

From: Eric Mann  
 To: James Farmer, Lou Smith, Marvin Rich  
 Re: CORE's position vis a vis discriminatory unions

December 1, 1964

After having been involved with the Trailways situation for over a month, I had come to a point where I was looking for new levers to try to remedy some of the problems which had arisen. The history of Negro workers with their union, The Amalgamated Association of Street, Electric Railway and Motor Coach Employees of America, Local 1112, had been a fruitless one. During the period of over a year during which CORE had negotiated with Safeway Trails, the union had played a passive role, and during the first series of negotiations, November and December 1963, had upheld the company's claim that equal opportunity existed in the Trailways operation. Grievances such as the harassment of Negro porters who were fired for insubordination were processed, but not actively pursued. The attitude of the Negro workers towards their union was one of alienation, and information I received from Mr. Louis Zimmerman of the City Commission on Human Rights, and John Somers and Roland Watts of the Workers' Defense League had validated the opinions of the workers. I also found out that the union was not very popular among the white workers, and during 1963 a petition had been signed by a vast majority of the workers in the local to disaffiliate with the union. (I am not sure of the technicalities of such an action, but apparently the workers are still governed by the union contract, but do not pay union dues and are able to bring in a new bargaining agent at the end of the union contract's duration.)

In view of this past history of lack of cooperation, and the overall vulnerability of the union, I wrote a letter to Mr. Andrew Peretta, President of the local which has jurisdiction in the New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington terminals. (The union's jurisdiction does not include the drivers and the people who work in the shop; mechanics, helpers and floormen). In light of the poor results we had had with the company in terms of the implementation of agreements, I felt that a more forceful approach would be in order with the union. I wrote to Mr. Peretta, apprising him of the fact that there was widespread discontent among the workers, Negro and white, in the New York terminal, and that the union had been remiss in processing the grievances of its Negro workers, and in general had been unresponsive to their problems. I then told Mr. Peretta that we hoped to be able to work out an amicable solution to these problems, but if such a solution was not forthcoming CORE would attempt to 1. bring in another union which was more responsive to the needs and desires of the Negro workers in the terminal or 2. establish a "freedom union" which would represent the workers, white and Negro, in an attempt to establish true equality in the Trailways operation. I received no reply to this letter.

This past week, while I was in Washington working on the Trailways boycott, I met with Mr. Walter Davis of the Civil Rights Department of the AFL-CIO to discuss the possibilities of putting pressure on the union to negotiate with us. To my surprise he produced a copy of the letter I had sent to Mr. Peretta, and expressed his dissatisfaction with the statements pertaining to the establishment or recruitment of a rival union. The meeting was quite amiable, but Mr. Davis made it clear that trade union support for the civil rights struggle was dependent on our behaving ourselves when it came to dealing with the unions. I asked him if he could suggest an

effective counter-measure which could force a recalcitrant union to change its policies, and he averted the subject. At that point he told me of the long history of cooperation between the labor movement and the civil rights movement, emphasizing the financial support which we received. He told me that my letter was very controversial, and in view of the fact that it was not official national policy he asked if I would let him "bury" the letter. I agreed for the sake of expediency, preferring to discuss the matter with Marvin Rich and James Farmer before committing the national office to a policy which was not officially determined. Mr. Davis is awaiting a letter from me which was sent today, in which I have stated our demands of the union. As soon as he receives it he will set up a meeting between myself and Walter J. Bierwagen, and International Vice-President of the union.

### Observations

I have written this report in an attempt to discuss certain conflicts and contradictions in our relationship with the trade union movement. Despite the fact that there are certain groups within this movement who are very favorable to our goals, it is quite apparent that as Mr. Davis described himself, they are labor union people first, and civil rights supporters second. Thus, Mr. Davis became upset about my statement, not because he was convinced that the situation was such that it didn't warrant such a move, but rather that as a union official he saw such policies as inimical to his primary interests. Secondly, there are many individuals and groups within the labor movement who are openly hostile to our goals. In both these cases I feel that we should use the same yardstick that union leaders employ, that is: using other groups to advance our position, not to tie our hands.

In the specific situation with the Amalgamated Transit Union, Mr. Davis, I believe, was not fully accurate in his presentation of the problem. He told me that it was illegal for one union to interfere with the jurisdiction of another at all times. My information to the contrary came from Cleveland Robinson, an official of District 65, who gave me specific information on how such a situation was possible. Realistically, I doubt whether CORE at this time is in a financial and administrative position to undertake an extensive program of establishing freedom unions, but the union's contract does not come up for over a year, so that some future developments could alter this situation. But the latter possibility, that of encouraging another union which is already established and more willing to advance the principles in which we believe, seems quite practical, especially since we will have over a year to carefully plan such a program. I definitely feel that I was remiss in stating such a position so candidly, but I was in a position where very few, if any, effective levers existed in working with a recalcitrant union. I think it is important to formulate a position paper on our official policy towards the discriminatory unions within the labor movement, to discuss various forms of pressure which we can exert on them, and to weigh the advantages and shortcomings of incurring the wrath of some labor people if we did adopt a policy of challenging an established union by bringing in or establishing a rival one.