



To: Friends of SNCC

Enclosed is a background paper on the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union.

Some people have asked to what extent is SNCC involved in the MFLU. The answer is that SNCC staff and volunteers who work on the projects in the Delta are helping in every way they can. But, the important point is that local people are running the union, making a policy, etc and that alot of good people are talking with people emerged as a result. This is something to stress when local leadership has people about the MFLU. No Northern organization is responsible for the Union, for its creation, its momentum. Many papers are giving credit to civil rights groups -- and to northern organizers. Thus it is our job to stress, again and again, that local people have built this movement and continue to run it.

# Mississippi Freedom Labor Union

The Mississippi Freedom Labor Union was organized in 1965, when sharecroppers in the Delta struck for higher wages. Families were evicted from plantations for union activities and lived for months in a tent city near Tribbett. To press the federal government for aid, 70 persons occupied a barracks at the Greenville Air Force base.



**Union leaders produced this mimeographed report to encourage people to join.**

Everybody should be on strike because you are not getting anything for your work. Why work and be hungry when you can gain the union some support? All the people that have children really should be on strike. Why make your child work for low wages when you all of your life have been working for nothing? Why buy the white man steak when you can't hardly eat neckbones? As cheap as chicken is you can't eat it but once a week on Sunday. Wake up and think. We as Negroes should want to be equal and get high wages. For over two hundred years we have been working for nothing. Please join the union because if you are not in a union you just aren't anywhere.

Here's how we got started.

The union started in January. A group of people at a freedom school discussion. got together and decided that they weren't getting anything for their work. They formed a union and started paying dues. They went to other counties in Mississippi spreading the ideal.

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## **Long Live the Spirit of the SNCC--Atlanta Project, Vine City the SNCC Architects of the Modern Day Call for Black Self-Determination & Black Power!!**

John & Camille Bell, Hildegard "Cissy" Breeland, Larry Fox, Connie Henderson, Bob Moore, Efia Nwangaza (Margaret Mills), Alton Pertillo, Donald & Flora Stone, Askia Toure (Roland Snellings), Barbara Simon, Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons (Gwen Robinson), Michael Simmons, William "Bill" Ware, Dwight Williams

Photo: Efia Nwangaza/Black IS Back Coalition, Washington, DC, 11/09



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In March the people in Shaw, Mississippi, about 90 people, canvassed trying to get people to strike for higher wages. At that time the union didn't have a name and they didn't have papers for people to sign to go in the union. But now the union have improved a lot since this. They didn't have any way of knowing how they were going to get support then.

In April we found a name for the union and drew up the rules and they were decided on at the state workshop. Some of the people all over the Mississippi Delta are on strike.

Shaw is the headquarter since it started in Shaw. Every month we have a state meeting. Some of the things we do at this meeting are people from every precinct give us a report on what they have been doing in their county. We have officers. We have 1325 members in the union and 350 people on strike. The way we got these many people is talking to them and showing them the point of how important it is to form a union. We talk to people in the homes and on plantations at store, churches and town.

#### City workshop

The city workshop was held in Shaw by the chairman with local people to discuss what we would talk about at the statewide workshop. We also elected committees to issue. And we selected the rules for the union.

#### Statewide workshop

In the statewide workshop we had people from the following places - Glenallen, Winstonville, Louise, Greenville, Batesville, Rosedale, Carroll County, Vicksburg, Thorn, and Marks, Mississippi.

Out of these places we have 100 people on strike in Rosedale, 68 in Glenallen and 135 in Shaw.

#### What we talked about

We talked about the support of the union and we adopted the same rules for the state that we had in Shaw.

We also discussed ways of getting funds for the union strikers. We decided to write letters to people everywhere and ask for help. We also talked about why it was important for people to join the union.

#### Offering houses

The people in the union stated they would let people live in their homes if they get thrown off the plantation. So far none have been thrown off.



The union handed out \$50.00 from dues

We gave \$50.00 to three union members who need it very badly. One member needed it because they were threatened to be thrown out of their house and it was being used as a center. The second was threatened by the man she owed. And the third member and family was starving or living poverty. So that is how we use our dues to help the members.

On April 14th and 15th people from 8 counties picketed the Motor Inn Hotel in Greenville. They were having a U.S. Department of Labor meeting. We were trying to get them to let us in and meet our demands. The second day they let us come in and listen to speeches. Mr. Hawkins a Shaw union member asked a question about wages for farm work. Mrs. Hamer spoke inside the meeting the first day and she read the union forms her and 6 more people sent in.

The people are on strike in other places like Greenville, Winterville, Laymont, Rosedale, Batesville, Tribbett, and Anguilla.

The most strikers we have are cotton workers that mostly what about 100% of the Negroes in Mississippi depend on.

Two maids quit jobs to join the strikers and one tractor driver which was very good.

One plantation 37 people in Issaquena county went on strike for \$.50 an hour and they were successful on Monday they will strike for \$1.00 an hour. They only work 9 hours a day.

There are 9 tractor drivers on strike on a plantation in Glenallen. On a place in Shaw they struck for more money. Friday they found out they got a raise from \$6.00 to \$7.50 tractor drivers. They are planning to strike again as soon as it dries up.

The strikers started with the people who chop and pick cotton and tractor drivers and now the people on various plantations are striking.

Each town is organizing their strike and officers. The chairman in Shaw is George Shelton, Jr., Shaw.

We need help raising money so the people on strike can pay their house rent and bills.

The way we got land to raise gardens the landowner gave us a few acres to plant gardens on. The union started because the colored people weren't getting anything for their work We will help the Negro farmers that gave us land to raise the gardens.

The money we raise we give it to the people to pay their house rent and bills. We would like for everyone to help support the strikers.

The food we are trying to get for people are just regular food like milk, canned meat, pinto beans, butter bean, lard, white corned meal.