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New York, N.Y. 10003

April 17, 1969

TO ALL BRANCH ORGANIZERS AND N.C. MEMBERS

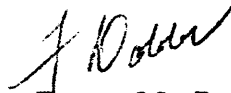
Dear Comrades,

GI Civil Liberties Defense Committee

The attached letter requires the full attention of each party branch, as well as of the youth locals.

A qualified member should be assigned to take charge of the work outlined in the letter and the name of this comrade and the address and phone number to be used for communication should be sent to the SWP national office as well as to the defense committee.

Comradely,



Farrell Dobbs

enc.

Report to NEC on Ft. Jackson Case by Larry S., April 14, 1969

The case of the Fort Jackson GI's, who have been waging a struggle for their rights under the U.S. Constitution, to discuss political questions facing GI's, including the question of the war in Vietnam, has the potential to become one of the most widely supported and well-known political cases in recent U.S. history. It is a key case for the YSA and for the SWP, and requires a national mobilization of our resources in a campaign to defend these GI's. The purpose of this report is to outline the perspectives for the case, and the tasks of the YSA in building support for the Ft. Jackson GI's.

There are three component parts of the legal case at this time. The first is the suit filed on behalf of ten GI's at Fort Jackson against the Commanding General at Fort Jackson and the Secretary of the Army. The suit asks for the courts to make a judgment that (a) GI's have the right to meet on or off post to discuss political issues; (b) that GI's have the right to petition. It also asks the court to direct the Commanding General to provide a place where a meeting can be held on post, and to direct the Commanding General to stop interfering with the rights of the GI's, to stop harassing them, and to allow them to exercise the rights they have.

This suit raises key constitutional questions concerning the rights of citizens in uniform. It is a totally unprecedented suit, and if it is victorious, it will have Army-wide application. The attorneys are prepared to argue the case all the way through the courts, if necessary.

The second component of the Fort Jackson case is the attempt by the Army to court-martial eight GI's who are active in GI's United. The excuse the Army is using for the court-martials is a large and successful meeting that was held by GI's United on post on the evening of March 20. It was a peaceful and orderly meeting. The charges against the GI's include: disrespect to an officer, willful disobedience of an order, holding an unauthorized "demonstration", breach of the peace, and breaking restriction. These are serious charges, and the GI's face stiff prison sentences if convicted. A preliminary hearing has been set for April 22, at which time the Army will decide how to proceed. They can drop charges against any or all of the defendants, and set a date for the court-martial if charges are not dropped. The court-martial will probably be held in late May or June.

The third component of the case is the immediate effort by the lawyers to have the men released from the stockade, and to have the charges dropped. Writs of habeas corpus were filed on Monday, April 14 in U.S. District Court in Columbia. The writs charge that the men are being held illegally, that the presence of an informer in consultations between the accused and their attorneys compromised whatever case the Army may have.

The case is of central importance to the SWP and the YSA for two reasons. First, two of the defendants are members of the Young Socialist Alliance - Joe Cole and Jose Rudder. An attack on any of our comrades must be viewed as an attack on our entire movement.

If we can demonstrate that we can respond in a vigorous, aggressive, and effective manner in building a defense for all of the defendants, we will have significantly demonstrated our strength, and make the ruling class more cautious in attempts to victimize us in the future. As in the Bloomington case, we must make the defense of our comrades a major focus of our work.

Secondly, this case is a crucial one for our work in the antiwar movement. If the Army is successful in court-martialing these GI's, it can only strengthen the hand of our opponents within the antiwar movement who maintain that GI's do not have rights, and should not engage in public antiwar activity. Moreover, it could be a demoralizing factor for other GI's, who are watching to see how this case turns out. A victory at Ft. Jackson will be a tremendous source of inspiration and confidence to antiwar GI's everywhere. They will see that they can fight for their rights, and win! This case is the embodiment of our line: that GI's can and should fight for their rights to discuss the war, as citizens in uniform. A victory at Ft. Jackson will be a major victory for the entire antiwar movement, and a decisive defeat for the Army, and the Nixon administration.

The case of the Fort Jackson GI's is being handled by the GI Civil Liberties Defense Committee, a defense committee which was established in the fall of 1968 to defend GIs who are victimized or harassed for exercising their constitutional rights to free speech, free assembly, to petition, etc. The defense committee has successfully defended in courts-martial Allen Myers at Ft. Dix, and Tommie Woodfin, at Ft. Jackson; it has also provided counsel and public support for other GI's, who have faced punitive action by the Army. There will be no separate committee for the Fort Jackson GI's. The GICLDC has arranged for lawyers in this case from the beginning, and has also actively publicized the case and raised money for expenses. This committee, with its established apparatus, will continue to handle all aspects of the defense.

The committee has asked for help in three areas: 1) obtaining sponsors for the GICLDC, 2) raising funds, and 3) getting publicity.

The securing of sponsors for the committee is a crucial and immediate task. The Army must be shown that wide sectors of the American people, including individuals of prominence, are willing to stand by the GI's who are fighting for their rights. Maximum pressure must be exerted within the period prior to the April 22nd hearing. This will maximize the pressure on the Army to back down at that time.

