

CONFIDENTIAL

Memo to Northern offices  
From Margaret Lauren

Re: The MFLU

The Northern office has been disturbed by the lack of information about the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union and by rumors of mismanagement of funds and factions within the union. We have also felt a need to have a clearer picture of what it is the Union needs and what the northern staff can do to fill those needs.

Week before last I went over to the Delta to see what the story was. I did not talk to the Chairman of the Union, but I did talk with several local people in the Delta and several members of the SNCC staff.

I don't think it is necessary to go into a long description of the kind of life that most of the people in the union have lived. You know about the poverty and squalor, the hungry stomachs, the crowded, cold houses, the despair that comes from not knowing where your next meal or your children's next meal is coming from. We assume you know how it feels, perhaps, to have lost your 30¢ an hour job because of the movement activity and have no prospects for ever getting another one.

The MFLU began last spring at a Freedom School meeting near Greenwood, Miss., when farm workers decided they would strike for a decent hourly wage, unemployment compensation, time and a half for overtime, and other things that enable people to live a decent life in return for their labor. SNCC workers Bob Weil and Mary Sue Galletely were working on the union last spring, along with Liz Fusco, who at that time was on the CORE staff.

The workers' approach was to let the local people run their own union. This meant raise all their funds, do their own organizing and communications work and in short--sink or swim. Problems involved in obtaining food and housing and clothing for the people who went on strike were turned over directly to the local people and Bob and Mary Sue provided them with names of people to write to in the north and ask for support.

Local people wrote their own letters, did their own fund raising and press work. The Northern Office in Atlanta was specifically asked not to interfere or to raise supplies and money for the union because these workers wanted to give the local people a chance to develop and learn to carry on the union after they left. We agreed.

The local people also did their own bookkeeping.

The strike was not a success, the local people say, although many workers stayed away from the fields and many maids stayed out of the white folks' homes last spring.

The Union was never chartered under the laws of the state or any other laws.

In addition to this, apparently no system of acknowledging contributions to the union was ever set up and few receipts were ever sent out. One labor union in the north sent several thousand dollars down, but there is apparently no accounting for it.

Last summer a "freedom garden" was cultivated to help raise money for the winter. However, people who worked in the garden needed food and it was distributed among them.

This fall the union people decided that in order to survive, they would have to go back to the fields and help harvest the cotton crop, and people have done so. Of course, many folks don't have any hope of going back to work and are unemployed.

Just as the people were going back to work in August, the Delta Ministry of the National Council of Churches of Jesus Christ distributed

\$30,000 worth of food and clothes collected by the National Student Association.

The Delta Ministry established welfare committees through their own movement contacts to distribute the food and clothes which were different from welfare committees local union people had set up to distribute food and clothes. Each community where the Delta Ministry has distributed the food and clothes has been split into factions. Some communities were already split over the distribution of food and clothes which the union had handled and were then split again.

My impression of the labor union was rather discouraging. People are still suffering, but they have not begun working together because of divisions and factions within communities over who gets what food and what money. In some towns people on one end of town won't have anything to do with people in the other part of town. It is important to remember that this is not the first time welfare programs have disrupted communities of very poor and oppressed people.

The Northern office feels that we should ask people in the north to send food and clothing to the Delta despite the condition of the union structure because there is such a desperate need for it. At a union meeting in Shaw last Friday, October 22, local people also asked that people in the north be contacted about sending toys for the children at Christmas. We feel it is also important that northern groups, when sending supplies like this down to the Delta, make sure that boxes go to each community directly (see list of locals in Oct, 28 FOS mailing) and not just to the union headquarters. We are going ahead with promoting these drives in the north. But we feel that people who work in the northern offices should have an understanding of what the union is doing at this stage.

We also feel there is a need for a staff person to work directly with the MFLU who can help straighten out the books, work on getting information out to northern supporters, and coordinate a fair distribution of food, clothing and other resources. soon.