

EXERPTS FROM

A NEW UNIONISM

An Analysis of Militant Community
Organization in Chicago

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An organization may be viewed as an exchange system, in which leadership offers "incentives" to induce constituents to contribute the time, effort and resources which the organization needs to maintain itself. The political machine gets work from its precinct captains by promising them city patronage jobs, while reform clubs recruit volunteers by giving them reason to believe they are serving a righteous cause. Once the basic needs of organizational maintenance are determined, analysis should turn to the nature of the "incentives" which will appeal to a given constituency and to the tactics which will enable leadership to generate a continuous stream of such incentives. The study of these fundamental functional requirements has been found to reveal important influences on the ideology, structure and policies as well as the viability of the resulting organization.

II. OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

. . . Clark and Wilson, in their paper on incentive systems refer to three types of incentives--material, purposive and solidary. Material incentives are tangible rewards such as patronage in a political machine or salaries in a business firm. Purposive incentives are "ideological" in the sense that they involve agreement on some more or less distant goal and on a strategy for advancing toward that goal. The inducement to participate in an ideological organization is evidence of unity and vindication of principles. Solidary incentives refer to the value people place on associating with congenial, like-minded or status-conferring company. Of these, the first two seem particularly relevant and fruitful for our analysis; the role of solidary incentives in slum organizing is distinctly limited and will simply have to be assumed.

Some distinction should be made between phases of the organizing process. Inducements which are sufficient to hold an organization together may not be sufficient to arouse potential members from apathy to action; conversely,

techniques which are effective for mobilizing people in the first instance may not provide a basis for lasting organization. Lewis found that the culture of poverty included a distrust of outsiders or anyone who professes unselfish motives, a very cautious approach to risk-taking, and a deep reluctance to "get involved." Slum organizers have been able to gain legitimacy for their efforts only by demonstrating real concern with the most salient of the "real" problems facing potential members, and by appealing to the pragmatic tradition of group action for group interests exemplified by the American labor movement. Still the resistance to involvement is great and often the only way to overcome it is to "rub raw" the latent resentments--stir up suppressed anger and focus it on some external object or enemy. Slum organizers must therefore search out and exploit issues with a high emotional content.

The prospects for viable organization may also be affected by certain other aspects of the constituency. Any organization requires some funds, if only for such basic equipment as a telephone and a typewriter. The need for money varies with the type of tactics employed, but the source of funds can be problematic with a constituency which is impoverished by definition. The need for contributions of time, effort and skill also varies with the tactical mix, but a given form of participation may have costs or side-benefits depending on the overall structure and strategy of the organization. Finally, the configuration of common and conflicting interests, unifying and divisive issues in the constituency shapes the scope of organizational activity, the size of the most effective membership unit, and the internal cohesion of that unit.

With this list of organizational needs we may proceed to the analysis of the obstacles and opportunities of slum organizing. We will want to re-examine the problems facing the poor with an eye to their potential as organizing issues.

Housing. The objective conditions of slum housing press themselves on the consciousness with immediacy and persistence. They achieve especially high salience when children are the victims of lead poisoning, rat-bites or illness caused by lack of heat. Sometimes anger and outrage can be focused on the landlord, but this hostility is hard to sustain since there is little personal friction or contact; blame for many problems is placed on more visible scape-goats--fellow tenants. Organization has only been successful where the anger against the landlord could be used to overcome the petty divisiveness.

The most common tactic in the housing area is the rent strike. The basic idea of the rent strike originated in New York and has been used extensively in Chicago by Englewood Civic Organization, JOIN and locals of the Union to End Slums in Lawndale and East Garfield Park. Like the

labor strike, the rent strike is an effort to coerce the owner of the means of production by interrupting the flow of revenue from the production process. Because of the high fixed costs of building operation--regular mortgage, tax and utility payments--the weapon of rent withholding is a fairly powerful one. In a small building, even a partial rent strike can cause heavy financial losses. The major difficulty with the rent strike is that it is illegal in Illinois. If a landlord has the financial reserves to withstand the initial pressure, there are strong retaliatory weapons at his disposal. In a strike called by the Tenants Action Council at the Old Town Garden Apartments in August 1966, the landlord got 130 eviction orders and had the police physically remove most of the leaders. Eight people were arrested and charged with criminal trespass for chaining themselves to radiators or trying to move furniture back. Once the strike is over the landlord can usually claim back rent where the premises have not in fact been vacated.

