

REVEILLE *for* RADICALS

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Let them call me rebel and welcome,
I feel no concern from it; but I
should suffer the misery of devils,
were I to make a whore of my
soul. . . .

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Community Traditions and Organizations

THE FOUNDATION of a People's Organization is in the communal life of the local people. Therefore the first stage in the building of a People's Organization is the understanding of the life of a community, not only in terms of the individual's experiences, habits, values, and objectives, but also from the point of view of the collective habits, experiences, customs, controls, and values of the whole group—the *community traditions*.

To a significant degree people express their traditions through their local organizations. The form, the character, and the purpose of all the local agencies reflect the traditions of the community. Agencies will be found representing almost every facet of the life of the community: religion, labor, business, social, fraternal, recreational, service, nationality, and many others.

In the building of a Peoples Organization the agencies and local traditions are to an important extent the flesh and blood of the community. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of knowledge of the traditions of those people whom it is proposed to organize.

This does not mean that one has to have a complete

knowledge of all their traditions, but it does mean that the organizer should have a familiarity with the most obvious parts of a people's traditions. And it does mean more than the organizer's recognition that he does not go into an Orthodox Jewish community with a ham sandwich.

Many organizers will speak of the difficulties of trying to overcome local traditions and local taboos in creating a people's movement. One should be constantly on guard, however, against attacking local traditions. After all, if the organizer believes in democracy and is concerned with what Jefferson referred to as "a decent respect to the opinions of mankind" there is no reason to oppose or try to break down local traditions. Furthermore, this course of activity only leads to hostility, conflict, and the creation of an impossible condition for a real People's Organization.

Those who build People's Organizations begin realistically with what they have. It does not matter whether they approve or disapprove of local circumstances, traditions, and agencies; the fact remains that this is the material that must be worked with. Builders of People's Organizations cannot indulge in the sterile, wishful thinking of liberals who prefer to start where they would like to begin rather than with actual conditions as they exist.

We move step by step—from where we are. Everyone has heard the story of the man who was asked by a stranger how he could get to Jonesville; after long thought and unsuccessful attempts to explain the several turns that must be made, he said, so the anecdote runs: "My friend, I tell you; if I were you, I wouldn't start from here." Some planning is just like that; it does not start from here; it assumes a "clean slate" that never has and never can exist.¹

The starting of a People's Organization is not a matter of personal choice. You start with the people, their traditions; their prejudices, their habits, their atti-

¹ David E. Lilienthal, *TVA—Democracy on the March* (New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1949), p. 213.

tudes, and all of those other circumstances that make up their lives.

It should always be remembered that a real organization of the people, one in which they completely believe and which they feel is definitely their own, must be rooted in the experiences of the people themselves. This is essential if the organization is to be built upon and founded upon the people.

The traditions of a people are interwoven in the fabric of their experiences. To understand the traditions of a people is not only to know their prejudices, beliefs, and values, but to understand them. It is to ascertain those social forces which argue for constructive democratic action as well as those which obstruct democratic action.

To know a people is to know their religions. It is to know the values, objectives, customs, sanctions, and the taboos of these groups. It is to know them not only in terms of their relationships and attitudes toward one another but also in terms of what relationship all of them have toward the outside. An excellent illustration of the importance of understanding community mores and of the difficulties that arise from lack of knowledge of local traditions, is contained in the following organizer's report:

"The last People's Organization I worked with was primarily Catholic. The Catholics are not hidebound on a lot of things; as a matter of fact, whenever I would visit with a priest, why, it was pretty customary for him to offer me a Scotch and soda or a highball. Not only that, but at church carnivals they have all kinds of gambling games and even slot machines. Gambling and drinking were not regarded in the neighborhood by anybody, including the churches, as being immoral or something to be frowned upon. The only time gambling or drinking was really condemned was if it was carried to excess, such as a guy getting drunk frequently or else blowing enough of his paycheck on the horses so that his family had a

tough time the next week. Everybody in the neighborhood—and that includes the parish church, too—had a pretty sensible and reasonable point of view on drinking and gambling.

"Well, after eight months in that kind of community I found myself down in Oak Root trying to build a People's Organization. Oak Root is not only a Protestant community, but most of the Protestants are fundamentalists. I made the bad mistake of not familiarizing myself with traditions, religions, and the way the people live, and the next thing I knew I was up to my neck in hot water. I found that a number of the ministers were openly charging me with being an 'immoral and depraved creature of the Devil.' Before I could get over the shock of surprise I discovered that the facts that they were presenting in support of their charge were accepted by most of the people. After hearing the facts and learning a little bit about community traditions, I pleaded guilty and faithfully promised never to repeat my 'immoral and depraved' behavior (at least not in the vicinity of Oak Root). I was guilty of being, in the words of one of the ministers who was most zealous in prosecuting me, 'the man seen entering the Platinum' (a large motion picture theatre in a nearby Big City). The act of entering a movie house to 'witness a lewd and lascivious performance by a brazen, half-undressed female was considered a flagrant violation of a community built around religious institutions which condemn the witnessing of a motion picture as a 'mortal sin.'"

