

ERAP NEWSLETTER

February 19, 1965

1100 E. Washington, Ann Arbor, Michigan

CLEVELAND COMMUNITY PEOPLE'S CONFERENCE

Five months ago, at the Fall SDS conference and NC, ERAP staff people suggested and argued strongly for having community leaders from all the projects meet together to discuss their various organizations, their programs, their strategies. While not clearly defined at the time, the concept of such a conference that was held by many people who made the decision to work towards a conference was a traditional one.

Our assumptions about the form that such a conference would take are clearly reflected in (1) our vision of the conference, as stated in the October Bulletin: "...it is anticipated that approximately 100 community leaders from the seven projects will meet...to discuss their various organizations, their problems, and their strategies for involving Negro and white poor in political action. Such a meeting will substantially enlarge the national consciousness of the local groups and strengthen the base of the local leaders." Many people hoped optimistically--though with many real reservations--that the conference might be a kicking-off point for a real national movement of the poor, or at least an event in which such a movement should be discussed. (2) Our notion was of a well-structured conference (with workshops, strategy discussions, etc.,

clearly defined), which was stated in the jargon of student conferences. And (3) to the extent that we conceived of bringing in people from "the other America" as speakers, to the extent that we expected SDS staff people to do a fair amount of the planning, we did not envision a maximal role for community people.

Since the Fall, the vision of the conference has shifted. Our expectations now are much more modest though equally important. One would conclude, from reading the correspondence from other projects, from conversations with ERAP staff, and from discussions with Cleveland community people, that the Community People's Conference will serve two basic purposes:

1. To the extent that those attending have developed ideologies and are concerned about strategy in a long-run sense, people will be able to discuss these. It is probable, however, that there will be a lot more sharing of experiences and problems than we might have expected. For example, welfare mothers might want to talk about how to get surplus food or food stamps; people living in slum housing might discuss how to conduct rent strikes.

2. The more important purpose, I think, is that of reinforcement. Community people all over--as well as SDS staff--are finding that organizing is a difficult, frustrating, and sometimes isolating experience. It is extremely important to give people a sense that first, people in other places are working in similar ways towards common goals and that, second, others face frustrations too, but that it is possible to have success, however one defines success. (It is not mere coincidence, I think, that the factor of need for reinforcement was one of the over-riding considerations in the entire discussion of ERAP project expansion at the December NYC meeting; this need is very much shared by community people and SDS staff, although we might draw different implications from that need.)

This need to know what others are doing and the problems they encounter is the basis of community people's desires to have a loosely structured meeting, in contrast to our original ideas. People's preferences are for informality, for a conference in which they can meet and talk with other people, without necessarily having to worry about sticking to an agenda or getting a certain amount of business accomplished by a set time. The desire people have expressed for having discussions around very general and some specific "problem" areas (as opposed to extensive long-run strategy questions about organizing and national movements) reflects the need people feel for just being able to get together and share experiences, successes, and failures.

Our early ideas about the role of community people in planning the Conference were also basically challenged by community people in the Cleveland area. Discussions with persons familiar with a religious conference which was planned by and involved poor people convinced us that the Cleveland Conference should be planned as completely as possible by local people from the different cities, partly because of the experience gained and consciousness created by such a process, and partly because it was difficult for people familiar with "student conferences" to conceive of the form that would be taken by a distinctly non-student conference.

The planning and programming for the conference has been done almost entirely by community people. Community people have planned the agenda, corresponded with people in other cities, arranged housing and meals. Decision-making, with some exceptions, has been done by community people. The exceptions have raised some troublesome questions about the role of SDS staff in helping to plan such a conference. For one thing, the list of areas to be invited were other ERAP projects and a narrowly defined list of "friends" which meant that community people really weren't encouraged to invite friends and relatives from all over.

CLEVELAND REPORT

COMMUNITY UNION

The general impressions about the feasibility of forming a community union is rather vague after one week of knocking on the doors of old and new contacts. People were generally open and responsive to discussion about issues and problems in the area, but without our having a definite focus or issue, the discussions were very general. The issue of spot labor still interested the men, and recreation is a key issue in the Abbey area.