Other tactics employ the leverage of publicity. The Woodlawn Organization (TWO) has picketed buildings and used sound trucks to advertise their complaints. The bad publicity can hurt a landlord quite severely since his profits are often closely tied to the vacancy and turnover rate in his buildings. Several organizations have also conducted informational picketing at the landlord's suburban home to embarrass him before his neighbors. The Mile Square Federation passed out pamphlets at the opening of Marina City explaining that one of the prominent promoters of that luxury complex was also the owner of some rather disgraceful slum tenement buildings.

The most important obstacle to lasting success in the tenant organizing, however, lies not in the power of the landlord but in the limited concessions he is in a position to make. Since tenant action is essentially a consumer boycott, the landlord cannot pass the cost of concessions on in higher prices as many industrial employers can. Mortgage payments are fixed, taxes tend to rise from year to year, and the cost of labor and materials for maintenance is on the increase. While there are some large and apparently prosperous slum real estate operators, many of the "slumlords" are small investors locked into unprofitable holdings by falling prices. Even where there is a profit being made, it is frequently not made by the landlord but by the mortgageholder. The building owner may have been forced to accept an inflated mortgage or a high rate of interest because he lacked capital of his own, or the inflated mortgage may be a ruse to camouflage the real beneficial ownership of the building.

One large real estate management company told a Wall Street Journal reporter that it had increased its expenditures for maintenance substantially after tenant protest actions, but the general experience has been that little material improvement is forthcoming. Tenant unions have been able to win extremely favorable contract terms from landlords, but they

have found them largely unenforceable. Often the landlord simply cannot live up to the promises made under pressure; several, including the owners of the Old Town Garden Apartments, have made desperate attempts to sell their property on any terms. The only way to squeeze concrete improvements out of such a situation would be to help the landlord cut costs by reducing turn-over and tenant-inflicted damage. The gains from such cooperation would be likely to be small relative to the loss in the emotional impact of the issue.

While the housing issue is one of the most salient in the slum community, the available tactics do not seem capable of generating dependable streams of incentives over the long run. Not only are the concrete material gains extremely scanty, but the problem itself is so complex, the enemy so obscure and the solution so illusive that few convincing ideological conclusions can be drawn. The housing issue can be useful in stirring people up and bringing them together with fellow tenants, but, as mentioned above, it can also have strong divisive effects.

The Englewood Civic Organization made an attempt to use the landlord-tenant bargaining relationship as a source of revenue by inserting a "dues check-off" provision in the contract. Since the amount of rent paid by the tenants was to remain unchanged, the landlord would essentially be paying tribute to the union out of his own pocket. If such a provision was ever enforced, it would undoubtedly be invalidated by the courts. In at least one case, however, the housing issue has lent itself to the creation of a decentralized structure of building stewards and has aided in recruiting and training new volunteer workers for the organization.

Welfare. The inadequacies and abuses of the welfare system have extremely high salience to recipients and potential recipients; the benefits are often the sole source of food and clothing for clients and their children. There is generally a large reservoir of repressed resentment at the humiliating and niggardly treatment which can be focused on the impersonal bureaucratic structure of the Department of Public Aid. This anger is kept alive by frequent contact with callous caseworkers and rude officials.

The most effective role for an organization is as advisor and advocate of aggrieved clients against the agency. In Chicago, this tactical approach has been used by Knewood-Oakland Community Organization (KOCO). The United Friends (TUF), JOIN and the West Side Organization (WSO). At first organized clients were confronted by a complete refusal to meet on the part of the agency. When, in separate incidents, recipients and organizers from JOIN and WSO insisted on their right to be heard, they were arrested for trespass. Once the welfare office has agreed to deal with the organization, it can be forced to make material concessions simply because many of the commonest abuses are directly contrary to the department's own rules.

