

NEIGHBORHOOD FOUNDATIONS  
MEMORANDUM #17

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WASHINGTON, D. C.

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SUBJECT: POPULAR POWER AND LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

I. The Rule

One task of good government is to maintain domestic peace. Toward this end, established authority must continually identify where new political power emerges out of broad discontent within society. When popular power is formed, authority cannot eliminate it by removing the 'cause of discontent,' for the popular leadership of new power will also strike new issues. Popular power once formed from mere discontent becomes its own cause, which is "to govern." In identifying the existence of new popular power, established authority must legitimize, that is, transfer to it real governing authority. Government must give such power the public authority to act so that its action makes law and builds the legal form of society.

Popular power always moves through its leadership. If such power is not given legal authority to act, it will act nonetheless; and its action, of necessity, will be viewed as illegitimate. The form of this action will be twofold: (1) to sabotage the legal programs of established authority that come within the province of popular power; and (2) to develop parallel programs of self-help for internal popular benefit. Both aspects of popular action are constructive, that, construct its power. Sabotage builds the strength and confidence of popular power. Self-help constructs that power into beneficial authority. There are only two ways to stop this constructive, though illegitimate, exercise: (1) by crushing it with force, or (2) by legitimizing it with public authority. Since the former is despotic, the latter course is imperative for a free society.

The legitimation of new popular power cannot proceed by the co-option of its leadership. It is the total popular power itself which must be legitimized and incorporated into the legal system of government. Popular power is the relationship of populace to their leadership. It is the relationship of populace to leader that is the nexus of popular power. That relationship must be structured into legal community and authority must be transferred to its control, so that populace stand to their popular leaders as citizens to their elected officials and political leaders.

It is a common mistake to think that the power of popular leadership rests absolutely in the person of the leader. Hence, if we coopt the leader into the existing authority structure, we assume his popular power will work for the establishment. This is a mistake for when the 'leader' is coopted, but the populace still excluded, the power of leadership is itself broken. He comes into established authority alone and powerless. Another man of the people then rises to assume his position and further builds the popular power. That is why it is so easy to fire the coopted leader; and also why popular leadership arises out of the people with such fecundity.

Popular power is the vital unity of populace and the personality of its leadership. That leadership only directs the force within the populace. To legitimize its real power means to give authority to that very unity, not just their leader and not the people, nor the people and not their leader. The popular power must be structured into a legal corporate body within the State and be granted public authority to control and govern something of value.

This prudential rule is the basis of local self-government for new popular power is always a local phenomenon. The populace is an aggregation in appearance to itself. It is bodies occupying together a space within the range of appearance. Its leadership exists within that space. It is in this sense that popular power is local. To legitimize the locality of popular power requires the establishment of local self-governing authority. Such power is legally structured by local constitution, and positively moved by the grant of authority over local matters. Local self-government remains as always the rule of good government in the face of new popular power.

## II. The Application

The foremost problem of the urban ghettos (recognizing their range of serious degree on this issue) is that they are areas of real power. Their power is popular in nature, not legally authorized; but nonetheless real power. That power was manifest in Watts, Harlem, Chicago, and other places of riots. It is manifest every day in the incidents of the terrorization of outsiders as well as the internal self-help among the ghetto residents. While perceived as violence by outsiders, it is a real power. That simple fact of existing power within the ghetto and its popular nature must be understood. The call for black power within the ghetto by its popular leadership does not mean that such power does not exist. That call is the definition and direction of existing power by its popular leadership, and its thrust toward greater strength and political structure.

In the face of this new popular power, it is imperative we legitimize it with governing authority, lest we end up crushing it with force. Our approach must be to structure that existing power of the ghettos into legal corporate organization, territorially defined by neighborhoods and based on assembly, officials, and revenue. These legal neighborhood organizations must be given some definite public authority over resources to decide and govern programs of common benefit to their locality. Only in this manner can the existing popular power be beneficially expressed, in concert with other authorities of the city. Only in this way can popular power be structured into positive governing power for programs of common benefit. The argument for the legitimization of real power is the very basis of local self-government within our cities, and can be viewed in that more tender tradition.

The resources required for transfer to local self-governing organizations are already available within our funded system of public welfare and social services. These resources are a substantial basis of common benefit within the ghettos. Our present failure is not so much the limited expenditure of funds in this area, but more principally, that the authority over these resources is given to those who have no popular power within the poor communities themselves. They are the professional and civic outsiders. Popular power grows within the ghettos independent of their use and distribution of resources. In fact, their own wages consume a major portion of resources available for the common benefit. Hence, they are structurally parasitic, notwithstanding the fact that many in social service administration have splendid motives. The structural conditions of their action aggravate popular power, which gets stronger as a social service administration grows. It is a sad fact of our present day government that we give authority to those who have no popular power; and thereby can deliver no popular support of the state and deny resources to those who hold popular power.

In return for a transfer of some of social program authority and resources, the neighborhoods of the ghetto are prepared to organize citizen-based legal neighborhood corporations to receive and govern such authority.

Once such territorial organization exists and their authority operates, the mayors and elected officials of our cities will find they are efficient corporate units of people (votes) with which to work. Since they are territorial they are permanent; hence the possibility of negotiation (unavailable in dealing with ad hoc issue organizations.) Since they are assembly-based, their officers and staff have the popular power to deliver corporate support to the mayor. Since their own power rests on 'bringing home the bacon,' they will seek strong relationship with the mayor. Neighborhood corporations would provide a direct relationship between legitimate political authorities, which could prudentially negotiate their differences into popularly approved agreements. Further, the resources

for social service programs transferred to neighborhood self-governing authority costs little. It might even cost less than today, if we transfer its authority from the professionals and 'civies' who have no popular power among the poor to their own popular based legal structures. As for the professionals, they will be hired by the neighborhood organizations.

The consequence of applying the rule of legitimatizing existing popular power with self-governing authority will result in the fact of new localities of government within our cities. The city will then be strengthened by the incorporation of legitimate popular power within its federated body. The federal formula has always been the genius of American political practice and the source of domestic peace.

We see, then, how the phenomenon of local government is not a mere ideal, but the effective resolution of the real problems of established authority as it confronts and incorporates new popular power.

ECCO membership is open to all residents, age 16 or above, of the city within the territory of ECCO. The qualifications become members open signing the ECCO charter. The membership is the legal body of ECCO and exercises its legislative authority in assembly meetings.

The ECCO Assembly meets annually to elect the officers of the corporation, as well as once a year by law, for other business. It can also meet upon the call of 50 members or the petition of any of its four neighborhood districts. In addition to its authority to elect executive officers, the Assembly has authority to remove them for cause, approve or terminate all ECCO programs, amend the bylaws of the corporation, investigate neighborhood problems, and initiate new programs to meet the community needs. Last year the ECCO Assembly and four bodies with the required quorum of 10% and effectively conducted its legislative affairs. Currently operating a \$100,000 budget, ECCO runs a range of self-determined social service programs of common benefit to its citizens.

Its constitutional structure of authority can be called local citizen government, with the ECCO Assembly as fully one expression of direct citizen decision. Popular decision also operates through the neighborhood units and executive committees of ECCO. It is important to understand these other ways in which the ECCO citizen expresses his direct decision in the legislative and judicial process of the ECCO organization.