The work in the community for the coming weeks centers around testing the possibility of organizing: (1) rent strikes in two buildings (2) parents of kindergarten children in a nearby school whose children have to walk to school before the guards are on the cross streets and who are then walked to another school because the school they should be attending is overcrowded, (3) the area south of Lorain whose population is more stable than that in the areas investigated last week.

CUFAW

CuLaw spent most of the past week discussing the role of officers: whether they should be old or new members, the length of term of office, and definition of the tasks of officers. Elections were held in which most of those elected were new people, the term of office is not definite, the role particularly of co-chair is limited in the sense that the job does not take away the rights and responsibilities of all members to participate in decisions, to speak and to act as "leaders," however that is defined. Now that there is a set of officers, they will act as the initiators and source of information.

CITIZENS COMMITTEE

Last week was a busy one. At an executive meeting, the co-chairman who had decided to accept a seat on the establishment War on Poverty Council was subjected to a searing attack. Subsequently he decided to remain on the Citizens Committee. There was also word from Washington that the slightly increased Council had not yet received the support of the poverty administration. A mass meeting was held of the entire Citizens Committee with over 75 people in attendance. The group decided to increase efforts to gain representation of the poor on the Council and to establish accountability of the entire Cleveland War on Poverty to the residents of local areas.

CONFERENCE

Work is continuing on this front with regular weekly meetings, and with people in the community working daily. See regular conference report for more details.

MOVING OFFICE

There has been a general re-shuffling of our housing arrangements so as to open a room downstairs which now serves as an office for people in the community.

OPEN LETTER TO L. B. SELTZER, EDITOR, CLEVELAND PRESS, CLEVELAND, OHIO

With copies to Lyndon B. Johnson, President of the United States, The Cleveland Plain Dealer, The Call & Post, The Washington Post, and other interested people.

In answer to the derogatory editorial in the Cleveland Press, December 17, 1964, in which it was stated that "presumably the impoverished could hardly care less ..." and that because we are perturbed about the refusal of those charged with impaneling a representative board, according to the law, to appoint a balanced board...we are "stirring a tempest in Cleveland's teapot."

Sir:

What do you mean "presumably the impoverished could hardly care less?" and that we who are poor are just "stirring a tempest in Cleveland's teapot?" Get with it, Mr. S! Come visit an impoverished home, see how we have to live! Eat with us in our home; try rearing a teen-age family on \$159.00 per month. Try teaching your children a philosophy to sustain their adulthood, as I am trying to teach mine, when that philosophy has blown up in your face as it has in mine! That philosophy which says, "all men are brothers; they do care! Opportunity will always come to improve our situation." Then: - WITH THAT OPPORTUNITY WITH THAT ...try to explain to your children why the very men who are taxed with its implementation are torpedoing it! Try to explain why these men set themselves up as greater than the President by refusing to comply with that part of his program specifying that we, the poor, should have a voice in our own salvation...not someone speaking for us, not someone who knows nothing of poverty...but we the poor should be involved.

On one point we do agree, however, 39 is an unwieldy membership. I doubt that we will agree on my solution! I say: Remove half the present suburbanites, replace them with urbanites...the poor, civil rights leaders (not because they are dissenter...but because they were the first and for a long time, the only people interested in the poor and their problems) and a few area businessmen, (who reap our little checks!) I dissent, not on the number, but the composition of the board. It is unfair, unbalanced and uninvolved...heart-wise with our problems! What McAllister, Bruere and presumably you who have set yourselves over President Johnson, (who says we poor must be involved) can't accept, is that feudal lords, the Middle Ages, and the "let them eat cake while their betters decide their fate" attitude Marie Antoinette lost her head over...passed long ago!

You prefer instead to label us poor, as bumbling idiots at best, as pinkish dissenters at worst, rather than face the facts. President Johnson has stipulated that we shall have a voice...and if that is dissenting, aren't we in good company?

