

LETTER FROM THE JACKSON FAIR GROUNDS COMPOUND

(Editorial note: Before Robert went to Mississippi to work for the Freedom Democratic Party this summer he left me a list of friends to whom I should send any communications he might find time to write while there. The following arrived June 26, 1965 in Minneapolis on a 8X5 piece of paper--because of a paper shortage in jail he explained.

James Park)

I had only heard about "police brutality" before I came to Mississippi, but now I have seen it first hand. Some 471 of us were arrested Monday June 14 for walking down the side-walk toward the state capitol. (Note: Protesting a special session of the Mississippi legislature called to circumvent new federal legislation, avoid federal registrars etc.) They called it parading without a permit. Parade permits have consistently been refused for civil rights demonstrations in Jackson. What we experienced on that first day at the hands of the Jackson city police and the Mississippi State Highway Patrol cannot be adequately described. It is a sad fact that these groups harbor, at the lower levels at least, many individuals who can only be described as goons with an especially vicious streak when it comes to civil rights workers.

It started when they loaded us into trucks to take us to two large exposition halls on the State Fair Grounds for detention. The demonstrators, all standing, started jumping up and down in the back of the truck, and the driver retaliated by jamming on the brakes, throwing us all toward the front of the truck. He repeated the treatment several times on the trip as we clung to the grating overhead and on the sides. When all the demonstrators had been delivered to the fairgrounds, we were herded into one of the exposition buildings. It was on the way in, I am told, that the first clubbings occurred. A girl, ^{Early} got it on the forehead when she started to turn in the entrance-way. A guy, ^{had} had his head bloodied when he told a cop ^{the} ~~the~~ stunk. When I first saw them they were lying on the floor, their ^{heads} ~~heads~~ staining the clothes of the fellow marchers holding their heads and collecting in pools on the cement floor. I did see the third clubbing. We had been packed into a tight circle in the middle of the floor when one boy decided to sit down. This seemed to greatly anger the nearest cops, and two or three of them charged the crowd, pushing them back and making the boy stand. In the heat of the moment, ^{one} policeman picked out another man, ^{and} for no apparent reason, pursued him into the crowd and clubbed him down. He required some 8 stitches in his scalp and they made him pay the \$20 bill. He has since been bailed out and rearrested for marching again. The other man clubbed was taken to city jail with other leaders after he agitated for a hunger strike. The girl was taken to the hospital and later released. All three were white, suggesting a police preference for whites, since the vast majority of the demonstrators were Negro (eg, the first night among the men 33 whites were arrested to 215 Negroes). The sympathy of the officers for the injured is indicated by the comment of one directed at the first man clubbed, "stand [him] up and let him die."

Many more of us to lesser extents, felt the billy-clubs that day. A middle-aged Negro woman became almost hysterical when she was jabbed in the ribs. When they marched us in groups of ten to the next building for booking, a tall Negro youth had the misfortune of being 11th. He was smashed in the chest when he did not back up fast enough. The most vicious and totally unprovoked incident after booking was running the gamut. The male prisoners were marched out of the building single file and around a corner. There stood a line of highway patrolmen, clubs in hand, with the wall of the building on the other side. When I went through at least two patrolmen, holding their billy-clubs in both hands jabbed me in the back. Others, including a mild-mannered minister, reported that they were hit on the head.

Once in the men's building we were segregated and forced to sit on the cement floor without leaning back or lying down, and without talking. The all-pervading feeling of dread we felt after the shock of seeing and experiencing unprovoked attacks on unarmed individuals who were not allowed to hit back is impossible to describe.

It was not until the lawyers arrived that night that things began to loosen up significantly. Since then pressure has been brought on the police for responsible behavior. The meanest ones have been removed and the others have controlled themselves better although it is sometimes obvious that they don't like it. The marchers who have been arrested everyday from Tuesday until now (Saturday) have not been subjected to this brutality. There have been further incidents and some tense moments, but conditions in

general have improved. The night shift police still take glee in pounding their metal chairs with their billy-slubs and making other loud noises off and on all night, but we have almost enough mattresses now to go around (the first night we had about 40 mattresses for 248 men), and cold-water showers have been set up. We are told that with luck we should be out of here by Monday, June 21. *(We were actually released June 24th.)*

The following is what my brother was able to make of my chirologological notes of the first couple of days, which I gave to a New York Times reporter to be forwarded to him.

