



Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

6 RAYMOND STREET, N.W., ATLANTA 14, GEORGIA • 688-0331

702 Wall Street
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(COUNTY OF PIKE

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On the evening of September 21, 1964, the COFO staff organized a prayer meeting at the site of the church which had been bombed the previous night. During the meeting, one of our workers, Dennis Sweeney, was arrested; on the way home from the church, five other workers (Jesse Harris, Cephus Hughes, Roy Lee, Bill Powell and myself) were asked by the police to follow them into City Hall. We were photographed without ever being told that we were actually under arrest.

The following is a summary of my interrogation by the local police and the F.B.I.:

I was asked by a police officer to follow him alone into the office of Chief of Police. Here I was faced with four policemen and questioning. The number of policemen increased after a while and, on occasion, Chief Guy was in the office also. The interrogating police officer asked me for personal data which I gave to him. Then a policeman came to take my fingerprints and I asked the officer, "Excuse me, am I under arrest?" He answered, "Yes." "On what charges?" I asked and he told me, "On the charges of inciting a riot." Then I said, "In this case, I have the right to contact my embassy and have them provide a lawyer for me." The police officer replied, "When you come to Mississippi, you ain't got no more rights, don't you know that?" I said that I had heard this, but I did not know personally until now. He then made some remarks to the effect that if I did not like Mississippi I should stay out and that Germany burned plenty of people also. And I replied that this was correct and the reason why I was in Mississippi. Then I was asked by a plain clothed policeman whether I was a Communist, which I denied; whether I had ever been invited to attend a cell meeting; whether I had lived in East Germany; whether I belonged to one. All of these questions I denied.

Then he asked me whether I belonged to any organization and I said yes, to C.O.F.O. He asked me what I was doing for them, and I said I was teaching Freedom School. He then asked me who paid for my work and I said that I was supporting myself, for I had saved money teaching at a NCCA institute. He then asked why I was not teaching now and I said I was teaching. Then the plain clothes policeman asked me whether I was married or engaged or

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whether I had a boyfriend. I said no to the first two questions and replied to the last one that I had many friends. "Do you date niggers?" And I replied, "No, I date people." "You mean white people and niggers?" (referring to Cephus and Jesse*). Again I said that I go out with people. He said, "I still don't know who you are referring to, these two niggers?" (He attempted for about ten minutes to make me call Jesse and Cephus "niggers" while he was using much worse terms.) Then he asked, "Do you sleep with niggers?" After which, since I did not answer, he proceeded to insult me in the most awful manner, while the other policemen (numbering 7 or more by now, although I can't completely determine since some were coming and going and until now this took place while I was fingerprinted) joined him in making derogatory remarks about my possible relationship with Negroes, in a language that cannot be printed. They asked me, for example, whether I had regular medical check-ups concerning venereal diseases, right after the interrogation. He also asked whether I slept every night with a different "nigger," and not knowing what else to reply, I said that I had told them before that I was Catholic. His reply to this was that "...those niggers like to climb on top of Catholics too." This topic was discussed for at least 20 minutes, and amounted to the fact that they practically accused me of being a prostitute.

Another policeman then proceeded to ask me where I had lived until now, and I said, "At Mrs. Quin's house (this was not true, but it was more prudent, considering that the Freedom House is co-ed for security reasons) until last night." "Oh, you mean the nigger woman whose house was burned?" "Yes, I mean that lady." "Where were you yesterday?" "At the office." "Which office?" "The COFO office, of course," I replied. "Did you go to eat?" "No, we left for a while at night to go and eat." "Where did you go and eat?" "I don't remember." "Where did you stay last night?" "At the office; I was on night duty." "Why did you come to Mississippi?" "To teach in the Freedom Schools." And then he told me that unless I voluntarily left, I was going to be speeded along by the police.

This interrogation lasted for about one and a half hours to and hour and 45 minutes. I was asked to take a seat outside in the hallway, where I had to face local whites and many policemen, who were coming in to stare at me. Then they told me that I did not have to answer any questions if I did not want to, but that they had ways of finding out anyway. This was the F.B.I. who arrived and asked me to go with them. I was told that they were called because of my lack of identification. This was true, because my passport at the time was not with me.

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After the routine questions involving personal data, they asked me where I was staying, and again I said that until last night I had been at Mrs. Quin's house. He asked me then where I had been during the bombing. I said, "I was not there, I had stayed most of the day at the office."

"Do you have any suspicions as to why her house was bombed?"
"Yes, because she was kind to us and let us eat at her restaurant."

"Do you have any suspicions as to why the church was bombed?"
And I said, "Yes, but they are not definite."

He then suddenly asked, "You said you were a Catholic?"

"Yes."

"When are the masses?"

"At 7:00 and 9:00 a.m., for there is only one church here."

"But you did not go to church on Sunday."

So I said, "Yes I did; I went with one of the Negro workers."

"But you were late."

"Yes I was late."

"If you were late, you didn't go to mass."

"That is an individual interpretation."

"But you offended the feelings of the community, for they knew you were brought there by a COFO car and picked up again. You offended the community further."

"By what?"

"Don't you know the proper way a lady dresses when going to church?"

"Yes, I do."

"But you were not wearing a head dress. The feeling of the community was that you went to church to demonstrate."

I asked whether anyone in the congregation had informed them and the local police because when we left church, a group of white men was standing there taking our picture. So he replied that these men had to do this for their own protection, for they felt that a disturbance would occur and they wanted to know who was there. And then he said, "And you wonder about the bombings?" Don't you see the connection?"

I said, "What connection?" The connection between your offending the community in church and the church bombing and the bombing of Mrs. Quin's home. He also said that he had nearly been hurt in the bombing himself, for he had left Mrs. Quin's house only a short time before the explosion. This I checked today, September 22, 1964, and found out it was not true. He seemed to tell me this to envoke my sympathies and make me feel even more responsible. I was so amazed that I was not able to answer.

Following this, came a lecture-type explanation of the United States, the way Mississippi is, the fact that people are every-

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where the same, etc. At one point I expressed my doubts concerning my safety in City Hall and our return to the COFO office, and Mr. Murphy told me that I should trust the local police and that not all things which were said about them were true, for they were concerned about our safety. Mr. Williams asked me whether or not I was mistreated in any way by the police. Here, however, I was too tired and felt too helpless to explain, and just said, "Probably not in your terms." I then asked whether I could leave and was permitted to do so. Outside, I met Jesse and Bill and Cephus, who at that time, were still being investigated, and joined me soon. Roy had been asked to walk home earlier. A policeman then came after the F.B.I. had had a small conference with him and several others, and told Jesse and Cephus they could go. I was extremely afraid then, that they were trying to keep Bill and myself in safety and let Jesse and Cephus go out and face the white men who had been standing outside when we had been arrested. I also thought of the possibility that they were supposed to drive away alone so that they could be met somewhere on the road. I asked Mr. Williams to please make sure that they got home safely. Later on, I found out that they were escorted to the Freedom House by a police car.

Bill was further questioned and so I had to wait for more time. By about 1:30 a.m. we were told we could go. We called the office and two of the clergymen picked us up. We were followed home by local police and F.B.I. In spite of this, we and the car were searched at one of the police road blocks. At the house, I asked about the rights and protection of U.S. citizens, but Mr. Murphy declined to answer and told me to make a signed complaint with the F.B.I. against the local law enforcement officers, and when Bill suggested we do this through our embassies, Mr. Murphy seemed to be interested in not having us do this, but rather file it immediately with him. We decided not to do so.

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