WSO claims to have processed 1341 grievances in an eighteen-month period without losing a single case. Where the source of the abuse is in the regulations themselves or in the basic legislative instruments, there is strong opposition to change. The pressure from tax-payers' groups and anti-"dole" public opinion is powerful and persistent, and, even where the system is obviously inadequate or unfair, the welfare department will generally arrange special exceptions to avoid more basic changes. A legal approach based on federal welfare legislation and constitutional rights might be more effective, but it would be prohibitively expensive for most community organizations.

The steady stream of small but tangible benefits produced by a welfare grievance operation can be used to win gratitude and loyalty. This type of activity also affords an opportunity for recipients themselves to participate in negotiations and in teaching and advising others. In addition, experience working with welfare grievances carries with it definite lessons of an ideological nature. The hypocritical cruelty of the system gives workers the assurance of a righteous cause; the political bias is obvious, and the needed changes are clearly more drastic than incremental. Many individuals and groups have independently come to the conclusion that the only solution is to abolish the entire system and replace it with some more equitable and humane form of income redistribution such as the guaranteed minimum income. The welfare issue can thus play an important part in building consensus within an organization, and in "radicalizing the constituency." The most severe disadvantage of welfare organizing lies in the danger of alienating segments of the community which consider themselves one step above welfare recipients and which hue to the anti-"dole" line with almost fanatical intensity. Welfare organizing provides no source of operating funds, but the tactics involved do not require large expenditures.

Jobs. The frustration of joblessness has considerable importance to the unemployed worker, but the cause of his hardship is obscured by application procedures, qualification requirements, limited geographic mobility and economic conditions which limit the total amount of work available. Frequently there is no obvious enemy, and men are led to see their difficulties as a sign of their own worthlessness. Only in the black ghetto, where racial discrimination is openly visible is there a clear enemy--and even then it is hard to show the connection between that enemy and any particular aggrieved job-seeker. The picketing of discriminatory employers has been tried on the West Side by WSO and the Mile Square Federation, and, in combination with a consumer boycott, it has been quite effective in changing hiring practices of those merchants and service establishments which depend on the local market. Even when such action does succeed in opening up new jobs for local people, the organization has no control over them; it cannot specify who is hired and thus loses the patronage effect. The problem of unemployment in a capitalistic society is so complex that

few lessons can be drawn without a broader ideological analysis of the system as a whole. The tactics provide relatively little opportunity for active participation of volunteers, and since the rewards of success are so arbitrarily distributed, there is no real incentive for cooperative effort. There is also no apparent way to generate the operating funds to make the effort self-sustaining. As a result most of the grass-roots community organizations have dropped the issue, leaving it up to a group of clergymen who work under the slogan, "Operation Breadbasket: Your Ministers Fighting for You."

Schools. Inadequacy and discrimination in education is an issue with high emotional content because of the cultural emphasis on education as the means of mobility. The enemy may be a local school administration, particular teachers, the school board, or the system as a whole.

The only available tactics involve the use of protest and publicity to mobilize the pressure of public opinion. TWO arranged an elaborate set of hearings in which slum school teachers, their identities concealed by sheets, testified about the disgraceful conditions in their schools. The Union to End Slums took part in a mass protest march organized by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Boycotts have also been tried with varying success. Still there have been few concrete improvements and fewer indications of overall progress. The problem of education lends itself to a variety of different ideological interpretations--the proponents of change are divided among the doctrines of "integrated education," "quality education" and "community control."

This issue, like many of the others, provides an initial excuse for bringing people together, but little opportunity for satisfying involvement over the long run. Money can be collected only by formulating an ideology to appeal to middle class liberal fund sources, at the risk of alienating local people.