Yours in Freedom,
Bob Park

(It is now your editors task to decipher notes probably scribbled in transit, etc. on the back and later front of two mimeographed pink sheets which provide the schedule for the Jackson Demonstration and Workshop. I take it the workshop which was scheduled for the afternoon was cancelled because the marchers were arrested about noon in front of the State Capitol. I shall try to make intelligible sentences out of what is often merely a succession of phrases and images.)

When seen after we reached the State Capitol a squad of trucks drew us stopping sharply. Eventually there were about 10 trucks, 3 paddy-wagons, and one truck with a torn canvas top. I was in the front of the lot of the first bunch of trucks. We linked arms and waited. About 12:45 state troopers were brought in and things became a little rough. Some marchers were dragged to the trucks and two that I saw were lifted by their heads. Many were pushed and pulled in loading and unloading the trucks. One white girl had her sweater pulled up to almost around her neck. The troopers were pushed back from the scene about 12:50. The 10 troopers in the front line were equipped with clubs, gas, guns, helmets, etc. I saw King put into one of the paddy-wagons. (Doubtless Edwin King, the white chaplain and dean of students at (Negro) Tougaloo College just outside Jackson and a leader in the MFDP) One man with dirty pants said, "They beat me." One girl was clubbed and had a bloody head. (Doubtless the same one reported in the later communication, above.)

About 1:05 we began singing "We Shall Overcome". As we arrived at the make-shift detention center, we were herded into the middle of the room. One bearded white guy was lying on the floor with a bloody forehead. Another man reported that he had been hit on the ribs. At 1:15 medical help arrived for the girl. The expressions of the policemen's faces were mixed—from gleeful to sad and worried. Rain began to fall thru the roof about 1:20.

At 1:30 with a "Get on down there and shut your mouth" I was jabbed in the back and hit on the elbow. A woman was jabbed in the chest, making her very angry. A Jackson policeman wearing sunglasses was overheard to say, "Stand the son of a bitch up and let him die." At 1:40 a white boy with glasses was separated and pushed around the circle. Another had his head bloodied as he tried to retreat into the crowd. He later said he didn't fully recover.

2:00 PM, prayer is becoming frantic; the others are fanning the woman while the troopers watch with amusement. Someone has fainted, a woman I think. At 2:10 the ambulance came to take the girl to the hospital. When one tried to sit down, he was angrily forced to stand. 2:30, the Jackson policemen who wanted to let the injured man die, now without his shades, pushes us (pokes me) back and clubs a white man in a yellow shirt. A Negro leader who was 11th in a group of ten is struck hard in the ribs because he did not back up fast enough. A white boy and young colored girl are separated. 2:55, finally we are seated in another building, the girls on one side boys on the other. (Note: Newspaper reported that most of the demonstrators were teen-agers.) My elbow is sore.

Rev. Galt of the Delta Ministry is here along with other white ministers in the same program. He has been in jail for the Japanese and the US government (as a conscientious objector he was sentenced to 5 years but did not serve it all). The Rev. Ed. King is also here. 3:25, the man in the yellow shirt is now standing last in line. Our side is being guarded by 10 men in green pants and soft straw hats and 3 or 4 city police. At 3:35 the men were marched around the corner and forced to run the gauntlet. Those around me (and including me) were jabbed in the back by 2 or more troopers. Rev. Galt was hit on the head. Dick was hit too when he left the other building. About 4:00 o'clock we were marched into the washroom and segregated. Our SNCC buttons were removed and pounded with clubs. Some Negroes are forced to sweep, George Green being second. About 5:00 the two clubbed whites are asked to sweep. Rev. King did it willingly. The bearded blond refused, but the other finally started reluctantly and slowly. The one with dark glasses stopped the sweeping. About 5:15 a student from upstate New York talked for a few minutes to

about 10 police and troopers. Earlier we had been told not to talk to each other. I estimated that there were 31 or 32 whites and 200 Negroes. ~~My~~ supper-count showed 33 whites and 215 Negroes. ^{men} Supper was provided from about 5:45 to 6:20. After supper a man with a red beard said that the place stunk and was cluttered. Before supper, ^{mean} dark ~~came to~~ ^{mean} ~~picture of guitar~~ ^{mean} ~~we were made to stand~~ ^{mean} ~~Earlier~~ ^{mean} ~~he had been told to stop staring~~. At 7:00 the leaders were separated--13 white ministers and one Negro minister.

