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REPORT FROM INDIANOLA, MISS.

By John Harris, COFO Project Director

INDIANOLA, Miss. — Since the last week of July 1964, the one-story brick building on Jefferson Street in Indianola had served as the center of civil-rights activity in this Mississippi delta town of 7,000 (54 per cent Negro). The building was used for mass meetings, freedom school classes, various committee meetings, library and community center activities. More than anything, the building served as a symbol of freedom for the community.

There had been an NAACP chapter here in 1955, but it collapsed after Herbert Lee was killed in Belzoni, some 30 miles away. This NAACP chapter was the only bit of civil rights for Indianola Negroes until COFO [Council of Federated Organizations] came into town in the summer of '64 and leased the building.

Typical Harassment

After the building was leased to COFO, the city of Indianola started to apply their typical methods of harassment towards civil-rights activity. The city inspector came out and told COFO workers they would have to have the building rewired for "safety purposes." The wiring was better than that in the county jail. Nevertheless, we were forced to have a \$200 wiring job done. A deposit of \$50 was required for the electricity, although the normal charge is \$15. A deposit of \$75 was charged for the phone and \$100 for gas. The first organized activity in the Freedom School, as the building was named, was the program of the Mississippi Summer Project. Civil-rights workers, mostly from the North, conducted freedom school classes in Negro history, American history, reading and writing, art, etc. Voter registration and literacy classes were held for adults, usually at night. Weekly mass meetings were held on Thursday nights. The Freedom Democratic Party held meetings in the building also.

First Violence

The first act of violence came just two days prior to the "freedom vote" that was held last Oct. 29-Nov. 1. A fire was dis-

covered at the building around 1:30 a.m. by COFO workers who came to get a first-aid kit for a youth who was injured when a bomb was tossed in the freedom house in Sunflower, just 30 minutes earlier.

Because of the early discovery, the fire was limited to the front section of the building. It did, however, damage the wiring. Because it is hard to get a licensed plumber or electrician to do work for anything connected with civil rights and because the city inspectors stalled on every point, the building could not be used for six weeks. Outside meetings were held when weather permitted. The first outside meeting was broken up by cops.

Some activity on the part of the movement usually spurs acts of violence by the racists. In February and March the white folks must have become very upset over what they were seeing. First of all, there was a demonstration about voting rights at the courthouse on Jan. 4. Four hundred people participated. There were no arrests, so many white bystanders were pretty upset.

In January and February the Negro community was mobilized around the right to use the public library. After about 50 Negroes had gone to the "all-white" library, the city council decided to open a "Negro" library. Picketing continued at the "white" library through February, and a boycott of the "Negro" library was one hundred per cent effective.

The library was finally desegregated during the last week of February. This was a great blow to the white segregationists in town who vowed that integration would never come to Indianola. They knew that the Freedom School was to blame for all the "freedom" trouble. So get rid of the school and you get rid of the trouble.

At about 2:30 a.m. on March 5, a fire was started at the Indianola Freedom School. It was not until 3 a.m. when neighbors woke COFO workers that the fire was reported. At that time it was almost too late to save the building — too late, that is if one is de-

termining on the eagerness of the Indianola fire department. With two hoses they started spraying water around the fire after being at the scene for 15 minutes. In the light from the fire, one could see tears in many of the people's eyes. They were seeing something which meant so much being destroyed so easily.

Rebuild School

The immediate reaction from people in the community and COFO workers was that the building should be rebuilt as soon as possible. A building committee was formed two days later. It made plans to rebuild the Freedom School on the same property, with additions. The meeting room will be larger. There will be a recreation room, an FDP office and a kitchen.

The building will be constructed with brick and concrete and fire-proof materials. All labor will come from volunteers in the community. Estimates for the materials vary between \$4,000 and \$7,000. Plans have been laid and the community is ready to start.

Several offers of help have come from the North. Groups and individuals are working on money for building supplies and materials for the office. Some books have been offered and some have already been delivered. Good paperbacks are needed. [If you want to help, send contributions to P.O. Box 30, Indianola, Miss.]

In an ordinary situation, the building should be completed in four weeks. But the situation here is not "ordinary." We expect all kinds of harassment from the city. An editorial in the local paper stated that "the city should not give the COFO workers a permit to rebuild the recently burned headquarters. This property has been a source of trouble for a number of months and it is high time an earnest effort be made to stop this sort of troublemaking."

While this article generally reflects the opinion of most white people in Indianola, the Negroes of Indianola have quite a different attitude. Their attitude has been expressed by the large and sincere numbers at the mass meetings, the excited eyes in the Freedom School classes. And the strong legs and voices on the picket lines cannot be mistaken.