Communities differ in moral standards according to their customs. Another example of the difference in definitions of moral values between moral leaders of the community and an outside moralist is to be found in the statement of a leading priest in one community: "These Welfare people from the outside always get upset when they are working with a family and they find out that the husband comes home smelling of liquor. They should know that a man working in

the cooling rooms of the packing plants—who has been frozen most of the day—when he gets through working he wants to get warmed up a little, so he takes a drink or two. It's only natural and human and it's nothing to get all upset about like these Welfare workers do."

Differences among groups must also be carefully studied and understood. Each group is bound by ties of tradition, common experience, and ethnic identification. In some cases the traditions, attitudes, and customs of first- and second-generation Americans are carry-overs from the Old World. It is important to know the traditions of these groups not only on an intramural basis but also in terms of their relationships with other ethnic groups. A wide variety of social distances will be revealed between one ethnic group and others. Slavs will feel closer to each other than to the Irish. The preponderant ethnic groups will be in sharper competition with each other than with the smaller neighborhood groups. As a result hostilities and jealousies may be more bitter among the major groups. Agnes E. Meyer, reporting on conditions existing in a Chicago community prior to the building of a People's Organization, wrote:

Though all these people sweated—or froze—side by side in the packing houses, they ignored each other in the streets, when not engaged in open feuds. The priests were not on speaking terms and passed each other without salutations. Language barriers increased the tension. The Lithuanians favored the Poles as enemies, the Slovaks were anti-Bohemian. The Germans were suspected by all four nationalities. The Jews were generally abominated and the Irish called everyone else a "foreigner." No Negro was safe in Packingtown on his way to work from his Southside quarters. When the Mexicans invaded this cheap labor market, they were treated worse than the Negroes.²

Ethnic groups express their ethnic character not only through lodges and social and fraternal organiza-

² "Orderly Revolution," *Washington Post*, June 4, 1945.

tions but in many instances through their religious organizations. This is true of Protestants, Jews, and Catholics. There are still in America a great many of what are called nationality churches among the Catholics. There is a Lithuanian Catholic church, a German Catholic church, a Slovak Catholic church, a Polish Catholic church, and others. These ethnic groups banded together after arriving in this country and created little Polands, little Germanys, little Slovakias, and little Lithuanias, which included churches of their own. In many of these nationality churches all of the sermons are given in the native tongue.

The standards, the codes, the attitudes, and the patterns of the local people touch every part of their life, even their food habits. Local leaders, in describing the wide gaps existing between outsiders and the local people, comment:

"Why, during the depression when Welfare workers came down among our Italian people, they would give them a certain amount of money to spend each week and some education on what they called 'nutrition' so they could get the most food for their money. These Welfare workers would get upset because our Italian families insisted on buying very good olive oil to cook with. Anybody ought to know that Italians have to have olive oil to cook with and it's something much more important than budgets or stuff like that.

"The same thing happened with some of our Jewish families. Some of the Welfare workers began screaming about the Jewish families on relief buying chicken on Friday. Well, our Jewish families have said all along, and we believe them, that they've just got to have a piece of chicken for Friday night, so if they're willing to sacrifice other things for the sake of having chicken, that's their business and it ain't that of the Welfare workers.

"You know, there are a lot of outsiders that make bad mistakes on this food business. Now, I had a teacher who came into a public school and in one of

a goal of the community—although many of the residents were too young to remember the flood—incorporated in a slogan to rising Bagville: “Back to Where It Was Before the 1915 Flood.” This slogan was a rallying point for many of the diverse elements of the community and a motive driving force in the organization of a People’s Movement.

In all communities there are multiple agencies and organizations—ranging from churches, athletic groups, nationality associations, benevolent orders, religious societies, women’s clubs, labor unions, businessmen’s groups, service organizations, recreation groups, fraternal societies, lodges, political parties, to a host of other organizations. When organizational work starts, it can be safely assumed that a great many of these agencies will be antagonistic toward the development of a People’s Organization. They will express their hostility in many forms, such as disagreement with the program, concern for the future possibilities of this kind of organization, and every reason but the real reason. The real reason is that these agencies have a stake in the life of that community. Many of them are in constant competition with the others and engaged in an unceasing struggle for survival. They define the introduction of a new movement as a further threat to their security. It means that many of their own people will share their allegiance with this new organization. It means also that this new organization will tap community resources for funds, thereby diminishing the amount of money available to the already existing agencies. Likewise, existing agencies fear that some of their own functions will be absorbed by the new organization and that their own survival will be further jeopardized. Still another reason for resentment is the fact that the coming in of a new organization carries with it the implication that the local organizations have not done their job or are incapable of doing it.

In one community a minister said to an organizer: “Why shouldn’t I feel bitter about your coming in

here? When this community says that they are going to put an end to this and to that, it really means that I have been sitting here for the last twelve years not doing anything and if they succeed in doing it, it’s going to make me look like more of a fool, and what are my contributors going to say next year when I ask them to give support to my church? They are going to say, ‘Well, look what this People’s Organization has done in just one year and you have been telling us for all these years that nothing could be done about it.’”

The essence of the situation is that the existing community agencies will generally be resentful and hostile toward a new organization because that organization is to all apparent purposes a basic threat to their own identity and security.