Incidentally, just for the record I am a WASP, white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant. Also a member of Citizen's United for Adequate Welfare, an organization of ADC mothers, who, could hardly care more--who are trying to get the voice President Johnson says we should have.

Phyllis Jackson
A. D. C. Client #93766

WASHINGTON ST. REPORT

FREE FOOD FOR BOSTON'S LOW INCOME FAMILIES:

On Monday, January 11th at 2:00 pm, over forty residents of Roxbury and North Dorchester, working with the Community Union (an organization made up of the Boston Action Group, Dudley St. Action Center and Washington St. Action Center) visited City Hall to demand that Mayor Collins bring the Surplus Food Plan to Boston. Petitions bearing over 1500 signatures were presented to the Mayor.

Mayor Collins replied that he was in favor of the program and had asked ABCD (Action for Boston Community Development) to bring surplus food to Boston as part of the Poverty program. A representative from ABCD told us that the food would be in Boston by March 1, 1965 and that unemployed youths (aged 16 to 22 years) being trained in ABCD programs would be hired to staff the centers.

The people asked many questions concerning the way the program would be set up and how it would work. Many questioners seemed skeptical of these promises in view of the fact that the program has been available since 1936. Why has it taken Boston so many years to apply for this food? Why does it have to part of the Poverty Program? This type of question seemed to annoy the Mayor, who insisted that he was as interested in seeing this program get through as anything they've been working on.

On January 18th, in a meeting with ABCD, a delegation representing the Community Union made certain suggestions about setting up the distribution centers so that they will be convenient to the people receiving the food. ABCD had planned only six distribution centers for the entire city of Boston. We also discussed the possibility of hiring unemployed fathers as well as unemployed youths. ABCD expressed interest in our ideas, but we don't know whether they have been incorporated into the program. We have been informed however that the Mayor will bring the program before the City Council on Monday, Feb. 1st.

TENANT'S NEWS:

Repairs are underway at 55 and 57 Columbia Road, Dorchester as a result of negotiations by the Washington St. Action Center and CORE backed up by a united tenants organization.

Volunteers are needed for tenants councils to aid their neighbors by investigating housing complaints and negotiation with landlord. Call or visit the Action Center at 149 Washington St., Dorchester.

This newsletter is written and distributed by staff and volunteers of the Washington St. Action Center. The Action Center is part of a Community Union made up of Boston Action Group, Dudley St. Action and Dudley St. Action center.

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The more serious question is one of funds: who is responsible for determining how the funds are to be used. The ERAP staff, since they obtained the money? But this really prevents the conference from being of, for, and by poor people, since the factor that is making it possible--realistically speaking-- is beyond their control, i. e. money. There is no readily apparent solution to this problem unless one assumes that community persons are knowledgeable about the financial operation of the national organization. It is important however, to begin to look for answers to this problem, which we are likely to encounter again, until community movements are sufficiently well established so that they do not have to depend on SDS for financial support.

There has been one very interesting result from having community people really plan the conference; that is the evolution of their attitude towards involvement by professional people. At first some people wanted professionals to participate--they felt they needed the people who "had the information." But as they continued to plan the conference, and as community people began to feel strongly that this was their conference, as they developed confidence in their ability--regardless of their condition of poverty--to plan and run a conference, their attitude towards professionals has changed substantially. (Some distinction is made between professionals who work with poor people, for example, ministers working in poverty areas, and those who really represent the "system," i. e. most social workers and welfare department staff.) This is reflected first in their decision to have only community people to do the speaking, and, second, in their statement which explicitly invites professional, students, etc., not to attend. The policy adopted was that "we cannot invite persons who are not directly striving to better the lives of the poor, both black and white, by the poor themselves. We cannot invite those who are not welfare and low-income community persons. We appreciate your interest and hope there will be another time that you can be with us to express your interest." Students, take heed: you will be turned away!"

