

1030 ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1967

"Campaign Headquarters: Carolina Times (682-2913), 436 Pettigrew Street.
"May 13, 1967.)"

On June 2, and June 3, 1967, Mr. G. F. Steele, Jr., 3928 Notteway Road, Durham, North Carolina, was interviewed as a result of his complaint to members of the Education and Labor Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, that personnel of Operation Breakthrough had engaged in improper political activity during the 1967 Durham municipal elections. Mr. Steele's information was incorporated in the following signed statement which he furnished on June 3, 1967:

DURHAM, N.C., June 3, 1967.

EDUCATION AND LABOR COMMITTEE,
U.S. House of Representatives,
Washington, D.C.

GENTLEMEN: I respectfully call to your attention improper political activities of certain personnel of Operation Breakthrough and the North Carolina Fund, both of which are OEO-sponsored agencies.

I make reference to activities surrounding the municipal general election in Durham, N.C. on May 13, 1967, the primary election on April 29, 1967, voter registration days on April 1, 8 and 15, 1967, and certain other activities of approximately two months' duration preceding April 1, 1967.

During the month of March, 1967, several local citizens advised me that persons known to be staff members of Operation Breakthrough were then engaged in a program of copying names of registered voters from the voter registration books at the office of the Durham County Board of Elections. The people who called this activity to my attention stated that their concern was based on the fact that Operation Breakthrough personnel were copying names of voters from the negro areas only, and the negro citizens of Durham traditionally "bloc vote."

On April 1, 1967, which was the first day that the registration books were open for new voter registration prior to the municipal election, I received calls from a number of local citizens advising me that Operation Breakthrough personnel were engaged in an apparently organized drive to register negro voters.

After receiving several calls of this nature, I personally visited a number of precincts and observed several people involved in what did in fact appear to be an organized registration effort. These activities apparently were organized in the following manner: (1) one or more persons were stationed at each of the various polling places with a list of names; (2) a number of people were driving automobiles and transporting prospective voters to be registered at the polling places, and (3) each prospective voter thus brought in to register first would check in with the person or persons stationed at the polling places as specified above. It should be noted that this activity included only negro voters, although some of the precincts involved are of a racially mixed population.

During the following week, I visited the office of Operation Breakthrough and discussed this matter with the Executive Director, Mr. William R. Pursell. I pointed out to Mr. Pursell my concern over the unhealthy atmosphere created by this activity, and the resultant effect of causing a "Black-White" vote on election day. I also expressed my concern over any activity which might be interpreted as political in nature, and asked for his cooperation in seeing that his employees took no further action that might be considered as politically motivated.

Following the two final registration days of April 8 and April 15, I received additional complaints of a similar nature and was, further, informed that photographs had been taken of these activities.

On April 29, the primary election day, and on days following, I received additional complaints of political activities of certain people described as employees of Operation Breakthrough and the North Carolina Fund. Again, these activities involved only negro voters. The specific complaints alleged that these employees were engaged in activities similar to those observed during the voter registration period; that is, some persons being stationed at the polling places with what appeared to be lists of voters, and some individuals driving voters to the polls. It was observed that voters thus transported were checked off the lists handled by those persons at the polling places. Furthermore, said voters were seen to have in their possession slips of paper which have been identified as a list of recommended candidates.