



to abolish racial discrimination by direct, nonviolent methods

103 North 10th Street
Monroe, Louisiana
2 March 1964

38 PARK ROW
NEW YORK 38, NEW YORK
Cortlandt 7-6270

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Mr. Hobart Taylor
Chairman,
President's Committee on
Equal Employment Opportunity
Washington 25, D.C.

Dear Mr. Taylor:

On 22 June 1962 the president of the Olin Mathieson Chemical Corporation signed an equal employment agreement with the then Vice President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, chairman of the committee you now head. A plan for ensuring equal opportunity in all areas of employment, and for integration of all employee facilities, called the Olin Plan for Progress, was drawn up. It is the contention of this letter that, as far as its operations in Ouachita Parish, Louisiana are concerned, the management of the Olin Mathieson Corporation has made no attempt to end discrimination or segregation against Negro employees and job seekers. We therefore contend that the company has acted in violation of its agreement with the President's Committee, the President's Executive Order 10925, and the so-called Olin Plan for Progress.

This letter is written at the behest of a group of employees at the Olin Mathieson Corporation in West Monroe, Louisiana, some of whom have worked for the company for as long as twelve and fifteen years. These men approached the undersigned Congress of Racial Equality Task Force workers and asked that we aid them in achieving the goals so loftily stated in the Olin Plan for Progress, because the company has failed to implement them in any meaningful way, in the four plants now in operation in this area.

These men, members of local 752, International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite and Paper Mill Workers, have attempted to achieve progress in ending discrimination and segregation through contract negotiation and discussion with company officials, but have received no positive response from their employers.

Investigation and negotiation have been carried out with no results: we now turn to your agency for assistance.

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There are four Olin Mathieson plants in Ouachita Parish; all located in West Monroe, and all devoted to the production of containers. A fifth plant has just been built and is scheduled to open soon. The following table will give you a rough idea of employment statistics as of today.

Racial Composition of Employment

Plant No.	White	Negro	Total Employed
32	400	25	425
33	400	20	420
35	300	60	360
43	200	5	205
34	(this plant opens in May, 1964)		
Total No.	1300	110	1410

The figures are approximate, but not far off. And, in an area where the population is about 50% white and 50% Negro, it seems strange that the largest single employer should have an employment ratio of approximately 10 to 1, white to Negro.

We have received complaints in several categories and shall briefly outline the nature of these complaints.

I. Employment: recruiting, hiring, upgrading and pay rates.

The Olin Plan for Progress states "Olin is pledged to provide equal employment opportunity to the best available person for each position without regard to a candidate's race, creed, color or national origin." This statement does not fit the facts, however.

Contrary to what is stated in the Plan for Progress no "minority group agencies" concerned with the welfare of Negro citizens have ever been contacted for job placement. Neither the local NAACP nor the Negro union have been made aware of "our (the company's) requirements and policy." Neither has the company recruited at Grambling College, a Negro school only thirty miles distant.

In fact, recent hiring has been almost exclusively for whites. Since 1956 the company has hired about 400 new employees and all have been white, except for one Negro who was hired two weeks ago. In the past eight years only one Negro as compared with 400 whites!

The company hires through an employment office where job seekers go to apply for positions. When a position opens up the company

calls in prospective workers and gives them a general I.Q. test. The standards for passing this test are extraordinarily high and, when a Negro takes the test he is only told whether he passed or failed. He is not told his grade.

About two weeks ago one Negro man applied for an off-bearer job. He had a high school education, four years of business college and three years of electronics school. He was turned down. Another Negro with fewer qualifications was hired for this job but, the reasons were obvious.

The off-bearer job is one which is exclusively for Negroes at the Olin plants in West Monroe, because it is a menial task. One reason for a highly qualified Negro being turned down is to maintain higher paying and more skilled jobs for whites. A highly qualified Negro would have too much obvious potential for promotion, and the off-bearer job is a "backwater," where Negroes can be kept out of the normal flow of promotion opportunities.

Negroes hold only menial labor jobs with Olin in West Monroe: there are no Negro executives, supervisors, foremen or office-workers. The highest job a Negro holds at any of the four plants is that of starch-man, and he has been employed by the company for fifteen years. He has continually been passed over for promotion because of his race, despite the fact that he has accumulated fifteen years of seniority.

Our complainants insist that the company has done nothing to end discrimination in upgrading although the Olin Plan says: "When job vacancies develop, we will consider all employees within the corporation who have demonstrated by performance that they are qualified for promotion."

Prior to contract negotiations last year, the company did not even inform Negro employees of promotion opportunities. However, in last year's contract the company agreed to put up lists of job vacancies. Since that time, though, only two such lists have been posted; one for an off-bearer job and the other for a maintenance helper. The former is a traditionally Negro job anyway, and the list for the latter was taken down after two Negroes signed it. It was not put up again and nothing in regard to the job has ever been heard by the two signees.