Many organizers become embittered by the obstacles placed in their path by the local organizations and they fail to recognize that they themselves are partly at fault. In their fervor they assume functions which are regarded by a local agency as its own property. The organizers may defend themselves by saying: “After all, that church says that this kind of program is what they are doing, but they haven’t done anything about it and it needs doing and that’s why we are doing it. We wouldn’t go into it if they were carrying their part of the load, but we are not taking anything away from them because they never did anything about it before.” The organizer should recognize that the local organizations with whom he is having difficulty are a most significant part of the democratic way of life. That to a strong degree they represent the very skeleton of democracy.

Democracy is that system of government and that economic and social organization in which the worth of the individual human being and the multiple loyalties of that individual are the most fully recognized and provided for. Democracy is a system of govern-

ment in which we recognize that all normal individuals have a whole series of loyalties—loyalties to their churches, their labor unions, their fraternal organizations, their social groups, their nationality groups, their athletic groups, their political parties, and many others.

Democracy provides for the fulfillment of the hopes and loyalties of our people to all of the various institutions and groups of which they are a part. It is not a single, unqualified, primary loyalty to the state, as the totalitarians would have it—a loyalty in which all other institutions and organizations are completely swept out of the picture. Under totalitarianism, you may be loyal to your church if your state decrees that you may be. But it is a loyalty by sufferance of the state.

The organizer would have far fewer difficulties with the local agencies if he fully understood the reasons for their resentment. Once he understood the reasons he would first of all work *with all of the agencies of the community* to build a People's Organization of which they were the very foundation. The People's Organization would take the initial form of an organization of organizations. That kind of organization does not present a threat to any one individual agency. On the contrary, through a People's Organization and the co-operative relationships that are part of it, the walls of isolation separating the various agencies are broken down. Intimate association and frank conversations will and do destroy those prejudices and suspicions which result in agencies fighting each other instead of working together. A local priest who in the early stages had opposed the building of a People's Organization said:

"In the beginning I was really afraid that this new People's Organization would reduce even more the already small financial support which all of our local agencies and churches received from the people. Whenever I had a bazaar, all of the other churches

and organizations would keep their people away from my bazaar because they didn't want them to spend their money at my place. They, of course, hoped that the people would spend their money only at their own churches. I suppose it was a natural desire to conserve the financial resources of their own people. Now, however, since the People's Organization came into being, whenever our people think of themselves they think of all the people, all the agencies, and all of everything that makes up the whole neighborhood. Until the People's Organization came my bazaar never made more than four thousand a year. Since the People's Organization, we have never made less than twenty-two to twenty-five thousand a year. There are some people who think only in terms of figures. They say, 'We are not interested in words but in dollars and cents.' Well, in straight dollars and cents the figures speak for themselves. Now when I have a bazaar everybody, and that means every other church, too, supports our bazaar. They encourage their people to come to ours, just as we encourage our people to go to their bazaars. It is really amazing how much more there is in life and for everybody if we all pull together instead of cutting each other's throats."

Furthermore, being built right up from the roots of the community, a People's Organization is not an outside movement coming into the community. The purpose of the organization should be interpreted as proposing to deal with those major issues which no one single agency is—or can be—big enough or strong enough to cope with. Then each agency will continue to carry out its own program, but all are being banded together to achieve sufficient strength to cope with issues that are so vast and deep that no one or two community agencies would ever consider tackling them. This kind of program does not present any menace to the future or reflection upon the past of any local agencies.

Frequently, however, the organizer will encounter

various community agencies whose policies are antagonistic toward the basic ideas of a People's Organization. In such cases he will not be discouraged or reflect the hostilities of these agencies if he remembers that just as people change when they get to know each other, so do the policies of community agencies change once these agencies become involved in the People's Organization. If the leaders of community agencies get to know the leaders of other community organizations, their personal opinions and attitudes are altered, with a consequent change in the attitudes and policies of their respective organizations. With this clearly in mind the organizer need not be too concerned at the start about the reactionary policies of individual community agencies. He will find that a mixture of the progressive policies of a progressive People's Organization and the individual conservative policies of a conservative neighborhood agency will result in a progressive product. Experience has shown this to be true no matter how wide a gap previously existed between the two agencies. It is like the chemical process in which hydrogen and oxygen, brought together in proper proportions and under the right conditions, result in an entirely new product—water. It becomes the job of the organizer first to get the two elements together and second to make sure that they are brought together in the proper proportions.

That kind of approach is actually the only kind that would be truly representative of the people and truly in keeping with the spirit of democracy. A People's Organization actually is built upon all of these diverse loyalties—to the church, to the labor union, to the social groups, to the nationality groups, to the myriad other groups and institutions which comprise the constellation of the American way of life. These loyalties combine to effect an abiding faith in, and a profound loyalty to, the democratic way of life.

7 *Organizational Tactics*

THE MOTIVES of the American radical engaged in organizational work will be viewed by many people and organizations with suspicion, cynicism and hostility. They will measure him with the only measuring stick that a materialistic society has taught them, one that is marked in units of selfishness, exploitation, money, power, and prestige. They will wonder and ask, "What's in it for him?" "What's his angle?" "What's his cut?" "There must be a catch in it some place—what is it?" "People don't do things for nothing—what's he doing it for?"

Basically, the radical must meet this opposition by a simple honesty, and must always remember that in the long run he is striving to make honesty a virtue instead of a stigma of stupidity. One of the most significant ways that he can do this is by the power of personal example.