Police Brutality. Incidents of police brutality arouse a flurry of outrage, but it tends to die down quickly. The enemy is clear, but far too powerful to oppose with impunity. The only tactic employed thus far has been protest, but even that has turned out to be a very risky business. Many organizations have experienced systematic patterns of harassment and there have been a few cases of heavy retribution. Two weeks after a police brutality protest march, the offices of JOIN and United People were turned into shambles by police raids. In each case, carefully contrived "discoveries" of narcotics were followed by arrests. A meeting between American Civil Liberties Union lawyers and a group of youths in Woodlawn was disrupted by a similarly contrived raid, and several groundless arrests were made. These incidents of retaliation were followed by an understandable lull in organizational activity on the police issue, but in recent months there has been new discussion of collecting evidence on police abuses and educating slum people about their rights.

While the material rewards of work with this issue have been negative, the experience does have a distinct radicalizing effect, and the purposive incentives generated in this way seem to appeal to the young people who are both the most adventurous and the most frequent victims of police abuse. It is however a dangerous form of action for any organization to undertake because the fear and intimidation can have the effect of isolating the few committed activists or of dividing even a relatively cohesive membership against itself. The issue affords no way of collecting money, but free legal aid can often be obtained. There is also a chance for effective use of less skilled volunteers in the education and evidence-collecting endeavors.

Consumer Frauds. Outrage over consumer frauds is usually fragmented and intermittent, because most of the chiseling is itself disconnected and sporadic. When there is a persistent pattern of fraud by particular businesses, then it can become a group grievance and an organizable issue. Community organizations have found ways of putting pressure on local businesses by picketing and consumer boycotts. TWO had a massive "square deal parade" down the main business street of Woodlawn. They also collected evidence about false weights and shoddy merchandise to use in negotiations with the store-owners. The itinerant selling operation is harder to trap; legal action and consumer education seem about the best possibilities.

The tactics used may have some real influence in persuading merchants to modify their practices, but except in cases where actual refunds are granted, no direct material gains result from organization actions. The issue also lacks ideological implications, except possibly in the case of racial resentment against white Jewish merchants in black ghetto areas. Again it is hard to see where operating funds can come from. The opportunity for volunteer participation varies with tactics, but is nowhere likely to be extensive or lasting.

Urban Renewal. To be effective, organizing on one-shot issues like urban renewal must be done before the event takes place. People must be convinced that the threat is real even when it is not evident. The issue seems to be most salient to the segments of the community with the longest time-horizons and the largest stake--the businesses, churches and small homeowners rather than the very poor. If people can be convinced of the grave nature of the threat, they will grasp at any straw of hope the organization can offer them. Most community resistance to city urban renewal plans has been futile. One notable exception is The Woodlawn Organization's battle against the University of Chicago's plan for expansion into Woodlawn. Using leadership from the churches and financial backing from the affected businesses, TWO mounted an impressive campaign culminating in a mass sit-in in the Mayor's office. At length the Mayor conceded the organization a substantial voice in the planning process. The stakes of an urban renewal

battle are high, and interested groups can be called upon to contribute considerable backing during the crisis period. For many of these groups the experience of fighting a City Hall responsive only to big business and upper class interests does have teaching value. The outstanding feature of urban renewal as an issue is the opportunity it affords for bringing together at least temporarily elements of the community that share few other interests in common.