Seniority is not taken into account when Negroes accumulate it; Negroes are continually passed over for whites with much less time at the company.

II. Employee Facilities and Social Services.

The Olin pledge also states: "We will continue to work toward maintaining all facilities, including cafeterias, rest rooms,

drinking fountains and recreation areas on a non-segregated basis. The company is in flagrant violation of this provision in its West Monroe operations.

All employee facilities at all four plants now in operation are segregated, except for the water fountains. And, when Negro employees complained about the segregated facilities of the cafeteria, the company responded not by desegregating it but, by closing it. This was certainly not in keeping with the letter or "spirit" of the Olin Plan for Progress.

Further, serious doubt must be cast on the company's intentions ever to keep good faith with the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity as well as its employees, by the manner in which the new plant, no. 34, has been built. Construction was begun on this plant in 1963, one year after the pledge was signed, and it was designed and built with completely segregated employee facilities.

Plant no. 34 will be in operation in May of this year with separate bathrooms for white and colored!

There are two social service agencies operating within the Olin plants in West Monroe. One is the Frostkraft United Giver's Fund. This fund collects money from employees to be distributed to charities and community agencies. There are no Negroes on the board of directors of this fund, and Negro employees have never been informed as to how the board is chosen. Further, the funds, including those contributed by Negro employees, are distributed to community agencies which operate on a segregated basis.

The other employee agency is the Frostkraft Federal Credit Union. As with the Giver's fund, there are no Negroes on the board of directors. Also, there are no Negroes on the credit committee, and members of one race are not permitted to co-sign notes for members of the other race.

How do these facts fit in with the company's statement that "employees are to be encouraged to support, and participate in, plant programs and community affairs on a completely non-discriminatory basis."?

The president of the Olin Mathieson Chemical Corporation signed a statement, together with the Vice President of the United States on June 22, 1962. The statement was institutionalized by the company as the Olin Plan for Progress. But, what has been done to effectuate the Plan at Olin plants nos. 32, 33, 34, 35 and 43?

The company's first failure was that no copies of the Plan for Progress have ever been distributed to Negro employees.

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The company's second failure was a series of meaningless negotiation and discussion sessions with members of Negro local 752 of the International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphit and Paper Mill Workers, AFL-CIO.

There were three meetings; one in July and two in August of 1963. At these meetings the following proposals were made by the union members:

1. Negroes should be given supervisory jobs.
2. Two Negroes should be put on the board of directors of the Frostkraft United Giver's Fund.
3. The company was asked to clarify job classifications, so that workers in one classification would not be doing jobs calling for higher pay.
4. The company was asked not to allow political candidates to preach segregation on company property or, not to allow political campaigning on its property at all.
5. The company was asked to integrate its employee cafeteria.
6. The company was asked to establish an apprenticeship training program, and that admission to this program be on a completely non-discriminatory basis.

So far the company has taken no action on any of these programs, except the one relating to the cafeteria. That action was to close it rather than integrate it.

No answer to the other proposals has ever come from company officials, either local or national.

In view of the facts and assertions presented in this letter, we charge the Olin Mathieson Corporation with failure to live up to any of the provisions of its agreement with the committee of which you are now the chairman, at least in its North Louisiana operations. And, we further charge it with breach of faith with its employees and with your committee.

We therefore ask that the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity send a staff member to West Monroe, Louisiana, to conduct a thorough and impartial investigation of the Olin Mathieson Corporation's policies and practices in regard to hiring, recruiting, upgrading, employee facilities and services, and employee-management relations; in order to plan and execute corrective measures which will end discrimination and segregation against Negroes and other minority groups.

We ask that the investigation be conducted with regard to what the company has done or, has failed to do, to make the Olin Plan for Progress a meaningful reality.

The Olin employees who are responsible for this letter ask that this investigation, aimed at establishing the facts and redressing their grievances, be initiated immediately, to obviate the need for any further action on our part, and pledge to assist your committee in every way possible, as do we, the undersigned CORE workers.

INSERT A.

Contact with all the persons responsible for this letter of complaint may be made through the CORE office in Monroe. Our mailing address is at the head of this letter, and our phone number in Monroe is 322-9103.

We respectfully request that you give this matter your immediate attention.

Sincerely yours,

Thomas Valentine

William Brown

Michael Lesser
CORE Task Force workers

cc: Rep. Adam C. Powell
Rep. Augustus Hawkins
Sen. Paul Douglas
Mr. Louis Martin
Mr. John Pomfort
Mr. Daniel Schulder
The New York Herald Tribune

A.

The jobs, the livelihoods, and the lives of the persons filing this complaint are now in danger because of their action. We have not included their names because of this danger to them. If their identities were to be made public before an investigation were instituted by the federal government, they would be open, for sure, to retaliation. This danger increases with each day that passes without action by your agency.

Thus, we ask you to intervene now.