Most suspicion of him will change to skepticism, then to incredulity—and finally to acceptance. In reaching a mass judgment of the motives of the organizer, the people will of course have to rely mainly on his words and actions. To the people, the radical's actions will be by all odds the central part of the picture, and his words the background.

Throughout the organizational period many people and organizations will revert to avarice, individualistic

In a survey of American educational institutions Robert M. Hutchins, then President of the University of Chicago, developed the thesis that the character of our educational systems reflects the character of the society that sustains and engenders them. The society in this instance is one characterized by aggression, both individual and social, by a wide disparity of wealth, privilege, and opportunity, by materialistic values and standards, and by a rather confused and demoralized ideology. Our educational system is the inevitable progeny of its present society. Hutchins continued with this statement:

A further consequence of American ideals in American education is that moral questions are omitted from it. The end given is money. The issue is how to obtain it as rapidly as possible and stay out of jail.¹

People living under a selfish system become adjusted to it in order to survive. They therefore naturally acquire a personal selfishness and just as naturally assume the same selfishness exists in all others, including the organizer. This ingrained suspicion must be destroyed; its destruction is an essential part of the fight for a people's world. Not only must the dignity of the individual be restored but in that process man must begin to see the good in other men. *He cannot see the good in others unless he has some of it within himself.*

The radical, with full recognition that many of our people are warped by the kind of society of which they are products, will realize that in the initial stages of organization he must deal with the qualities of ambition and self-interest as realities. Only a fool would step into a community dominated by materialistic standards and self-interest and begin to preach ideals. Only a fool would try to persuade people to cross a river without first having either boats or a bridge. Rad-

¹ Robert M. Hutchins, "Ideals in Education," *American Journal of Sociology* (July 1937), p. 8.

icals, contrary to public opinion, are not fools. Although they have been regarded and condemned as crackpots and crowned with the vilest of opprobriums, the history of man has vindicated them as the wisest of the wise.

The radical recognizes that in order to work with people he must first approach them on a basis of common understanding. It is as simple and essential as learning to talk the language of those with whom one is trying to converse. The procedures or tactics that follow from here on should be understood in those terms. They are the simple means with which to arouse people to stand up and move. Some critics have described these means as fighting fire with fire. This is not strictly true, because these procedures are used only during the early stages of organizational activities. The radical is fully conscious of the fact that they are temporary expedients for the beginning of the organization. They are the instruments used in preparing the scaffolding for the building of an environment which will permit people to express their innate altruism. After the organization is soundly built, they will work co-operatively for reasons of social good rather than individual interest.

Practically all people live in a world of contradictions. They espouse a morality which they do not practice. They will tell you that they fervently believe in Christianity and the brotherhood of man and all of its moral implications in spite of the fact that a majority of their actions are designed to exploit their fellow men. They find themselves constantly trying to extricate themselves from this dilemma by erecting a ladder of rationalization such as, "Sure, we believe in Christianity, but after all business is business." The vast separation between their moral standards and actual ways of living resolves itself into extraordinary inconsistencies and inner conflict.

This dilemma can and should be fully utilized by the organizer in getting individuals and groups

involved in a People's Organization. It is a very definite Achilles' heel even in the most materialistic person. Caught in the trap of his own contradictions, that person will find it difficult to show satisfactory cause to both the organizer and himself as to why he should not join and participate in the organization. He will be driven either to participation or else to a public and private admission of his own lack of faith in democracy and man. Most people are eagerly groping for some medium, some way in which they can bridge the gap between their morals and their practices. The failure to find a satisfactory and viable way to resolve this inner conflict leads to the rationalization that "whatever is, is right," and can't be changed. It is the old story that once you accept a false premise you must continue to sustain it by additional false arguments. Once you tell a lie you are going to have to tell another to cover up the first and an indefinite cycle has begun. A Christian who believes that man was created in God's own image but nevertheless retains his prejudice against Negroes will resolve his inner struggle by rationalizing that Negroes are "really inferior." Man must be provided with an opportunity for a healthy, consistent reconciliation of morals and behavior or he will be forced into a pathology of rationalization.

Many exponents and supporters of People's Organizations bitterly denounce self-interest as one of the main obstacles that must be crushed if people are to be organized into a co-operative fellowship. Both liberals and organizers have attributed the failure of their attempts to the rampant spirit of individualism and selfishness. These organizers have never appreciated that many seeming obstacles can be utilized to great advantage. The fact is that self-interest can be a most potent weapon in the development of co-operation and identification of the group welfare as being of greater importance than personal welfare.

In approaching people the shrewd organizer will

not stand back in sackcloth and ashes and mourn certain phases of life or traditions as obstacles to his work. It should be remembered as a maxim in community organization that every obstacle contains certain assets.

Certainly the element of self-interest has been constantly condemned as one of the large obstacles in the development of an esprit de corps. Such self-interest is based a good deal on the law of the jungle, and certainly the survival of the fittest does not lend itself to thinking and acting according to co-operative and self-sacrificing-for-the-other-guy philosophy. Yet this seeming obstacle can be and has been used as one of the most driving motive forces in the development of a co-operative organization. A vivid example of the use of greed for good is revealed in the experiences of a successful organizer.