In contrast with this massive array of issues, the labor organizer deals with only a small cluster of concerns focused around the basic struggle between labor and management over the division of benefits and burdens in the production process. The early organizers of the labor movement benefited from the salience of wage income and job conditions, they exploited the repressed hostility to the "bosses," and they exacerbated the friction between managers and workers. They chose a central tactic and developed its effectiveness even though it was at first illegal. The strategic leverage of the strike, coupled with the prosperity of most sectors of the American economy, made it capable of generating a substantial stream of tangible material gains. During the early period of comparative weakness and during depressions, the unions supplemented the relatively meagre material gains by exploiting the ideological potential of the conflict with capital. With the coming of good times, ideological appeals were dropped in favor of more manageable material incentives. The labor union is also fortunate in having, in the employment relationship itself, an excellent source of funds. Wage deductions for dues were accepted as a cost of holding the job and a legitimate "commission" to the union for its efforts in improving conditions. Unions at first made extensive use of volunteer workers as shop stewards, but the importance of the steward system in internal communication and policy formation was gradually overshadowed by paid staffs of economists and time study experts. The conflict with management forced a certain cohesion on the workforce; the need for solidarity was clear in the strike and in the concept of collective bargaining. Internal divisions and conflicts arose, but mainly over the division of gains won from management. The sheer multiplicity of issues in slum organizing can be either an asset or a liability. There is danger of spreading scarce resources too thinly, dissipating vital energy needlessly in unrelated undertakings. In addition, the different segments of the slum constituency reached by different issues may be antagonistic. The welfare issue does have a divisive effect, at least initially, and the urban renewal issue may show up an even deeper divergence of interests. On the other hand, while the pool of able-bodied job-seekers overlaps but little with the mass of old and young, sick, disabled and infirm dependent on welfare, they have a common interest in a more adequate and humane system of relief. The distinction between the young people interested in police brutality and the family heads concerned with housing conditions is merely a matter of a generation. There is no logical reason why these segments of the constituency cannot gain by

supporting each other. To some extent, the opportunities and constraints associated with the different issues may turn out to be complementary. It may be possible to arouse the interest of a potential member on one issue, bring him into the organization and put him to work on another, and educate him with the ideological lesson of a third.

Taken together, this array of issues provides the slum organizer with at least as much material for overcoming the original inertia of his potential constituents as his predecessor the labor organizer had. The problem of finding a stable source of incentives to hold the organization together over time will be much more difficult for him however. There is no tactic comparable to collective bargaining in its ability to generate a steady stream of tangible rewards for distribution to the membership. Welfare and housing actions share some of the same properties, but, as we have seen, the gains are sharply limited by the complex nature of the problem. It is often easier to keep an organization going than to start one, but in this field it will be necessary to develop other sources of incentives and work out a more complex exchange system.

Another serious problem in organizing the poor is the difficulty of collecting basic operating funds. With the exception of urban renewal, no tactic or issue provides a legitimate source of income for the organization. Most of the slum unions in Chicago have tried raising money through levying dues or holding special benefit functions like rummage sales, but all are still dependent on outside financing. Experience has shown that reliance on external sources of money is risky; it sets up a new constituency which demands pay-offs (incentives) commensurate with its contributions. Foundation and governmental fund sources have proven particularly troublesome benefactors because their motives are so subtle and complex. Careful section and manipulation of contributors can avoid major conflicts with the needs of the slum constituency, but the process is fraught with dangers.

III. IDEOLOGY, STRUCTURE & POLICY

These then are the basic elements of the situation facing the organizer-- the constraints, the opportunities and the organizational needs with which he must work. Clearly the most difficult problem is making the transition from initial excitement to stable, lasting and autonomous organization. An organization simply cannot be maintained on excitement alone if it is to achieve permanence or strength; and yet the very process of routinization may transform it so fundamentally that it is no longer faithful to its original purpose.

In terms of incentive theory, leaders must seek rationality and efficiency in the exchange system of incentives and contributions. They are led to

concentrate the available incentives on gaining those contributions which are seen as most essential. The set of priorities and values formulated or adopted by the organization as its ideology defines what contributions are most essential and what kinds of incentives members can expect in return.

The American cultural bias in favor of material, pragmatic values tends to make organizations judge themselves in terms of immediate, tangible gains. This climate affects leaders, members, peers and competitors, alike, and it exerts strong pressures for an organization to specialize in those areas or those methods which produce the most demonstrable successes. Leaders are led to cultivate the segments of their constituency with the greatest concentration of resources or leverage. Organizational goals and policies are reshaped to generate incentives which please these essential contributors, while those with less to contribute are given marginal concessions or ignored entirely.