We were hoping for legal help. ^{mean} ~~red-blond (Bill Light)~~ ^{mean} ~~was~~ ^{mean} ~~kicked in the head~~ when he was down. I met Ronald Weiss from Cleveland Miss. The lawyers arrived and told us 471 had been arrested and that bail had been set at \$100 each. We ~~tried~~ ^{all night} to keep ~~the~~ a lawyer in the building. At 9:10 Ron Weiss shouted "Freedom." Silence. Then a chant began ~~among~~ ^{all night} the Negroes--"What do you want?"--"Freedom!" But this was quickly quieted when a Negro rose and raised his arms. We signed retainers for the lawyers, ~~because we had no money~~. There were ~~only 3 Negro~~ lawyers, ~~from the Lawyers Constitutional Defense Committee~~. They interviewed us all, ~~giving each an ink spot as identification~~. They left about 10:30 and we were permitted to go to the washroom individually without asking permission. Some of the policemen (especially two fat ones) enjoy their power for its own sake. They act very childish, swinging their clubs, telling us to sit up, not to look at them, to look down at the ground, etc.

Tuesday morning (second day). About 4:00 AM I first became aware of an almost constant noise from the police pounding their clubs on chairs, garbage cans, etc. ~~occasionally~~ ~~the~~ ~~tried~~ ~~to~~ ~~tap~~ on the floor. At 5:10 we were whistled up and stacked our mattresses. About 7:00 a cop told us, "Sing if you like because tonight we'll get our turn." Maybe the girls sang last night. They were singing this morning at breakfast outside. Real singing was restored this morning for the first time since booking. At 8:30 there was applause for each white as he came ~~in~~ from washing ~~the~~ ^{his} dishes. There were a few boos too. One white said he thought the Congress-of-Federated-Organizations leaders resented white competition. Ron Weiss again shouted "freedom!" He also led in singing multiversed songs, too many in fact seeing that he is not a very good singer. Bill Light led an insulting verse about cops stinking. At the breakfast line there were 3-mean-looking troopers with their numbers taped over. (presumably on helmets and badges)

A 9:10 a Sargent said he would treat us like animals if we treated them like animals. ~~After most of us stood and clapped and some Negroes danced, he added~~ "We're human too." Two more troopers arrived with taped-over numbers. ~~and were told~~ ^{that} ~~the noise~~ ^{all night}. The same Sargent said we're supposed to be educated Christian men. A Negro was hit about 9:45. One ~~made~~ ^{said he had been} to chew on his SNCC button. We were told that we didn't have to call an officer "sir," (Note: This probably because some had been using the word but meaning the opposite.) ~~or put any thing in our mouths we didn't want to, by the lawyer that~~

About 12:45 ~~the~~ ^{the} Negro girls were marched in, to the sound of cheers and clapping outside. We supposed these ~~were~~ ^{girls from the prisoners} ~~from the second march~~. The ~~men~~ ^{men} integrated. 12:50, ~~we~~ noticed that the phone-booth wire had been cut. At 1:15 some girls went to lunch and the remainder began singing "Go Tell It On the Mountain" and we joined. The police reportedly have ordered the Negroes back to their side but they didn't move and no action was taken. Lunch consisted of beans, bread, and weak milk. At 3:45 the dishes had been washed and the girls were returned to ^{their building and} the newly arrested girls (of which about 9 were white) and the newly arrested boys were marched across to our building. One male who did not want to segregate was dragged and thrown against a wall. A couple of others were dragged too. One girl also had to be dragged. One white who would not stop singing was hauled out to a patrol wagon, a patrolman on each arm (one not being enough). A club was put behind his arm to twist it. One Negro girl who was looking faint probably for fear of beating ~~began to cry and was taken to police car~~. Bob from New Hampshire ^{mean} ~~Mexico~~ estimates that 200 were arrested today and we expect more tomorrow. We heard about sympathy demonstrations in the North. We got some cold water in line due to a police slip. A Negro policeman, ~~called over~~ ^{by a white policeman, was addressed as "big"} ~~"boy" to remove whites and sent Negroes~~. Then the Sargent apparently vetoed the order to sit down.

The Rev. Bob (what's-his-name) from New ^{Mexico} ~~Hampshire~~ has just returned from talking with his wife, who was also arrested. They will write from an Albuquerque paper. After applause for the girls going to supper, the doors were closed on that side ~~so that we and we~~ were not permitted to go to the washroom or water-fountain for a while. ~~My pen was returned via another person who had used it~~. Some women and kids complain and ^{are} upset, a lawyer, about 6:00. He told us we ~~will~~ ^{may} be out Saturday without bond or Monday at the

A volunteer, working behind a screen of tall prisoners, managed to replace the wires without being seen. Several calls got out.

wanted to this morning!

