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### MINIMUM WAGE HEARINGS

WASHINGTON, D.C. - A House committee seeking to extend minimum wage coverage to farm laborers has heard from the workers themselves for the first time.

The House Committee on Labor and Public Welfare heard, July 15, from sharecroppers and cotton pickers, including a representative from a newly formed labor union of cotton workers in Mississippi's Delta region.

Aaron German and Andrew Hawkins of Shaw, Mississippi, told the committee workers in their area earned 30¢ an hour. Hawkins said "kids have to drop out of school" because their parents can't support them on the wages they make.

A spokesman for the National Cotton Council, a lobbying group of wealthy cotton farmers, said cotton was a \$15 billion dollar-a-year industry that employed 9 million people. He said that the industry was unable, however, to pay day workers \$1.25 an hour.

Rep. James Roosevelt (D-Cal.) asked the Cotton Council spokesman, "Do you mean that this is what it takes to grow cotton...that it takes slavery? If so, I'd rather not see cotton grown."

Hawkins, one of the organizers of the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union, told the House Committee that federal subsidies go only to landowners, and never to sharecroppers. Hawkins said sharecroppers were told how much to plant, when to plant it, and when to pick it.

In further testimony, Hawkins said that workers on a plantation owned by Senator James O. Eastland (D-Miss.) workers received such low wages they were forced to operate illegal liquor stills. Hawkins also said that Senator Eastland uses prison labor on his farm.

Median income for Mississippi Negroes across the state is \$660. Negroes in rural areas, like Mr. Hawkins' home in Shaw, average \$474 a year, according to a report issued by the Atlanta-based Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

Nearly 1,000 members of the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union have been on strike in Mississippi's Delta counties for several months. They are demanding \$1.25 minimum wage for all workers, and an end to child labor.

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