It is important that the nature of the defense committee be clearly explained to potential sponsors. Comrades must remember that we will be asking people to sponsor a defense committee that is broader than just one case and one set of defendants. They must understand that the committee takes only cases directly raising First Amendment questions of GIs' rights, as outlined in its statement of aims, and thus does not include within its scope defense of deserters, draft resisters, etc. Moreover, it should be emphasized that sponsorship of the committee in no way implies agreement with the politics of any

of the defendants. If these points are made clear, there should be no difficulty at all in getting people to sign as sponsors, and, in fact, the prominence of the Ft. Jackson case can help in building a strong defense committee that can be set into motion quickly and effectively when needed for future, similar cases.

The case itself ties together several issues that make it possible to appeal to different sectors of the population for support.

It will be easy to get leading figures in the antiwar movement to join in the defense and become sponsors of the GICLDC. Antiwar figures of national and local prominence, antiwar professors, trade unionists, ministers, lawyers, and other professionals should be approached for support. The GI antiwar movement has been getting a lot of coverage recently, and the Ft. Jackson case poses the issues in a clear and precise way. Just as the case of the Fort Hood 3 was adopted by almost the entire antiwar movement as an important case, the Ft. Jackson case can get wide support from the growing antiwar movement.

The case is, however, not limited in its appeal to antiwar leaders and activists. The case is being fought around vital constitutional questions, and thus has appeal for all those who believe in civil liberties, regardless of their attitude towards the war. Key questions of First Amendment rights are at the heart of the case. Appeals can be made on this basis to lawyers, law school deans and professors, professors of political science, and other principled supporters of civil liberties. These people can support the case and become sponsors of the GICLDC regardless of their view toward the war in Vietnam, and should be approached on this basis.

In addition, the case involves the whole question of Third World GI's and their rights. It should be remembered that among the eight defendants are four Afro-Americans and two Puerto Ricans. GI's United was led, in the main, by black and Puerto Rican GI's. Afro-American and other Third World leaders and organizations can be asked for support of these GI's.

In only a few days of intensive work, more than 50 sponsors, people whose names are known nationally or regionally, have been obtained for the case. These people include Kathleen Camp (National Board, WILPF), Terrence Hallinan (Attorney for the Presidio 27), Rev. Ed Riddick (SCLC), Mitchell Goodman (Professor of English, Berkeley), C. Clark Kissinger (Guardian), Sid Lens (National Mobilization Committee), and G.T. Jacobs (Secretary-Treasurer, OCAW 1-561). With these names as sponsors, and with continued publicity around the case, obtaining additional sponsors should present no problem. All that is required is that comrades organize this activity, drawing up lists of key people, and making assignments for them to be visited.

The second pressing need of the defense committee is funds. The Ft. Jackson case is an extremely expensive one, involving the presence of several attorneys in Columbia for extended periods of time, frequent travel, etc. While all of the lawyers, with one exception, are working without fee, their expenses must be paid. In addition, money is needed for court expenses; the functioning of the defense committee staff in New York and in Columbia; and for the publishing of brochures, pamphlets,

etc. The committee is already several thousand dollars in debt, and is in urgent need of funds to continue.

Fund-raising opportunities are as broad as the opportunities for getting sponsors. Individual contributions, large or small, cocktail parties, collections at meetings, fund appeal letters, etc., all must be utilized to help raise money for the defense. While the committee will have long-range expenses, it is in immediate need of several thousand dollars. Without this money, the functioning of the defense committee will be severely restricted.

Thirdly, the defense committee has requested help in getting publicity out on the case, through articles in campus and underground papers, public statements, contacts with the press, etc. Continued publicity will help both in getting sponsors, and in putting the heat on the brass to drop the charges.

Because of the popularity of the case, there will be forces outside of our movement with whom we can work on the defense effort. The Student Mobilization Committee, is, for example, planning to make the defense of the Ft. Jackson GI's a major focus of its activities for the next several months. SMC activists will be working on getting sponsors, raising money, etc. It is crucial that comrades active in the SMC make every effort to involve other SMCers in defense work. Moderate leaders of the antiwar movement can also be asked for help in making contacts, raising money, etc.

It will be possible for comrades to help in establishing local chapters of the GICLDC, involving broad forces in activity directed at raising funds and getting sponsors for the national GICLDC. As was done with the Committee to Aid the Bloomington Students, in local areas, these groups may want to sit down and plan out a course of action, although there is no need to establish any type of membership organization with regular business meetings. It is crucial, however, that these local groups understand that they are not to function as defense committees for local cases that may arise, or as a local counseling service for GI's. Their only function will be to provide support to the national defense committee in the cases that the national defense committee is handling. This support will be in the form of money, sponsors, and publicity.

In order that we be able to participate in the defense campaign most effectively, every local should take the following steps immediately:

- 1) Assign an experienced comrade to take charge of this area of work. This must be seen as a major assignment, and steps must be taken to free a qualified comrade to do this work.
- 2) Full discussions on the case and the defense work should be held, so that all the comrades are aware of the importance of the case, and are well-prepared to participate in the defense activities.
- 3) Reports should be sent in to the YSA National Office outlining plans for the defense work in each area.