

2608 Milvia Street
Berkeley 4, Calif.
October 2, 1964

Margaret Farley
21 Santa Margarita Drive
San Rafael, California

Dear Margaret:

I write to you as an individual member of ICEA and in your capacity as representative of the Marin ECA. I regret that I cannot attend your ECA meeting on October 7, as I know Dr. Miller will do a splendid job in describing the ICEA June convention.

Although the convention was in many respects excellent, its aftermath has been most troubling in many important ways, and I think you and Marin ECA will be troubled too. I bring these matters up because in my opinion an approach to solution must involve information and protest by those informed. If you cannot attend the meeting and read this letter at it, I hope you can give this to someone else to read there.

As you know, I took your proxy vote to the convention, and I also had five other proxies. Each of these persons who gave me a proxy knew that I planned to move the ICEA at the convention to adopt a program of 1) aiding the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO- including Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee, SNCC, NAACP, CORE, Southern Christian Leadership Conference) in its "Mississippi Project" of voter registration, freedom schools, health centers, integration etc. by way of sending maternal and child health aids and literature * and 2) implementing in some way our by-laws which provide that we welcome individuals of all races. My motion on this point was to have a committee appointed by the president of ICEA to explore reasons why we don't serve more Negroes and other minority persons and why we don't have more as members- and to improve this.

I did so move at the convention. Both motions were seconded (by Dr. Miller, I believe) and both came on regularly to be heard in the proper manner. I had asked Edith Patten, president, for 45 minutes to present these matters, and she had put the issue on the agenda under the heading "integration."

BOTH MOTIONS PASSED UNANIMOUSLY AND BY ACCLAMATION.

Dr. Miller and Edith Patten knew of my intentions and of my interest in this for some months prior to the convention. I had written Niles Newton at length and in detail months before the convention. I believe others on the board knew of my intention.

* for which COFO had specifically asked in a letter to Edith Patten

Niles Newton was on the floor when I made my motions and argument in support of them. No one said a word in opposition. Someone asked for clarification and it was provided. The meaning of the motions and the general intent was perfectly clear.

Thence followed, the next day after the convention was over, an impassioned plea to the board by letter from Michael Newton, that we do nothing to implement the "hasty" decision of the membership, claiming that everyone in Mississippi detested COFO, that "dedicated" doctors who served "indigents" would stop doing so if maternal care became "associated" with civil rights, that mothers would die.

Helen Wessel, the new president, at first agreed not to send anything to COFO which had ICEA's name on it. After some prodding, she agreed to call COFO in Jackson, Miss. and find out what they needed. She did put in the mimeographed newsletter that individuals and groups could send materials to COFO. Two persons did so to my knowledge; perhaps one or two more did. That is all that has been done.

No mention of this appeared in the News which was just received. Niles Newton absolutely refused to mention this unanimous decision of the membership in the News. Helen Wessel acquiesced.

To my knowledge, nothing has been done appointing a committee as described above. It was not mentioned in either the little newsletter or the News. Neither those who gave me proxies nor the membership at large, nor the non-members who are interested in ICEA and expect to hear what actually happens in that organization know that the membership UNANIMOUSLY voted these things.

Furthermore, in a recent letter which was circulated amongst the board, Helen Wessel explained that the decision on COFO was not her doing, that she had to implement the membership decision by letting individuals or groups send materials OR NOT as they preferred and that the matter was now closed and ICEA had no further commitment to COFO.

She went on to say that this whole matter had brought up another question, and she proposed making it impossible to bring up new business from the floor unless the president and the board were "forewarned". The fact that in this instance the board and the president were "forewarned" is beside the point. Is this a trend that ICEA and its member groups wish to encourage? Are persons who undertake to go to the convention to be denied the right to submit new business to the membership in convention assembled? Can ICEA's democratic process yield to the unfortunate even sympathy-inspiring fact that the editor lives in the terrorized society of Mississippi? Should the board be the servant or the watchdog of the membership?

I think Marin ECA will want to consider these problems and possibly to protest some of these happenings. I don't think that childbirth education or any other worthy cause is well served by these distortions of the democratic process.

I want to add a postscript which is not strictly speaking relevant to these points. Naturally I did not have the following in mind when I spoke at the ICEA convention, * but I have since been to Mississippi as an attorney and have seen for myself that other very respectable and well-financed medical groups were coming in to aid the civil rights movement, that the United States Public Health Service and other large foundations are on the verge of large scale investment and programs there in health and that ICEA has no missed the chance to be in on the ground floor of these new programs. We might have done childbirth education a lot of good and we might have been able to bring in our concepts of childbirth education and family centered maternity care into very high places and with large scale new programs had we not allowed ourselves to be frightened into suppression and distortion of our own membership's unanimous vote. Even the President of the United States finally seated two COFO workers at the Democratic Convention!

Very truly yours,


Fay Stender

cc: John Miller, MD
Edith Patten
Flora Hommel

* I was most graciously and hospitably welcomed by the Newtons personally and regret the conflict which their position in Mississippi has posed to them. However, ICEA must face it.
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