

Statement By Rabbi Alan Levine

County of Sunflower
State of Mississippi

Allan Levine - 124 Longmeadow Drive, Rochester, New York

On Thursday, July 23rd, 1964, from 2:00 to 9:00 PM the following happened: I am a minister counsellor to the Civil Rights workers sent to the Ruleville Community Center by the National Council of Churches, Race and Religion Commission and the central conference of American Rabbis. In such a role together with another minister, Charles Adair, Presbyterian from Chicago, I visited the offices of the Chief of Police of Indianola and the Mayor of Indianola on the afternoon of this date to request police protection be present that evening in the street to make sure that unfriendly cars would not gather outside to incite violence to the Civil Rights Voter Registration mass meeting taking place at the Baptist school on Jefferson Street in Indianola. Basically the Mayor promised at least one policeman would be patrolling the area in the street. When we arrived before the meeting about 7:00 PM, a Negro policeman whose name was Nathaniel Jack informed John Harris, SNCC staff member, and myself that he would be inside the meeting and not outside the meeting in the street. Mr. Harris informed him that he was not welcome inside and that protection was needed outside in the street and not inside at the meeting. The same policeman retorted "you can go to Hell; I'm not standing outside. There will be nobody outside to protect you." He left, but a few minutes later police Chief Bryce Alexander pulled up in a patrol car and spoke to John Harris and myself. Chief Alexander said that the policeman had informed him that we didn't want any protection - how was it that I had asked for protection that afternoon. I replied that we didn't need the protection inside only outside. John Harris said this was private property and the policeman had no right to come in. Chief Alexander assured us that the police would remain in the street, but that the police had a right to enter to chase a criminal inside or if there were trouble. We understood that there would be no policemen inside.

During the first few minutes of the meeting policeman Nathaniel Jack entered the meeting. He was asked to leave by John Harris who said he had no right to be in there. I asked him to check with the Chief because the Chief had assured me no policeman would be inside. Charles McLaurin, SNCC staff member, asked the policeman to leave. He refused. Mr. Harris from the podium asked the audience of over 300 whether they wanted the policeman to be present. They shouted a resounding "No!" Mr. McLaurin came to him again and told him to leave. I said to him, "we have an agreement with the Chief. Check with the chief," referring to the short wave set the policeman who was right outside was carrying. Mr. McLaurin said he would be forcibly removed from private property. I repeated to the policeman concerning the agreement with the Chief. The policeman, Jack, took his revolver out of his holster, pointed it at me (at my stomach) and said in excited tones that he was going to shoot-kill some of you or somebody. I said, "he's pointing his revolver at me." Everybody said, "he's got his revolver out." Jack repeated this threat and then he put his revolver back in his holster and retreated from the meeting house.

Within minutes the Police Chief, Sheriff Hollowell, the Mayor and about 12 policemen some wearing riot helmets and carrying nightsticks assembled 40 to 50 feet outside the meeting house. They rushed towards the doors, then being closed, and demanded they be opened. They were informed that this was a private Vote r Registration meeting and that they were ~~not welcome inside~~ // not welcome inside. The Chief (still outside) asked who was in charge. Jerry Tecklin, SNCC summer volunteer, informed the Police Chief that John Harris was in charge. While John Harris was being called, I informed the Chief that the policeman (indicating Jack) had threatened to shoot or kill me. The Chief said that he didn't believe me. I also said this was a violation of the promise that the Chief had made earlier that afternoon and earlier that evening. The Chief said he had made no such

promise. I said perhaps there was a misunderstanding, but that we had certainly understood that the protection was to be confined to the outside and not inside. At this point John Harris appeared and informed the Chief that this was private property and that this was a voter registration meeting and that we didn't want or need the police inside but wanted them outside. The Chief ordered John Harris to open the doors and let the two policemen inside. With protests Harris opened the doors and let them in. They were carrying walkie-talkies. Sheriff Hollowell asked me what was I doing there. I told him I was a Rabbi. He asked me if I had any proof I was a Rabbi, saying "You sound more like a lawyer to me than a Rabbi." and further, "I know ministers, they don't talk like that." I informed him that Reverend Charles Adair and myself were ministers-counselors sent by the National Council of Churches Race and Religion commission - that we were not demonstrating, but acting as pastors to the Civil Rights workers. And as such I did not think a policeman should draw a gun on a Pastor.

A few moments later I requested Chief Alexander to take me to his office., that I might report to the FBI that my life had been threatened by one of his men. He said I could go - that he couldn't stop me. I said since I had been threatened I wanted and needed police protection for this call. He asked me was I frightened - I answered, "Well my life had been threatened by a policeman." After several more minutes of conversation Sheriff Hollowell said "If you are frightened then why did you come down in this part of the country?" The Police Chief insisted for the second time that I should make the call from a public pay phone. I said I didn't think that was safe. Sheriff Hollowell said he would take me to town and would arrange for my call. Together with Reverend Charles Adair, Chief Bryce, Sheriff Hollowell and two others we headed for the Police station. On the way Sheriff Hollowell called his office and asked them to call Ed Schamm of the FBI in Greenwood. When we got to the police station, Sheriff Hollowell attempted to call the FBI. When the connection was made I told my story to the agent Schamm. The agent told me the FBI could not guarantee protection, that only the local police could. I told this story in the presence of the Chief and the Sheriff who was listening on another phone. After I finished the Chief asked me to leave., so that he could speak to the FBI privately and "tell the other side of the story."

While driving us back to the meeting, both Hollowell and Alexander assured me that my life would be safe and that nothing would happen to me.

They dropped me at the meeting where the two policemen had remained at the door going in and out all the time. They had been causing a disturbance with their walkie-talkies. The other white policemen remained outside until after the end of the meeting.