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The Peacemaker

Volume 18

January 2, 1965

Number 1

Ross Finishes Six-Month Sentence; Wants to Spend 18 Months with COFO

John Ross, who was sentenced to six months on July 30, 1964, for violating the draft law, was released from the federal prison, Terminal Island, Calif., on Dec. 23, somewhat in advance of the expected release date. He said, after release: "I was given seven extra days toward early release and sent packing at the earliest possible convenience with the comment that I never had learned to behave like a prisoner." (See copies of letters he circulated to fellow prisoners while at Terminal Island, regarding the role the United States is playing in Vietnam, in the Dec. 12 issue of *The Peacemaker*.)

Ross, who is married and has a daughter, was apprehended on April 2, 1964, after an indictment had been returned against him in New York Southern District Court for violation of the Selective Service law. He had originally refused to contest the case by entering a plea of *Nolo Contendere*, a plea which the court interpreted as a guilty plea.

On June 26, Judge William T. Swigart, federal judge in San Francisco, gave him the opportunity to apply for classification as a conscientious objector. Bail was at first set at \$25,000, but was reduced after friends demonstrated outside the Hall of Justice on April 12.

Although released from prison, Ross still faces probation of 18 months, during which time, he says, "I am to obtain civilian employment contributing to the national interest in performance of alternative service."

In a letter written in federal prison and sent to several people on Dec. 8, he asks, "What is the national interest?" and follows with these comments:

A white youth knocks on the door of the windowless shack. He has come to ask if the man and woman inside are registered to vote. Inside, three small very hungry children crouch in the corner. A baby lies squalling upon the bed. He has been born blind. His mother and father are both ill and cannot work and there are no welfare payments.

This is Mileston, Miss., in America. The woman does not know that colored people can vote.

To extend the vote to the black citizens of Mississippi would mean a com-

plete redistribution of the political and economic power in that state. There are 450,000 Negroes of voting age in Mississippi, but only 25,000, less than 5%, are allowed to vote. In Tate County, for example, there are no registered voters among 4300 Negroes of voting age. In Jefferson County, where Negroes comprise 76% of the population, not one is registered to vote.

This past summer, as part of the Mississippi Freedom Project, the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) established 45 "Freedom Schools" in 30 different communities across the state. Some 3000 pupils, ranging in age from three years old to seventy, attended these schools where everything from Negro history to trigonometry was taught. One way to consolidate black voting power in Mississippi is through the Freedom Project's educational campaign.

I have been found acceptable for participation in COFO's continuing Mississippi Freedom Project. What COFO is doing in Mississippi is in the National Interest.

It is in the National Interest for the black people of Mississippi to obtain for themselves an equitable share of the political and economic power in their own communities, in their own country.

It is in the National Interest to insure for all our citizens those constitutional guarantees upon which the idea of America is founded.

It is in the National Interest to remove the cataracts of fear and bigotry which blind so many of us to the real meaning of this nation. Indeed, if we do not begin to see every man in the full light of human dignity, if we do not seek to make every man a master of his own destiny, we will not survive as a nation.

No conscientious objector has ever been granted assignment with an organization working in the area of civil rights before, but as Ben Seaver of the American Friends points out, it would require no very tortuous interpretation of Selective Service Regulation 1660.1 (which governs alternative service assignments) to create such a precedent. The U. S. District Court, acting through the Federal Probation Office,

(Continued on page 2)

Jailed for Opposing Peacetime Draft

A 22-year-old young man is now serving a prison sentence because he objects to conscription in peacetime. George Edgar Gee, Texas City, Tex., was sentenced to two years by Judge James Noel on Oct. 23. Mr. Gee, a former mathematics student at the University of Texas, said he would be willing to fight in wartime but that he believes the peacetime draft is an invasion of personal rights.

When Judge Noel gave him an opportunity in court to say he would serve a two-year hitch as a draftee rather than as a prisoner, he replied: "I wouldn't trade my self respect for two years outside prison. Freedom has no value without self respect."

He had been indicted in May for failure to report for pre-induction physical examinations in January, and for failure to report for induction in February.

Judge Noel had ordered Gee to the Springfield (Mo.) Federal Medical Center for a mental examination before sentencing. The medical report said that he was quite sane. On Oct. 23, Judge Noel took from the two-year sentence the four months already served. Appearing in court with Gee were his mother and father, the latter assistant postmaster in Texas City and a school board member.

He said that he feels the draft to be a part of the trend toward big government and that "the growth of government is a dangerous trend."

Draftee Refuses To Work or Eat

Pvt. Scott Burchill, stationed with the American forces in Mannheim, Germany, went on a hunger strike recently because he does not like the army. The 22-year-old draftee had gone 22 days when newspaper reports were carried on him.