"We had just gotten started in this neighborhood and gotten some of the organizations together when I went to see Mr. David. Mr. David was a businessman who had been in the fruit and vegetable business in this community for many years. Throughout this period he had avoided participation in any kind of social-betterment program or community group. He was in many respects a typical businessman of the community. I told him that we were starting a community organization to do something about many of the problems of the neighborhood, including many of the neighborhood children who were underfed, miserably clothed and rapidly drifting into delinquency. Throughout my conversation with Mr. David he kept one hand in his right-hand trouser pocket, where he was obviously fingering paper money, and his eyes wandered around the store. His whole manner let me know that in his opinion I was just another 'do-gooder' and as soon as I finished my song and dance he would give me a dollar or two and wish me well. I suddenly shifted from my talk on the children and began to point out

indirectly the implications of his joining our organization. And then it happened. His eyes lit up like a pair of neon lights and you could almost see the cogwheels turning around in his head like a Disney cartoon and his thoughts were audible to the point of needing no verbal amplification. As I said, I could almost hear Mr. David thinking: 'Why, this is wonderful! I'll go to this meeting and get up before all of those labor leaders, ministers, priests and heads of these different nationality organizations and I'll say: "For years my heart has been bleeding to see the poor children of our neighborhood going around the way they have and for all these years I have not been able to do anything because there was never a real People's Organization—right from this neighborhood. Oh, it's true, that there were a lot of well-meaning people who would come in, but they didn't know what it was all about and they really didn't care for the people here. You know that too. And so there was little that I could do, but now—now that the people themselves have gotten together and now that I have somebody I can work with, my heart is breaking with happiness and I, Joseph David, want to help this organization not only with money but with anything you want and I will therefore give three hundred dollars to this movement."

"And where could I get better business relations than at this meeting. I can't get advertising like this. Why, whenever somebody is out shopping and meets his labor leader, minister, priest, rabbi, president of the bowling club, he will be told right away to buy his vegetables from me. They will say, "Go to David's. David is a fine fellow. He is interested in more than just his business. He is part of us, working and fighting with us." It's wonderful!"

Then David turned to me and said, 'I'll be at that meeting tonight.' Immediately after I left David I went across the street to Roger, who is in the same business, and I talked to him the same way. Roger

had a doubled-barreled incentive for coming. First there was David's purpose and secondly Roger wanted to make sure that David would not take away any part of his business.

"That night at the meeting we had what you would certainly call a couple of unsocial characters. That is, they were not one bit interested in the welfare of the local people. Their sole interest lay in getting as much advertising, good will, and—finally—as much business as possible. They were present to make a commercial investment.

"During the course of the meeting both David and Roger got up and made talks right along the lines which had been so obvious in their thinking processes of that afternoon. They both made generous contributions. Since they expressed such a deep interest in the welfare of our children we appointed them to the Children's Committee. Again I felt I could guess their reaction: 'Well, I did what I came for, but now they've put me on this committee so I will go along for a couple of meetings and then I will step out of the picture. After all, I should spend my life on committees!'"

As part of their first assignment the members of the committee were sent into some of the West Side tenements of the neighborhood. There Roger and David personally met the children who had been the subjects of their orations. They met them face-to-face and by their first names. They saw them as living persons framed in the squalor and misery of what the children called "home." They saw the tenderness, the shyness, and the inner dignity which are in all people. They saw the children of the neighborhood for the first time in their lives. They saw them not as small gray shadows passing by the store front. They saw them not as statistical digits, not as impersonal subjects of discussion, but as real human beings. They got to know them and eventually a warm human relationship developed. Both Roger and David came

out of this experience with the anger of one who suddenly discovers that there are a lot of things in life that are wrong. One of them was violent in his denunciations of the circumstances that would permit conditions of this kind to go on unabated. Today these two individualists are the foremost apostles of co-operative organization.

If they had been originally asked to join on grounds of pure idealism they would unquestionably have rejected the invitation. Similarly if the approach had been made on the basis of co-operative work they would have denounced it as radical.

Just as individualism and self-interest can be transformed from an obstacle into an advantage, so can the spirit of competition be used to develop co-operation. This element is also illustrated in the story of David and Roger, particularly in the case of Roger, who came to the meeting in order to insure David's not cutting in on his business. This force of competition can be used in working with various organizations. After a start has been made, an appeal can be directed to the various organizations by pointing out that some of their competitors are now within the People's Organization and that as the People's Organization develops in strength this strength and power will naturally be shared by the member organizations. So the member organizations will get stronger and become leaders in the community to the detriment of those who are neither affiliated with nor part of the People's Organization. One organizer described this point thus:

"One neighborhood that I was working in was pretty heavily Catholic and it may surprise you to know that a lot of those churches hated each other's guts. Sure, they were all Catholic churches but there are different kinds of Catholic churches. Now I don't mean that they weren't all Roman Catholic. I mean some were Polish Catholic, some were Slovenian Catholic. Some were Lithuanian, some were

German, others were Slovak, Mexican and a couple of others, including what they call All-Nationalities Church. All-Nationality Churches are also All-American Churches. By that they mean that Catholics of any kind, whether they be German, Polish, Lithuanian, can all come to this church. Now, all these churches were in competition with each other, and I mean it when I say that they really hated each other. It was pretty funny too, because a lot of these priests would get up on Sunday and would give long sermons on the brotherhood of man and therefore love thy fellow man, etc., and the next thing you know they would be walking down the street, bump into the priest from the other church, and cut him cold. When you talked with them they had nothing but scorn for a lot of their fellow priests. Now, in this organization the churches all came together, most of them because they were genuinely interested in doing something about working with the people for a better life. But two of the churches were just staying out until we let them know, and they could see for themselves, that the organization was going ahead and it meant that the competition would get stronger than they were. So they joined up. Now that's all in the past, because today those two churches are actually in it for no other reason except real altruism."

