

December 18, 1964

Mr. Douglas Levine
Local 99
ILGWU
275 Seventh Ave.
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Levine:

I have just been notified by Richard Haley of my "adoption by your union. I was quite gratified to see that there is some interest in our project since all too often we have felt like the orphan child of the civil rights movement.

I am working the Gadsden County, specifically in the town of Gustatoheschee. For the first three months of the project we worked only in voter registration. In that period approximately 3100 Negroes were registered to vote. It was an increase from 11.5% of the eligible people registered to 38.9% of the potential. I believe that this was one of the greatest, if not the greatest percentage increase in registered voters in the country. After the books closed for registration, we began a concerted get out the vote campaign. The drive resulted in approximately a 90% turnout of Negro voters. (A professor of government who was doing a study on southern politics at the time told us we would be lucky if there was a 40% turnout).

The county's economy is based upon its shade grown tobacco crop. The crop is lucrative only to the whites of the county. All the tobacco is grown on farms owned and run by whites. The farms are worked by Negro tenant farmers. They have salaries ranging from \$3.50 to \$5.00 per day for twelve hours work. The conditions on these farms are as close to conditions on pre-Civil War plantations as you can possibly get today. On many farms the people live in terror of the owner or the manager. Beatings are daily occurrences and I have heard of several of these resulting in deaths. The farmers view any attempt at enlightening the tenants as both an economic threat and a crack in the wall of tradition. They have gone to great lengths to keep us off the farms. I have been arrested twice while canvassing. At one time while canvassing on the Thomas Smith (a large landowner and former county commissioner) Farm I was stopped by Smith, beaten with walking canes by him and three other men, shoved into a car and taken to a house where I was threatened with death and then they had me arrested. While the deputy was awaiting to arrest me Smith beat me again for not saying "sir" to him.

We anticipate more of this type of treatment as we continue to try and organize farmer groups. It being part of our program to start literacy classes for farm laborers as the first step in a series to help the people to organize into a group able to wield sufficient economic power to grant them the ability to deal with their bosses on a more equal level.

In addition to but complimenting our work of the farms is a program of Community Center development. A center has been started in Chattoechee. It will include a library specializing in Negro history, a remedial reading program, a pre-school program for the younger children, Negro history classes, and will also serve in any capacity that the community call upon it to serve. Right now the hang-up as far as instituting the program is lack of material. We have made a start however, using what is available in the community.

The main reason for the success of the program is of course the participation of the local people themselves. Our actions have been catalytic, the people have participated with great enthusiasm in every stage of the program. They have been the pushing force in the expansion of the program. We have expanded into the areas where the people have indicated the desire for action.

As we enter the seventh month of the project the need for intensification is more apparent than ever. Combined with the need for expansion is our everpresent and worsening financial situation. We have not received any money for the project for quite some time. As a result of this we have had to use our own money from our subsistence to pay for project expenses. This is quite a burden since some of the staff had never started receiving checks and we have been sharing our checks. Thus out of our \$12.50 a week must come gas expenses, mineo supplies and other miscellaneous expenses.

North Florida is on the road to Freedom. All we need is the car fare. It is by the social minded actions such as your union has taken that we will be sided in the struggle for economic and social equality.

Yours for freedom,

Stuart Wechsler