Money is coming but is not here yet.

latest with luck. 6:30 a hunger strike is being considered. 6:50, we lined up for supper, which was not served until 7:35. I hear the lawyer says that money is coming, but not quite yet.

At 7:50 I talked with Nick Fisher who was one of the 20 arrested at the Post Office. They stood for about half an hour on the steps with signs. They were pushed off several times by US marshals. Finally they were pushed onto the city sidewalk and taken away by waiting city police. They would not all fit in the paddy-wagon so one girl went in a car. ~~Two whites taken away.~~ Piggy (one of the policemen?) jabbed the back of a Negro tonight.

5:10 AM Wednesday (third day), I was awakened by metal folding chairs being pushed over the floor. But there ~~was~~ ^{seem} less noise last night than the first. But others thought they were noisier last night. Maybe I just slept better. AT 6:10 the girls started to go to breakfast ~~and our~~ ^{and our} doors were closed because of applause, at which we applauded again. We sang "Woke up this Morning" "Clap Your Hands" and "Ain't Gona Let No boddy Turn Me 'Round." At this 2 cops tried to get the standing clappers to move back, but more came forward instead. Frantic clapping subsided as reinforcements stood inside the door but before they took threatening ~~positions~~ ^{positions} we were ~~then~~ told to line up for breakfast about 6:30. Club tapping is now applauded and when one trooper accidentally dropped his club, he was applauded. There is a good mood in the group; they applaud with the slightest excuse, sometimes mixed with boos however. 7:05, the men went to breakfast. 7:10, one large Negro woman is hustled away being hit behind with a club; another is led away. One Negro sings good-natured jibs at cops, especially one of them. This rough one even smiled a little when he was serenaded as he lit a cigarette with "You got a weed in your mouth, I hope you get ^{the} cancer." Great voice.

The song-leaders ~~was~~ ^{was} hauled off to city jail and some Negroes didn't eat and called on us not to eat, singing "which side are you on?" So we didn't line up and consequently missed breakfast. Word from the other side via the washroom is that they are split--some plan to skip lunch, but most of the 870⁺ now here will probably eat. My position is that I would join a hunger strike if one-half of the Negroes favored it on the basis of the protest-of-treatment list drawn up, read, and given to the lawyer last night, or if there were more blood drawn by the cops without ~~signified~~ ^{provoked} provocation. The initiative should come from the Negro side. Most of the Negro kids are out by now (or have they been moved?). The word on the large Negro woman is that she refused to stop singing and kicked the cop in ~~when~~ ^{when} she was hauled away. The rewired phone had been said to be dead, but it rang this morning, and after a cop answered it and left at least one Negro tried to call. A second cop came back to check it and left apparently unconcerned. The Sargent talked to both groups again this morning ~~after~~ ^{we were called to eat} ~~we were called to eat~~. He said we did not have to eat if we so chose but that we would get very hungry by Saturday because they were not going to give in and return the song-leaders. He says he comes on at 7:00 AM and is not responsible for anything which happens when he is off duty. We have not seen any helmeted troopers (highway patrol) since the first day. A few Jackson motorcycle (?) cops with helmets have been seen at meals. In the buildings only troopers with gray visor caps (light gray shirts, dark gray pants with red-blue-red stripe), city patrolmen with black visor caps, and State-Fish-and-Game-Commission men with white cowboy-type hats are to be seen.

The word from the other side is that they have repelled the people and almost everyone is going to strike. Another kid (about 12) has been bailed out presumably by his parents and is applauded--a little more than usual. About 11:10 all the kids under 15 (about 40) are asked for and given candy bars. (The notes break off here. This is evidently the time he give them to the New York Times reporter, who sent them to me.)

(In a letter to me dated June 26, Robert writes that he was bailed out Thursday, June 24 (meaning he was in jail for 10 days) and was then at the Mt. Beulah (Edwards, Miss.) headquarters of the Delta Ministry of the National Council of Churches. Friday a drunken white fired four shots into one of the buildings, but in general things are peaceful and quiet there. Much of his baggage was stolen while he was in jail.)

Bob Park

they were
trashed hell
then the
hoped you
at the
attack.

This information, that most favored a hunger strike, came from the most radical remaining white agitator, Lou Perry, and passed to the police. The hunger strike even developed at the attack.