

Student "Non-Violent" Agitators Face Repression and Injury

by Judy Walborn

Whenever I was to participate in a sit-in demonstration at one of Atlanta's downtown restaurants, I had to ask myself the question . . . How can I love that restaurant owner, who will kick my shins, spit on me, slam doors into my shoulder, call me "bitch," "white trash," or "nigger-lover?" How can I love that man who hates me so? The answer to this question came from another SNCC worker, one who had been beaten severely in Alabama jails, where he fasted for 31 days. He said to us . . . "Remember that the southern white man's violence is a sickness, and that his hatred is the product of a very twisted society in which we live. We are all products of that society." These words stayed clearly in my mind as we sat on the ground, arms interlocked, heads bowed for protection, while the angry white crowd of several hundred gathered round the 14 of us. The police came—finally — and dragged us into paddy wagons and hauled us off to jail. (We were bonded out 3 days later.)

In every incident of this sort we employed non-violence—lack of physical response to the blows we received, and passive resistance to the police. In one sense non-violence was a tactic, a way of trying to enter the restaurant. But in another sense it was a philosophy — a mental attitude. We hoped, through non-violence, to reach the

minds of those in the watching crowd. We believe that no man can, if he is human, continually beat upon another man, who does not respond violently in return, and never once stop and ask himself . . . What is the nature of this man I am attacking? Why does he not respond? And if his questioning goes this far, he may then ask . . . What is it that this man believes in so strongly that he will suffer being beaten for it, even to death? At this point **real thought** about integration, equality of opportunity, and freedom for the Negro may occur in this man's mind for the first time.

The effects of non-violence, both as a tactic and as a philosophy, cannot, of course, be measured. They can only be hoped for. I would judge that the majority of Negroes who are revolting in the South are impatient; they will use non-violence as a tactic for as long as it produces concrete results in terms of desegregation of restaurants, hotels, schools, etc. If it ceases producing such results, they are not beyond turning to violence. But for others, non-violence is very much a way of life. The concept prevails that if there is a fire inside of you, and I allow a fire to build inside of me as well, we two shall never communicate but shall together produce a blaze which will destroy us both. My response to your fire, then, can only be the coolness of compassion and understanding.