Many people and organizations will originally join a People's Organization simply to use it as a medium for furthering their personal desires for power or money. There will always be a sufficient number of them coming in on that basis so that they will effectively checkmate one another and discover that the only way any of them can make progress is by the entire group's moving forward. In one community it happened this way:

"A lot of our businessmen and a number of our agencies which included a couple of churches joined the organization solely to put a noose around the

neck of their competitors. So what happened? We had a lot of groups and people who had nooses around the other guy's neck and it got so that nobody dared to pull his rope any tighter because the other guy might grab his end of the rope and pull too. Of course, one of the jobs in organization is to get all these nooses tied into such a complicated knot that nobody dares to pull his rope.

"In the last analysis all these people and agencies find that they have put their individual objectives into a collective basket and the easiest and best way for them to get what they want is to work with the whole group so that the whole group will get the whole basket. After a while it really isn't such a complicated thing because when these fellows really get to know each other they all forget about the nooses and they stick together because they want to, because they like each other, because they really are concerned about the other guy's welfare *and because they know by that time that the other guy's welfare means their own welfare.*"

A common cause of failure in organizational campaigns is to be found in a lack of real respect for the dignity of the people. Some organizers may feel inwardly superior to the people with whom they are working. An organizer who has this superior attitude cannot, in spite of all his cleverness, all his protestations of belief in the equality of all people, including himself, conceal his true attitude. It repeatedly comes out in a gesture, an expression, or the inflection of his voice. People cannot be constantly fooled. Even when that organizer uses a sympathetic approach, it is a calculated form of sympathy which is apparent to the people.

An organizer who really likes people will instinctively respect them. He will not treat adults as children. He will have the utmost consideration for the

pride and feelings of those whom he is trying to organize. To understand this is to understand the story of the failures and later success of Muddy Flats.

Muddy Flats lies in the heart of the Bible Belt of America. Here a number of religious groups, ranging from a small but strongly organized Catholic church on the one side through the main arms of the many Protestant churches—Methodist, Baptist, Seventh-Day Adventists, Holy Rollers, and fifty-seven other varieties on the other—all flail one another mercilessly, vengefully, and spitefully with the cudgels of religion. Each church leads with the Old Testament, and as you raise your guard, up they counterpunch with the New Testament. They view a follower of another sectarian group as being far more depraved than the heathen.

The countryside around Muddy Flats represents a strange combination of contradictions. During the Civil War the spirit of secession ranged the streets side by side with the spirit of Unionism. Southern and Northern cultural characteristics have fused together into an incomprehensible hybrid. Out of the country of which Muddy Flats is a part came the flaming, fanatical John Brown. And as John Brown's body marched on, that part of America took a deep breath and belched forth Carrie Nation, who promptly picked up her little axe and declared war on every saloon in the country. Carrie Nation went the way of all people and the whole Bible Belt shuddered and was convulsed by the intolerance and cruelty of religious bigotry. Conversion traveled at the rate of a mile a minute and many Midwesterners were converted and reconverted over and over again. Religion became the Midwestern measles and almost everyone caught it. From an adjoining state, but part of the same Bible Belt, came Earl Browder, who was the titular head of the Communist party in America and generally a bitter foe of organized religion. From this same adjoining state came William A. White with a genuine sense of humor and a real

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Conflict Tactics

A PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATION is a conflict group. This must be openly and fully recognized. Its sole reason for coming into being is to wage war against all evils which cause suffering and unhappiness. A People's Organization is the banding together of large numbers of men and women to fight for those rights which insure a decent way of life. Most of this constant conflict will take place in orderly and conventionally approved legal procedures—but in all fights there come times when "the law spoke too softly to be heard in such a noise of war."

The building of a People's Organization is the building of a new power group. The creation of any new power group automatically becomes an intrusion and a threat to the existing power arrangements. It carries with it the menacing implication of displacement and disorganization of the status quo.

Agnes E. Meyer of the *Washington Post* pointed this out in a study of a People's Organization in Chicago:

These serious-minded inhabitants of Packingtown have never picked a fight, nor have they avoided one when great issues and principles were involved. They have fought because in a competitive city like Chicago, any new power group has to go through battles if it is going to survive. Their thinking on pressure is very simple.

*"We believe that democracy is a government constantly responding to the pressure of its people," a group of council members said to me. "The biggest hope for democracy is that Americans will overcome their lethargy and that more and more people and groups will become articulate and formulate their needs."*¹

A People's Organization is not a philanthropic play-thing or a social service's ameliorative gesture. It is a deep, hard-driving force, striking and cutting at the very roots of all the evils which beset the people. It recognizes the existence of the vicious circle in which most human beings are caught, and strives viciously to break this circle. It thinks and acts in terms of social surgery and not cosmetic cover-ups. This is one of the reasons why a People's Organization will find that it has to fight its way along every foot of the road toward its destination—a people's world.