It is too early to predict with certainty the course of the slum union movement, but the influence of these cultural forces can already be seen in the developmental patterns of Chicago's militant community organizations. We will have to extrapolate from the case material available to us at this time.

The Woodlawn Organization. TWO is the oldest (1960) and most famous of Chicago's slum organizations. It was started by paid organizers from Saul Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation, backed by grants from the Catholic and Presbyterian churches and a foundation. The initial organizing consisted of rubbing raw the latent frustrations of slum dwellers and searching out natural leaders and hot issues. The real catalyst, however, was the threat of land-taking by the University of Chicago under the aegis of the city urban renewal program. This issue was the basis of a coalition of block clubs, mostly composed of small homeowners, and local church leadership, supported by business organizations, labor unions, social clubs and fraternal orders. After a mass march to City Hall and a sit-in outside the Mayor's office, an agreement was signed by Mayor Daley and the University representative granting TWO's major demands about the pace and scope of renewal and giving the organization the right to appoint a majority of the planning committee and veto the selection of a program director. The organization then turned to the issues of housing, consumer frauds and schools, and applied similar tactics. Publicity and mass demonstrations organized through the block clubs and churches were used to develop leverage for negotiations with landlords, merchants and school officials.

In structure, TWO is a federation of about a hundred separate groups-- churches, block clubs, business associations and the like--held together by the slogan of "Self-determination for Woodlawn." Even in statements

for mass consumption, TWO leaders shy away from ideological appeals, feeling that it is quite radical enough for slum-dwellers to demand their fair share of the pie. No unnecessary meetings are held, and the emphasis is always on action which can produce visible results; organizational power is never wasted in areas where there is little chance of immediate success. Much has been made of TWO's victories over the "power structure," and it was hailed by Charles Silberman as "the most impressive experiment affecting Negroes anywhere in the United States."

There was, moreover, a noticeable shift in TWO's tactical mix over time. Instead of organizing new mass actions, the leaders did more negotiating with the "outside powers" on the strength of previous demonstrations of power. It became more and more a staff operation. The ranks of the natural leaders thinned down to the most able and ambitious; a few among them became pre-eminent. Soon a relatively small elite group of leaders, many of whom actually had homes outside Woodlawn, were running the organization subject only to the check of the annual Constitutional Convention. The personal relationships between TWO leaders and people in the power structure of the City and University grew closer and closer. The University began a deliberate policy of helping TWO to build its power in Woodlawn. University connections helped the organization get a manpower training grant from the U.S. Department of Labor and may have been influential in negotiations with the City for a new police commander. Plans are currently being developed for a social service center and an urban education center to be established in Woodlawn with University funds and joint TWO-University control. Other recent activities have included a clean-up drive and a campaign to dry up a local skid row. While TWO has been concentrating its efforts on this type of issue, there have been increasing signs of disaffection at the grass roots level. Groups of concerned parents have accused TWO leadership of getting too far removed from the people and their problems; the most active youth groups in the area have also felt obliged to take up a separate position to the left of TWO.

There are definite parallels between TWO's line of development and that of the Back of the Yards Council, which started as a militant slum organization in the neighborhood Upton Sinclair described as "the jungle" during the thirties, and which is now a strongly conservative homeowners association dedicated to the fight against open housing. Alinsky himself explains this development as a result of rising prosperity brought about through the efforts of the Council. The problems of the Negro ghetto, however, are much deeper, and TWO can only claim success by ignoring many of the most stubborn ills. The gains that TWO leaders have achieved benefit mainly the more fortunate elements of the community. TWO leadership, in their search for leverage against the city and the University, have been led to cultivate those richest in resources and influence. Some new leadership talents have been discovered, and some existing leaders have been raised

to new positions of power, but the overall change is small. If the weakest and neediest were ever reached, they have since become disaffected, lost interest and dropped back into apathy.

