

On June 2, 1967, Miss Charsie Hedgepeth, Program Coordinator and Miss Joan Burton, Community Worker, Target Area A, were interviewed in the offices of Operation Breakthrough. Miss Hedgepeth acted as spokeswoman with an occasional comment from Miss Burton.

Miss Hedgepeth advised that during the past year Operation Breakthrough has conducted a Voter Education Program involving an effort to contact a maximum number of Durham's poor. The program was designed to explain to the poor the importance of registering and voting.

According to Miss Hedgepeth, early in 1967 Operation Breakthrough began reviewing registration books in the office of the Board of Elections. These books were available daily, Monday through Friday. Lists of registered voters were compiled. Using the voting lists and tax maps, door-to-door canvassing in the target areas was commenced and several hundred of the poor were registered on three successive Saturdays in April, 1967. Miss Hedgepeth estimated that approximately 500 were registered in Target Area A.

Miss Hedgepeth said Operation Breakthrough automobiles were used to transport the Durham citizens to the polling places for the purpose of registering on April 1, April 8, and April 15, 1967, and this effort was considered the end product of the one year Voter Education Program.

Miss Hedgepeth explained that Operation Breakthrough community workers are assigned to specific geographic areas in what are considered target areas in Durham. On the days of the municipal primary and general elections (April 29 and May 13, 1967) Operation Breakthrough employees, on a voluntary basis and using personally owned cars, transported numbers of the poor to the polling places to vote.

Miss Hedgepeth and Miss Burton were shown photos taken in the vicinity of the polling places on May 13, 1967. Miss Hedgepeth stated she recognized Operation Breakthrough employees, but declined to identify them, other than a photo of herself where she appears on the passenger side of a two-door Volkswagen.

Miss Hedgepeth and Miss Burton were shown a political brochure captioned "The Durham Committee on Negro Affairs respectfully recommends the following (candidates for Mayor and Aldermen)." When asked if these brochures were distributed to the people transported to the polls, Miss Hedgepeth replied, "No, it wasn't necessary, they knew who they were going to vote for."

On June 2, and June 3, 1967, the investigator met with the following officials of Operation Breakthrough:

Dr. Charles W. Watts, President, Board of Directors, and Chairman of the Executive Committee.

Mr. Robinson Everett, Attorney for Operation Breakthrough.

Mr. William R. Pursell, Executive Director.

Mr. Scott Puckett, Assistant Director.

Mr. Lawrence Kelly, Administrative Assistant to the Executive Director.

Mr. Aden Field.

Dr. Watts expressed concern over the public charges made by Fred Steele (G. F. Steele, Jr.) that Operation Breakthrough employees were engaged in improper political activity. He stated that the anti-poverty program in Durham suffers from this adverse publicity and that to his knowledge there have been no violations of existing laws or OEO regulations. He indicated Operational Breakthrough members and staff feel they have complied with regulations pertaining to political activity and, if there has been noncompliance, they want to be apprised of the specifics in order that necessary steps can be taken to correct the situation.

On June 2, Dr. Watts requested that Operation Breakthrough be advised of the specific allegations or charges which have been made by Fred Steele regarding improper activity of Operation Breakthrough employees. The investigator advised that if the complainant, Fred Steele, had no objections, a list of specifics would be furnished the following day.

(On June 3, 1967, Mr. Fred Steele furnished the following statement in response to the request of Dr. Watts: "During the Durham, North Carolina, Municipal elections of 1967, and for the period preceding the elections, including Registration of voters and the primary elections, employees of Operation Breakthrough were engaged in political activity in an effort to elect a slate of candidates." Mr. Steele declined to furnish Operation Breakthrough with specific evidence or charges because he felt the evidence should first be reviewed and evaluated by members of the House Education and Labor Committee and the Office of Economic Opportunity or the U.S. Civil Service Commission.)