Because the character of a People's Organization is such that it will frequently involve itself in conflict, and since most attempts at the building of People's Organizations have been broken by the attacks of an opposition which knows no rules of fair play or so-called ethics, it is imperative that the organizers and leaders of a People's Organization not only understand the necessity for and the nature and purpose of conflict tactics, but become familiar with and skillful in the use of such tactics.

A People's Organization is dedicated to an eternal war. It is a war against poverty, misery, delinquency, disease, injustice, hopelessness, despair, and unhappiness. They are basically the same issues for which nations have gone to war in almost every generation.

A war is not an intellectual debate, and in the war against social evils there are no rules of fair play. In this sense all wars are the same. Rules of fair play are regulations upon which both sides are in mutual agreement. When you have war, it means that neither side can agree on anything. The minimum agreements of

¹ "Orderly Revolution," *Washington Post*, June 4, 1945.

decency that either side may display stem not from decency but from fear. Prisoners are treated according to certain minimum standards and both sides hesitate to use certain inhuman weapons simply because of fear of reprisal.

In our war against the social menaces of mankind there can be no compromise. It is life or death. Failing to understand this, many well-meaning liberals look askance and with horror at the nakedness with which a People's Organization will attack or counterattack in its battles. Liberals will settle for a "moral" victory; radicals fight for victory. These liberals cannot and never will be able to understand the feelings of the rank-and-file people fighting in their own People's Organization any more than one who has never gone through combat action can fully grasp what combat means. The fights for decent housing, economic security, health programs, and for many of those other social issues for which liberals profess their sympathy and support, are to the liberals simply intellectual affinities. They would like to see better housing, health, and economic security, but *they* are not *living* in the rotten houses; it is not *their* children who are sick; it is not *they* who are working with the specter of unemployment hanging over their heads; they are not fighting *their own* fight.

It is very well for bystanders to relax in luxurious security and wax critical of the tactics and weapons used by a People's Organization whose people are fighting for their own children, their own homes, their own jobs, and their own lives. It is very well under those circumstances for liberals who have the time to engage in leisurely democratic discussions to quibble about the semantics of a limited resolution, to look with horror on the split-second decisions, rough-and-ready, up-and-down and sideways swinging and cudgeling of a People's Organization. Unfortunately conditions are not always such that a board of directors can leisurely discuss a problem, refer it to a commit-

tee, and carry through with all of Robert's Rules of Order. That luxury is denied to the people who suddenly find themselves subjected to a lightning attack, of what liberals would call a foul character, by the opposition. The people in a People's Organization cannot afford simply to stew in righteous feelings of indignation. They are in a fight for everything that makes life meaningful—and attack by the enemy calls for counterattack.

The People's Organization does not live comfortably and serenely in an ivory tower where it not only can discuss controversial issues but actually possesses the choice of whether or not to take a hand in the controversy. In actual life, conflict, like so many other things that happen to us, does not concern itself too much with our own preferences of the moment any more than it does with our judgment as to whether or not it is time to fight.

A People's Organization lives in a world of hard reality. It lives in the midst of smashing forces, clashing struggles, sweeping cross-currents, ripping passions, conflict, confusion, seeming chaos, the hot and the cold, the squalor and the drama, which people provisionally refer to as life and students describe as "society."

The difference between the conventional liberal protest and the life-and-death type of tactics used by a People's Organization is illustrated by an account of a struggle of one of the most powerful People's Organizations in the nation. One of the leaders of this organization described the methods used in what he called "the battle of the People versus the Tycoons":

"The giant of the retail business life of the Across the Tracks neighborhood is Tycoon's Department Store. Its size, volume of business, and capital indelibly stamp it as 'big business.' Tycoon's stands at the corner of Main Street and Washington Road, in the

are remarkable for their respect to old age, and the insolence with which it appeared to be done, uniting with the general fermentation they were in, produced a powerful effect, and a cry To arms! to arms! spread itself in a moment over the city.

The enormous importance of tradition in shaping the life of man is a common and accepted fact. What is not too well recognized is that violation of tradition has from time to time unleashed powers which have drastically altered the course of mankind.

9

Popular Education

IN THE LAST analysis the objective for which any democratic movement must strive is the ultimate objective implicit within democracy—*popular education*. Thomas Jefferson's confidence in the eventual realization of the full potentialities of democracy was based on popular education: "Enlighten the people generally, and tyranny and oppression of body and mind will vanish like spirits at the dawn of day."

The very purpose and character of a People's Organization is educational. The bringing together of the many diversified elements of the American population results in the acquisition of knowledge and a consequent changing of attitudes on the part of all of these various elements. Businessmen, labor leaders, religious leaders, heads of nationality, racial, fraternal, and athletic groups all get to know each other. Through constant exchange of views and by sharing common experiences there comes not a so-called "better understanding" between these various groups, but simply *an understanding*. This mutual understanding is accompanied by a new appreciation and definition of social issues.

During hard times the businessmen of the community assume that the problem of unemployment is mainly the burden of business; that when people are unemployed the businessmen have to pay taxes for

relief and at the same time suffer from lack of business. There are many labor unions, on the other hand, that feel that unemployment is mainly a burden on labor because unemployed men can't pay dues and are constantly requesting financial aid from the union. The churches feel that unemployment is primarily the heavy cross of the church because when men are unemployed they are wholly concerned with the fundamental job of getting bread for themselves and their families—and in addition there are not only few contributions coming in to support the church but an ever increasing flow of supplications for help from the church.