The Union to End Slums. The Union to End Slums was a product of an alliance between the AFL-CIO Industrial Unions Department (dominated by the United Auto Workers) and Dr. Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Organizing efforts began in East Garfield Park, and later another "local" was established in Lawndale. This joint undertaking served at first as a vehicle for a splinter group in SCLC to move away from Dr. King's symbolic "strategizing" to what they saw as more practical endeavors. The UAW was at the same time seeking identification with a progressive cause both to show its idealism and to win the confidence of Negro workers it hoped to organize. With labor advice and backing, the SCLC workers began organizing tenants around the housing issue. Captivated by the tenant union-labor union analogy, they mounted a major drive to win collective bargaining contracts with landlords.

The auto workers' union was generous in its support of this drive, and under the pressure one of the city's largest real estate firms signed a contract covering forty buildings, only a few of which had actually been organized. The leadership of the local Union to End Slums found it very difficult to organize the tenants after the major crisis had passed, and impossible to enforce the contract without organization. There was some feeling that the labor partners, with their high powered tactics, had moved too fast.

As the drive for bargaining rights continued, they started running into small landlords who were genuinely unable to meet the demands for repairs and who were essentially tied to their unprofitable holdings by the weakness of the market. While the labor leaders saw this as a strategic pitfall, a chance for the landlords to "shift the crisis back to us," the local organization leadership was disposed to work out an accommodation. This debate coincided with an ideological development in another wing of SCLC in favor of economic self-determination in the ghetto to be achieved through communal ownership of housing and businesses. This was suddenly seen as the solution to the problem of the weak landlord, and a four million dollar grant was obtained to purchase buildings and convert them into some form of cooperative.

Where the pressure to produce immediate results led TWO to specialize in a narrow tactical approach, the Union to End Slums was induced to concentrate on a single issue. This left the question of goals and tactics up to an internal struggle between groups. The relationship between the local organization leadership and its backers in SCLC and the UAW illustrates the problem of split constituencies. The danger in the latest development

phase is, as it was in the first phase, that policy will be shaped to the ends of one of the supporting organizations, resulting in a loss of contact with the slum constituency,

West Side Organization. The West Side Organization was formed in 1964 with the backing of the Urban Training Center for Christian Mission, an ecumenical offshoot of the National Council of Churches. The UTC was conceived as an effort to make the church more "relevant" by giving clergymen three, six or nine months of exposure to the problems of the inner city slum; they were at first mainly interested in WSO as an opportunity for trainees to do field work in the neighborhood. UTC staff shared control of WSO with a small group of indigenous leaders recruited from the area. After some experimentation with employment and other issues, welfare was picked as the main focus of activity.

A highly effective grievance procedure was established, and within the first eighteen months over twelve hundred grievances were successfully processed. Within a much shorter period, involvement with the welfare issue began shaping the perspectives of the organizers. The problem was no longer seen as a matter of isolated cases of abuse, but rather as a systematic pattern of humiliation and exploitation by a system existing as a "parasite on the misery of the poor." The ills of the present system, it was concluded, could only be cured by its abolition and replacement by a guaranteed minimum annual income. Experience also indicated that the collapse of the welfare system could be brought about simply by forcing it to live up to all its statutory obligations. A "welfare union" was set up with this as a stated goal, and attempts were made to extend it city-wide by alliances with other community organizations working on the welfare issue. The WSO leadership also sought to build up a body of adherents in its own area through a system of block clubs. Still there is no real effort to appeal to the broader slum community, and other more general-purpose organizations have grown up in the same neighborhood to fill unmet needs.

To a certain extent WSO seems to be using the material incentive generated by welfare tactics to cultivate a constituent base, albeit a rather specialized one. Discussion of the ideological implications of the issue still seems to be limited to a narrow leadership group, and organization policy is still much influenced by the need to generate purposive incentives of a dramatic sort for the benefit of UTC trainees.

JOIN Community Union. JOIN was originally organized by a group of radical college students from the Students for a Democratic Society. They brought with them certain ideological preconceptions about the need for broad social change, and a commitment to the principles of "participatory democracy."