On Nov. 27 he walked into his company commander's office with a four-page manifesto in which he said he was dissatisfied with U. S. draft laws, especially the part having to do with COs. He said these fail to give adequate protection to men refusing to serve in the army out of purely moral rather than religious reasons.

Since making these objections he has not worn a uniform, and has been confined to the stockade at Mannheim. He refused to eat or work. He was reported to have sent copies of his statement to anyone he thought might be sympathetic, including Joan Baez and Jean Paul Sartre.

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THE PEACEMAKER is the organ of the Peacemaker Movement, published every three weeks or more frequently as activity or amount of news demands. Inquiries about the organ or the movement and material for publication, as well as subscriptions to the paper or financial contributions to the movement, should be addressed to 10228 Sylvania Avenue (Gano), Cincinnati Ohio 45241.

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Finishes Sentence; Wants to Join COFO

(Continued from page 1)

although it concedes that it technically could grant such assignment and that certain civil rights activities such as voter registration work in Mississippi could legitimately be termed in the National Interest, is reluctant to set this precedent. Instead, the Court indicates it will base its decision as to the suitability of my election of assignments upon a predetermined list of activities which Selective Service has deemed acceptable in the past. And Col. Leitch, head of the California Selective Service, has said that this list is now closed. However, in the past, assignments to organizations not specifically mentioned on the Selective Service list have been granted. Thus the problem is to convince the Court that the pressing responsibility all Americans have to the Negro citizens of Mississippi overrides the convention of and automatic recourse to the Selective Service List.

We would like to think that approval of the Mississippi Project as a suitable alternative to military service would be a significant affirmation of the principles for which Chaney and Schwerner and Goodman, Medgar Evers and Mack Parker, Herbert Lee, and so many others have given their lives.

In addition to documenting the reasons for the creation of the Mississippi Freedom Project, its goals, accomplishments and development, I am asking various individuals and organizations for letters supporting the legitimacy of my position, the relevancy of COFO's work in Mississippi to the National Interest and the moral urgency for establishment of the legal precedent for this relevancy. Your statement would be most valuable in helping me win a favorable decision.

In closing, I must add that I am not alone in this contention. All over America, young men of draft age are refusing to divorce the issue of war and peace from that of human dignity, Vietnam from Mississippi. I believe that it is only by making and remaking this connection that we can hope to achieve an end to war everywhere on earth. I believe that there can be no peace until all men are free.

John Ross, a writer, was living (since 1958) as an "exile" in a tiny Indian community at the foot of a mountain called Tanihuata in Michoacan State in Mexico, when, he says, the radio announced one Sunday morning that "four little girls had been murdered in a Birmingham, Ala., church." He then added, "So I came home. What good are my words without my deeds?"

His arrest by the FBI on draft charges followed his participation in a demonstration for fair employment practices in the San Francisco hotel industry, at the Sheraton Palace early this year.

In court he made the following statement:

Your honour, I am guilty of having violated the Selective Service Law of the United States of America. I am guilty of having refused to participate in war or the structure which supports war. I am guilty of refusing to carry arms, of refusing to harm my fellowman. I am guilty, your honour, but I am not remorseful. If I had not been guilty of ignoring the draft I might well have been guilty of killing the children of Vietnam with napalm bombs and poisonous chemicals.

Your honour, people are not my enemies. The people of Vietnam, the Russian people, Germans, the peoples of China, of Cuba, are not my enemies.

War is when I am told to kill people who are said to be my enemies. I must kill them, I am told, or they will kill me; because they have been told that I am their enemy. How blind we all are not to see that war is the only enemy.

Your honour, I have lived these past four years high in the Sierra of Michoacan State in Mexico. My Indian neighbours had not enough to eat or to wear, and if three babies were born one always died because there was no doctor for hundreds of miles around. No doctor, no food, no clothing and yet we here in America stockpile pesticides and nerve gas and thermonuclear warheads as if hunger were not enough to obliterate the hungry.

We in America stockpile the obliteration of everyone's Tomorrow, while all around us children starve to death today.

Your honour, I am of a generation

born and bred in the darkest hour of an age which has never known a peace. We are a generation, your honour, impatient and desperate for an end to war, for an end of the threat of war. We are a generation so threatened that we fear even to bring children into this world. Your honour, we are a generation afraid of geneing.

We who have inherited this troubled world from our fathers can no longer be silent. We have inherited a world in which all of our children, born and unborn, will never grow if we do not now, today, each in our own way, cry out at the injustice of war and refuse to serve the Master War. I say today, your honour, I speak and act today, your honour, because I am never quite sure of Tomorrow.

