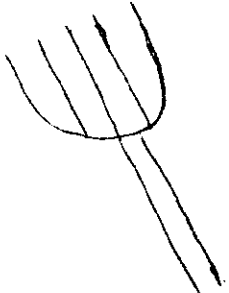


[AWP]

AGRARIAN



WORK PROJECT

The South has been largely an agrarian society, its culture and traditions are agrarian, and much of its radical heritage grows out of the rebellion of farming men against industrialization and its effects on their culture. The building of any movement for change in the South should include analysis of rural problems and a strategy that incorporates the radical traditions and potential of Southern farmers.

In the past we have woefully neglected the task of organizing in rural areas. The reason seems to be at least partly due to the difficulties in figuring out how to go about it. There have been obvious issues and usable institutions (labor unions) for reaching industrial workers. The task of reaching black rural people has been somewhat easier than whites since there were issues centering around racism such as disfranchisement. But the task of organizing white farmers hasn't even begun.

One place to start is to begin working with whatever is going on, which is mostly organizing black farmers at this point, and learning what we can from them. This is what we plan to do in the summer project.

H.L. Mitchell, co-founder of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union in Eastern Arkansas during the thirties has offered to help set up a project for this summer with sugar cane workers in Southern Louisiana. The project will be co-sponsored by Southern Student Organizing Committee and the Agricultural and Allied Workers Union, which is the successor to the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. The sugar caneworkers are among the poorest and most exploited workers in the United States. They live and work on vast feudal sugar cane plantations in Southern Louisiana. Ninety per cent of the sugar cane workers are black. The Agricultural Union project already in progress is aimed at helping the sugar cane workers gain control of their communities. Organizing has taken several forms: the union has worked to make conditions of the workers known to the public and bring about wage increases, it has developed credit unions and co-ops, and has begun to build housing and make basic improvements in living conditions.

Students participating will be paired with sugar cane workers already involved in organizing there. They will receive subsistence pay, living and travel expenses. Living facilities owned by church and labor organizations will be used for co-operative living.

Beginning in early June, the students and workers involved will fan out over the plantations, making a house to house survey to secure data on family earnings for the past year and learn about existing living and working conditions.

This data, along with information from official sources and company financial reports will be collated and used to support pleas for higher wages for plantation workers at the annual wage fixing hearings held by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, under the National Sugar Act, expected to be held June 26, at Houma, La.

The Union will call its second "Holiday" for plantation workers and seek to mobilize 500 or more men, women, and children to attend the USDA Wage Hearing. In 1968, about 200 attended and wages were increased about 15¢ an hour to \$1.30 and \$1.40 per hour.

The next part of the program to be carried out by the student volunteers and part time field worker organizers will be to make house to house calls on plantations, to organize and hold small group meetings in the homes of workers. Simultaneously, the organizers will help set up a system for voluntary union dues collections and credit union contributions from each family. At least once a month general meeting of all plantation workers will be held in each central location in the sugar cane area of South Louisiana. Spirituals and folk songs will be sung and motion pictures will be shown at these meetings to make them both educational and entertaining.

Students and workers will participate in a study program which will explore conditions in the rural South today as well as historical agrarian movements. Folks not able to work in La. are encouraged to participate in the research project where ever they are for the summer (we'll send bibliographies and study guides and hopefully put out a summer newsletter about what we're learning). At the end of the summer we plan to get together for three or four days to compile what we've learned--organizing guides, research papers, etc. Hopefully at that time we can begin to plan for a larger conference of Southern students and rural organizers.

If you're interested in working with the project, or in participating in the research project write for more information to:

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1970 or before