



Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

National Headquarters: 6 Raymond Street, N.W. • Atlanta 14, Georgia • Area Code 404 - 688-0331

Tel. 387-7445

3418 Eleventh Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C., 20010

May 30, 1964

Mr. Robert Penn Warren
2495 Redding Road
Fairfield, Connecticut

Dear Mr. Warren:

I am happy to inform you that we have been able to move the date of the hearings back to Monday, June 8th. I strongly hope that this will make it possible for both yourself and Mr. C. Van Woodward to serve on the panel. In which case, our complete panel will be yourself, Mr. Van Woodward, Gresham Sykes, Paul Goodman, Joseph Heller, Dr. Harold Taylor, Judge Justine Polier, Michael Harrington, Murray Kempton, and Miss Lorraine Hansberry if her health permits, which would be, we think, an unusually distinguished gathering of Americans.

The hearings are scheduled to begin at 9:30 a.m. We would hope the panel members would arrive at the National Theatre one hour before this, at 8:30, for a briefing on the details of the proceedings. We will break at 12:15 for lunch, and the hearings will resume again at 1:15 and are scheduled to end at 4:00 p.m. We must be out of the National Theatre by 5 p.m.

There will be two categories of witnesses: local Mississippians and civil rights workers who have experienced brutality and intimidation there; and Constitutional lawyers who will define the powers and the limitations of the Federal Government to act in the Mississippi situation.

We hope that the panel will be able to agree upon a statement expressing their reactions to the information made public by the hearings. It would be less than candid not to admit that we hope that the statement will call for definitive

"One Man, One Vote"

Mr. Robert Penn Warren

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preventative measures on the part of the Federal Government to maintain order and insure justice in Mississippi this summer and always. We are certain and confident that you feel as we do that what we are confronting is a problem of national morality. We feel you will be interested in the enclosed column by James Wechsler which appeared in the May 27th issue of the NEW YORK POST.

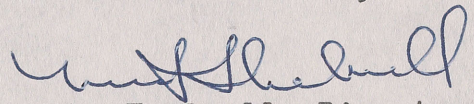
It will be our pleasure to assist you with hotel accommodations and travel arrangements, if you so wish. It will be best if members of the panel can find it possible to arrive in Washington on the evening of the seventh. If you are able to do this, please notify us and we will arrange to meet you upon your arrival.

It will be most convenient if panel members arriving on Sunday night were to stay in the same hotel. We suggest the Willard which is in close proximity to the Theatre. At your request, we will make your reservation there.

Please let us know what your plans are and whatever assistance we may give you.

With our thanks,

Yours for Freedom,


Mike Thelwell, Director
Washington Office

Enclosure



Big Test Case

JAMES A. WECHSLER

President Johnson may soon confront the first major domestic crisis of his Administration.

It involves the question of whether the U. S. government will throw its weight behind this summer's massive effort of the civil rights forces to establish some form of democracy in that oppressive police state known as Mississippi, or whether it will try to remain above the battle.

In anticipation of the coming storm, leaders of the "Mississippi Summer Project" have decided to seek a meeting with Mr. Johnson. A joint letter urgently requesting such a session is being sent to him by representatives of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, the NAACP and CORE who are linked together in the Mississippi Council of Federated Organizations.

The letter, signed by SNCC's Robert Moses, NAACP's Aaron Henry and CORE's Dave Dennis, declares that "during the past three years civil rights workers and local citizens in Mississippi have faced violence and brutal resistance when they have tried to exercise their Constitutional rights." It asks for a chance to discuss this summer's outlook before the first contingents of summer volunteers assemble in the state. Such a meeting, if the President consents to it, will produce appeals for federal aid and protection on a wide front.

As James Forman, SNCC's executive secretary, describes the summer offensive, it will be a many-phased drive. The local battalions will be augmented by at least 700 students from many areas, about 100 ministers, some 150 lawyers prepared to serve on the legal battle-lines, and a number of teachers who will help to conduct Freedom Schools.

The major thrust will be the stepped-up voter registration campaign, coupled with support for the "Freedom candidates" seeking Congressional office. At the same time "community centers" will be set up to provide services—cultural, medical, vocational—normally denied to Mississippi's Negro populace. Law students will undertake suits against state and local officials engaged in the business of "official tyranny." Amid the local political operations, a delegation to challenge the seating of the "lily-white" Mississippi contingent at the Democratic convention will be organized.

An orientation program for the volunteers will begin at Western Reserve University in Ohio on June 15; the first detachments will enter the state to join hands with the local groups a week later.

Meanwhile, there have been ominous portents of Mississippi's counter-offensive. There have been widely-publicized reports of new weapons being assembled by state and city units, an obviously intimidatory gambit in view of the non-violence commitments of the civil rights groups; there have been hurried legislative enactments to "legalize" even more drastic restrictions on the rights of assembly and speech; there have been increasing arrests of civil rights field workers and sporadic outbreaks of violence against heretic whites—including a few courageous local journalists like Hodding Carter. The state police force has been doubled and its powers of "law enforcement" multiplied.

In the face of this developing civil war atmosphere, there is a clear prospect that federal intervention will be required. That is what the civil rights chieftains want to discuss with President Johnson.

* * *

What can the President do to uphold the Constitution in Mississippi and to protect the freedom forces?

In the view of Forman, a spirited 35-year-old Negro veteran of the Southern wars, he can do many things. The first and perhaps most crucial step, he believes, would be for Lyndon Johnson to confer with Paul Johnson, Mississippi's new Governor, and make it plain that U. S. policy will not be "neutralist" if peaceful activity is subjected to lawless violence.

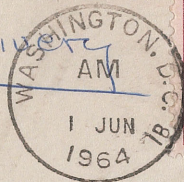
Beyond that dramatic gesture lie many other possible moves. The creation of a special federal force of E-men ("Equality-Men") attached to the Justice Dept. and specifically assigned to the civil rights fronts would, it is argued, have strong psychological and practical impact; there is deep, continuing doubt that the FBI's Southern G-men are prepared to police the area in any affirmative fashion. Judicial appointments will also be closely watched in the South as a clue to Washington's attitude. Finally, of course, there is the question of what posture the President will assume in the row over the seating of the Mississippi delegation.

Many other detailed points of strategy and substance will develop in any full-scale appraisal of the Mississippi outlook. The immediate question is whether the President will be disposed to face the issue now, before the storm breaks.

Certainly there is a compelling case for the argument that clear-cut signs of federal concern and conviction at this juncture might avert infinitely larger trouble in the warmer summer days. That is the message the civil rights spokesmen hope to transmit if and when they see the President. One hopes he will listen and respond. Surely a government that stands firm on so many distant world fronts should be capable of upholding the rule of law in Mississippi, and perhaps even negotiating effectively with the rulers of that despotism.

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