American People's Movements: 
THE SOUTHERN TENANT FARMER'S UNION

EDITED FROM TAPE RECORDINGS MADE BY
H.L. MITCHELL, CO-FOUNDER OF THE STFU

I started to work on a farm at the age of 8 working in cottonfields, chopping and picking mainly. We also had some strawberries and tomatoes. There was a lot of work involved in all. We worked from 50 to 60 hours a day for ten hours a week. My first wife and I made a sharecrop with the landowner. I made a crop on these several acres of land, raised some cotton. That was in 1920. I recall it very well. I had expected a good price. But it went down in such a high price that I could not even sell my cotton. We were very poor. We owned no land. We did not have any savings. The landowner let us stay and we were able to raise a little bit of food. We also made $385 for all that year's work. We moved to Arkansas in 1927 to the town of Arkansas, a dollar a day was earned. We lived on nearby plantations. My daughter was born there, but I had some money to go back to Arkansas and make a sharecrop on an Arkansas plantation. I went into the cleaning business. Most of my customers were people who lived on nearby plantations. I travelled around through the plantation country, getting business.

1000 Members in Tyrone, Arkansas

I think our 1935 report showed that we had 30,000 members. We had someBefore I went to work on a farm, I had some savings. I was able to purchase a sharecrop with the landowner. When I left the landowner, I made a crop on these several acres of land, raised some cotton. That was in 1920. I recall it very well. I had expected a good price. But it went down in such a high price that I could not even sell my cotton. We were very poor. We owned no land. We did not have any savings. The landowner let us stay and we were able to raise a little bit of food. We also made $385 for all that year's work. We moved to Arkansas in 1927 to the town of Arkansas, a dollar a day was earned. We lived on nearby plantations. My daughter was born there, but I had some money to go back to Arkansas and make a sharecrop on an Arkansas plantation. I went into the cleaning business. Most of my customers were people who lived on nearby plantations. I travelled around through the plantation country, getting business.

Blacks and Whites

Just Wanted Federal Benefits

In the beginning, we never received any actual support from organized labor. The local labor people, for instance in Memphis, said the union could only lead to uprisings among the sharecroppers. The local law enforcement officers were alerted and were prepared to arrest union members. Near the town of Earle, Arkansas, a group of workers started to work on a privately owned plantation owned by Paul Fears. The men picketing were arrested, most of them were Negroes, and were sentenced to work on a private-owned plantation owned by Paul Fears.

Nonviolent Marches

The dismembered had a bad reputation, so they just called it the Night Riders. The home of E.B. McKinney was shot into late one night. At the time .....

The Inheritors

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Strike Successful But No Negotiations

for the first two or three weeks and save money until they had enough to buy groceries, and then called the strike. That plan prevailed.

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