But, your honour, I demand a Tomorrow. I demand a Tomorrow for myself, for my wife, for my daughter. I demand a Tomorrow for you, your family, for the whole Human Family. I demand a Tomorrow with fear, a Tomorrow when all men—black and white, worker and farmer—will be free masters of their own destinies. I demand a Tomorrow when each man will be free to help his fellowman build and not destroy. Yes, your honour, Demand is an angry word, a word sprung from frustration and outrage. Is it unforgivable, your honour, that we who are determined to lay the foundations of kindness do not have time enough to be always kind. Your honour, I ask you not to judge us harshly.

Bob Switzer Moved to Sandstone

[Robert Switzer, sentenced in Chicago on Nov. 20 to three years on draft charges, was recently moved from Cook County Jail to the federal prison at Sandstone, Minn. His wife Jayne, sends the following.]

Dec. 27, 1968

I have just returned from Sandstone, Minn., this evening. Bob was transferred on Dec. 19, and has succeeded in locating a number of other conscientious objectors (apparently he is 7, the others being Jehovah's Witnesses). He expects to begin teaching 6th grade subjects sometime next week, and is also trying to get a book in the prison library which he says is quite excellent, containing many books on pacifism and nonviolence. He hopes to be able to finish the 2½ credit now lacks for his degree.

Since he left Cook County Jail he has received a number of letters from ex-cellmates asking for more information, about Bob and nonviolence.

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Mayor Invites RFK's Probe Into McComb

BULLETIN

McCOMB, Miss. (AP) — City school officials suspended 118 Negro students from classes today in the wake of their downtown protest against earlier suspensions of two Negro sit-in demonstrators.

McCOMB, Miss. (UPI)—Authorities were ready today to let U. S. Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy see for himself whether a "reign of terror" exists in south Mississippi as a result of a Negro voter registration drive.

"Our conduct is an open book," said Mayor C. H. Douglas of this town of 12,000 located 80 miles south of Jackson.

Negro integration leader Martin Luther King Jr. of Atlanta wired Robert Kennedy Thursday night that "police brutality and beatings" have created "an apparent reign of terror" against Negroes in this area.

Douglas said King's charges were "absolutely groundless" and he is "perfectly willing for Kennedy to come down here himself" to investigate them.

The mayor said racial troubles have been touched off by "agitators from elsewhere and not from within."

There have been several incidents since the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, a national

wide pro-integration group, began a campaign late this summer to register Negroes to vote in this area.

The latest was a march on City Hall Wednesday afternoon by 118 high school students in an anti-segregation demonstration. All the students and their adult leaders were arrested for disturbing the peace. King claimed the adults, workers for the Nonviolent group, have been "victims of police brutality and beatings." Authorities deny that any blows have been struck by policemen.

In his telegram to Kennedy, King also referred to the fatal shooting of Negro farmer Herbert Lee Sept. 25. Lee, who had been active in the voter drive, was killed by State Rep. Frank Rouse

Additional Arrests Made In Pike Case

McCOMB, Miss. (UPI) — More desegregation leaders arrested here Friday as FBI agents continued to investigate tense racial situation in Mississippi city.

The FBI agents were to investigate charges made by Justice Department that of "reign of terror" against Negroes resulted from a campaign to register Negroes for voting.

Local police officers help is needed from the government.

There have been several incidents since the voter campaign began, including segregation march on City Hall Wednesday by 118 high school students, all were arrested.

A police desk sergeant that integration workers throughout the nation "are stirring in here in droves and to stir up our Negroes." groups of Negroes gathered streets Friday night "and seems to be lots of unrest by outside agitators."

Arrested on charges of using to the delinquency of were Cordell Reagon of N. Tenn., a field secretary Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and Curtis C. of McComb, president of Pike County NAACP chapter.

Each arrest was made affidavit signed by Police George Guy who said he information that the two were hind some of this racial trouble.

At Jackson, 80 miles north here, Negro newspaper Perc Greene disputed integration leader Martin Luther "reign of terror" charge. also suggested that Negro could best be served by the withdrawal of civil rights groups from the state.

M. L. King, Jr., Sends Bond Money To Pike

McCOMB — Five young area Negroes were released from the Pike County jail last weekend on \$1,000 cash appeal bonds from their McComb City Court convictions in two sit-in cases of late August. ☉

Jess Young, Negro attorney of Jackson, filed \$5,000 in cash and checks with Sheriff Clyde E. Simmons Saturday to obtain the release of the defendants.

M. L. KING CHECK

Among the money put up with the sheriff was

unidentified, and a Western Union money order for \$2,500 originating in Connecticut.

FIVE DEFENDANTS

Young left jail with the five defendants at about 11 a.m. They are:

Hollis Watkins, 20, and Curtis Elmer Hayes, 28, Negroes of Rt. 2, Summit.

Watkins and Hayes sat in at the F. W. Woolworth Co. lunch counter on Main street Aug. 26,

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