Early organizing focused around a wide range of issues--housing conditions, welfare, consumer frauds, police brutality and abusive treatment of community people by the local agency of the War on Poverty. Rent strikes resulted in three contracts with landlords; a local merchant was forced to sign a fair practices agreement and repay people he had cheated; welfare grievances were processed, and a variety of different protest actions were carried out against the police, the OEO-funded Urban Progress Center and the city administration.

The organizers soon recognized that direct action on these issues, even when it produced tangible results, did not get at the roots of the problems that concerned them. Rent strikes and welfare grievance handling, no matter how successful, could not change the fundamental realities of poverty and powerlessness. This apparent gap between the daily work of organizing and the overall goals of social change threatened to destroy the ideological cohesion of the organization. The flow of purposive incentives was weakened, and the contributions of organizing staff began to fall off. It became clear that unless something was done to deepen the consensus and reintegrate the intermediate and long range goals, the organization would stagnate.

A formal school was established to give organizers a more thorough understanding of the forces behind the problems they saw and to educate them in long range strategy and goals. At the same time, increased attention was devoted to political action as an intermediate goal, and foundation stones were laid for coalitions with other slum community organizations. A proposal for JOIN to run its own candidate for alderman in the 48th ward was defeated only by a narrow margin, in spite of the enormous odds against success in such a venture.

It was also decided that direct action tactics on major issues should be continued as a way of recruiting new members, giving them basic leadership skills and introducing them to a sense of efficacy and participation in decision-making. This recruiting system was supplemented by an informal program of dramatic skits designed to introduce the audience to a wide range of slum issues and to make an openly ideological appeal to potential members.

By defining success in terms of meaningful social change, JOIN chose an incentive system based primarily on ideological inducements. It also picked a goal so general and sweeping that it could only be reached through the participation and proselytizing efforts of the largest possible body of people. The only real leverage for social change lies in the collective beliefs and desires of the people. The strongly materialistic culture of our society very nearly makes the two parts of this strategy, ideological incentives and organizational growth, incompatible--almost, but not quite.

If our society is to purge itself of the cruel blight of poverty, if it is to become a more just and humane place to live, then we must set about the task in a conscientious way. We cannot rely on an invisible hand or an unaided providence. We must rise above the narrow competition of unresponsive power blocs; we must turn away from the deceptive self-satisfaction of purely pragmatic political theory; and we must end the fruitless clash between those professing ultimate goals and those who claim to have none. We must bring our highest aspirations out into the open, examine our values and priorities, and discuss strategies for realizing them. The relationship between ultimate goals and immediate reality is seldom simple or obvious; to bring these two into line will require all our capacity for intellectual vision and leadership. It is, however, only in such a dialogue of principle that all citizens can participate and contribute as human beings, and only through such a dialogue of principle that the general will can be heard.

Every freshman studying political science is bombarded with the notion that America, thank God, is a "pluralist society." What is generally meant by the phrase is something like this: power in America is distributed among a variety of groups and institutions in such a manner as to guarantee that no one institution can lord it over the collectivity of others. Robert Parsons, David W. Newman, Daniel Bell, Seymour Lipset, John K. Galbraith, V. O. Key and David Truman are among the most cited proponents of this view; C. Wright Mills is the favored whipping boy. The pluralist stance has well served the proponents of the widely-touted "end of ideology" of the '50's.

The following notes are concerned with the localized version of this poly-societal outlook, finding and rejoicing in power similarly fragmented and delinked to local community or city. Local pluralism has become the rallying cry of urban renewers and modernizers who rationalize land deals and the exiling of the poor in the name of "everyone's freedom" of welfare-state bureaucrats and their academic apologists who find comfort in insisting that an urban system so dispersed makes sweeping change impossible; of war-on-poverty boards weighted toward business and social agencies in the name of "democracy"; even of many liberals and labor leaders who celebrate their hard-won "power." The localized theory has its own growing academic literature, lending easy authority to the gradualist or the would-be weary fatalist paralyzed by the eye of the City at a time when serious movements for social change are coming into being. These notes, then, are intended to question the validity of local pluralism, and to inquire into its origins.

CS;kk
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