Through the People's Organization these groups discover that what they considered primarily their individual problem is also the problem of the others, and that furthermore the only hope for solving an issue of such titanic proportions is by pooling all their efforts and strengths. That appreciation and conclusion is an educational process.

More important is the fact that leaders of groups that have seemingly conflicting interests get to know each other as human beings by working together on joint programs of mutual concern. They get to know each other as Johnny and Fred. They learn that they both admire the same ball team. They both cuss when they have a flat tire. They both are filled with the cute sayings of their three- and four-year-olds and essentially they both want just about the same things out of life. Where they differ is in the means to be used in achieving the end.

One of the most common experiences during the early days of a People's Organization is the constant reactions of leaders from various groups along these lines: "Well, Freddy, I had no idea that you guys felt that way about it. Of course, I never knew about how you fellows saw it, but you've certainly got something on your side too." This educational process represents

one of the cardinal premises of a People's Organization.

The Organization is convinced that when people get to know one another as human beings instead of as symbols or statistics, a human relationship—carrying with it a full constellation of human attitudes—will inevitably result. It would seem that this point is so patent that it is unnecessary to elaborate, and yet, as with many fundamental precepts, it is so obvious that while we talk about it we completely overlook its significance for practical purposes. A simple illustration is in the reading of the morning paper as part of our breakfast routine. The front page carries a detailed account of the threat of starvation facing millions of people in India. We continue to turn the pages and suddenly our attention is riveted by a small item on page 19 that informs us that one of our friends has been seriously injured in an automobile accident. The emotional impact brings about a sudden cessation of our breakfast enjoyment. Our reaction is one of shock and sorrow. Here is one individual injured in an accident that evokes all of the human sympathy within us. But the millions of Indians have no relationship to us and mean nothing to us. The millions of Indians add up to impersonal digits, but that one friend of ours is not a symbol or a digit, but a warm human being whom we know as a person. We know our friend suffers pain just as we do; in essence, our knowing him as a human being serves as a strong bond of identification. That is the human relationship.

You obviously cannot get everyone in the community to know everyone else on a personal, human basis, but you can get the hundreds of little local leaders to know one another on a human basis. These little local leaders may be shop stewards in their union. They may be active in the P.T.A. They may be officials in their religious organizations. They may be heads of athletic groups. They may be bartenders,

precinct captains, or small businessmen. They are the people we referred to earlier in our discussion of native leadership—the "Little Joes." They are the Little Joes that have some thirty or forty followers apiece. Their attitudes significantly shape and determine the attitudes of their followers.

Any labor organizer knows of the Little Joes. When a man is being solicited to join a union he will usually respond along these lines: "Everything you say sounds pretty good, Mister, but before I sign up I want to know if Joe has signed up." If the organizer says he has, the reply will be, "Well, if Joe has signed up, what are we waiting for?" If the organizer says that Joe has not joined, the potential member will answer, "Well, I think you're right, Mister, but I want to think it over and I'll let you know some time tomorrow." The organizer knows full well that the prospect is not going to reach a decision until he talks it over with Little Joe that night. He knows also that Little Joe's decision that night will be the prospect's decision the next day.

These Little Joes are usually totally ignored in all programs superimposed by well-meaning outside agencies, whether they be in the field of reaction or adult education. *But these Little Joes, who are the natural leaders of their people, the biggest blades in the grass roots of American democracy.* These Little Joes present not only the most promising channels for education, but in certain respects the only channels. As the Little Joes get to know one another as human beings, prejudices are broken down and human attitudes are generated in this new relationship. These changes are reflected among their followers, so that the understanding or education begins to affect the attitudes of thousands of people.

The major task in popular education that confronts every People's Organization is the creation of a set of circumstances through which an educational process

can function. If we think of education as a high-powered motor car, it is obvious that its use is dependent upon roads. Regardless of the quality of the car and our ability as a driver, the fact remains that unless we have roads on which to travel we can have only limited use out of the car. So it is with education. One may have the finest teachers, the best libraries, the most beautiful buildings, but unless the people have a desire to use these facilities, all the teachers, buildings, and libraries will not advance the cause of education.

A People's Organization is constantly searching and feeling for methods and approaches to make the community climate receptive to learning and education. In most cases the actual procedures used to further popular education will not be independent projects but simply a phase of every single project which the People's Organization undertakes. Here again popular education becomes part of the whole participating process of a People's Organization. The following report from an organizer vividly illustrates how sensitive awareness on the part of a People's Organization can create circumstances that speed the flow of educational programs.

As you know, our People's Organization is very strong and tied right into the masses of the people living in our neighborhood. We are sufficiently powerful so that educational programs can be spread through the community just about as fast as somebody can crack a whip. You remember when we had reports about some of our children beginning to show signs of rickets? Well, the Executive Committee took it up, came to the decision that one of the reasons for the rickets was that a lot of our children were not getting sufficient vitamins—for instance, the vitamins that are found in orange juice. One reason for this is that many of the folks in our neighborhood are immigrants. They have come from Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Italy, Yugoslavia, Lithuania,