

Prison Notes

anon.

1965

NATCHEZ, MISS.—Within the last month, more than 500 people have been arrested in the city of Natchez, Mississippi. Although news of the arrests received wide circulation, the brutality and the indignities which the prisoners were forced to endure during their stay in Parchman State Penitentiary has until now been kept secret. However, with the release of some of the arrested, the story is finally getting out. What follows is the report by two of those recently released:

James Herman Johnson, twenty-year old Alcorn College junior, states that upon arrival at Parchman, he was forced to disrobe and to allow his private parts to be examined by a police officer. Johnson was then pulled up by his beard so forcefully that some of the beard came off in the policeman's hand. Johnson said he thought the policeman to have been about six feet tall, weighing over 200 pounds.

Phil Latansky, 24 year old white FDP volunteer from Seattle, Washington gave this report of his arrest: "After our arrival at Parchman, we were admitted to the maximum security building where we were stripped of all our clothing. Each of us was forced to swallow approximately eight ounces of laxatives. Naked we were herded into two-man cells with concrete floors and steel bunks minus mattresses. The windows directly opposite our cells were wide open and the air conditioning fans were on, circulating a cold wind throughout the cell block.

"According to weather reports, the temperature dropped to the low 40's that evening. We were kept in this condition for approximately 38 hours at which time a prison official closed the windows and turned off the fans. He told us that if there was any talking, the windows would be opened again, the fan turned on, and we would be hosed.

"After several hours had passed, we were given out underwear, the only clothing any of us had throughout our stay. The prison guards were always insulting and constantly threatening brutality.

"Several people were unable to bear the intense cold and broke down into intense fits of screaming and crying. The prison doctor arrived several hours after the victims were stricken and treated them rudely. In spite of the fact that we were all given heavy doses of laxatives, we were given a sparse supply of toilet paper. The only reason for sending us to Parchman was the obvious sadistic one of degrading and dehumanizing us. We were constantly shivering from the intense cold. We never had any relief from the cold, neither adequate clothing or blankets. We tried exercises and such to keep warm, but all we had to sit on were the frigid steel bunks. In my cell, water had leaked all over the floor. It was like an icy lake right below us. It's a wonder more of us didn't crack under the strain."

These are just two of the many areas of police brutality which have been reported. All the arrested are held incommunicado until their release. However, as more demonstrators are released, it is certain that many other such reports will be revealed.

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