Finally, a few brief words about the conference itself. As of now (12 days before) we've received word that about 60 people are coming from out of town, and expect perhaps another 15 to show up. The number of Cleveland people that will be involved is harder to estimate, but a rough guess would be 25-30. People are definitely coming from Boston, Newark, Baltimore, Chester, Chicago (JOIN and CORE), Cairo, Detroit, Hazard, New Brunswick, Mississippi, and San Francisco and a few other areas will show up. The original notion was that those who came would be community "leaders." Preferences for comm "leaders," however one defines that, have never been stated, and the Conference is open to all community people, regardless of their stature in local organizations.

Most of the conference will occur Saturday, February 20. In the morning there will be three speakers (maybe more if others are interested in getting up and speaking) who will discuss general problems of poverty, the need for organization, and "visions" of the future. They will be followed by small discussion groups in which people will describe the activities, organizations, and programs in their own cities. The afternoon discussion groups will focus on specific topics: the nature of the problem and how to organize around that problem. For example, welfare, which would bring together welfare mothers from different cities; urban renewal; reemployment, which would involve JOIN people from different cities. These groups could be very general or very specific, concerned with organizing strategy or with problems and experiences, depending on the interests of the participants. The tentative evening speaker is Fannie Lou Hamer, speaking on "What the MDP is doing in Mississippi in relation to what can be done all over the US." Sunday's session will contain any reports that come out of Saturday's meetings, plus discussion of possible future meetings, coordinating groups, or whatever else interests people.

CORRESPONDENCE

Feb. 12, 1965

Dear Roger and Rennie,

Some promised thoughts on your SDS theatre idea:

Its appeal may lie partly in a nostalgia about the '30s, or in a frustration we all may share about the left's failure to be as widely, as pungently articulated now as it has been in other times and other places. We're sitting on a fault in a precipitous place and Democrats play man-to-man politics, progressives mumble in their dreams, the unions are just enough alive to fight internationalism with all the silence they can muster, the rocks keep slipping.

It'd of course not a matter of finding out what's wrong. You know, he nows, I know; we tell it to each other. The question is how to wake up this dumb sleep-walking giant. And thinking of young Odets and the Federal theatre people (who failed), of Brecht and Piscator (who failed), of Sartre and Camus (who failed), we wonder (knowing the answer but still wondering, which is okay) if it isn't maybe in the artwork that a few can catalyze the buried crippled decency or just realism of the many, make a big conscience or turn loose a few angry angels.

The drama project idea is appealing, too, because it so closely resembles the functional structure of social organizing. A theatre assumes a crew: it makes a single audience out of many individuals, gives them a common rhythm of feeling, reaction, insight; focus, too, sometimes even purpose; makes compact what was diffuse, gives direction to what was random and ambient. And this is something like what ERAP projects want to do.

So we all agree that an SDS/ERAP theatre project sounds like a good idea. Then a great noisy silence falls.

I've been trying to understand why it's so hard to see the next step. We ask what feel like penetrating questions. About purpose: is it to teach power about the poor or the poor about power? About scope: do we awaken the continent or only Hazard? About talent, modus operandi: local amateurs with instant gut-born dramas or outside pros doing ready-mades? About strategy: do we try to roll back a little the cultural deprivation of the poor (maybe unreal), or to get a slumlord to turn the heat up and a city to get after rats?

This doesn't get anywhere. So we try being realistic; we say the program would no doubt have to be unsymmetrical, silly to think a big deal in Boston would be a big deal in Chester. That seems right, still doesn't get anywhere. So then we try being really realistic; admit that our questions are workpoints at best, that we need is a recon in a project to sniff out the lay of the land.

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I'm not fully convinced of this, but my present view is that our questions were okay, but the assumption that they embodied was terrible. That is, our attempt to develop concrete instances of the generalization could not have resulted in anything but inflated analytics and paper positivity for the reason that we never really had a generalization, only a desire. The either-or problems we thought he had to resolve first were not real-world forks-in-roads dilemmas; and within pretty clear limits, there's nothing in the "facts" of the ERAP project situations that would make one alternative better than another. ERAP could tour its projects with a play, a series of plays, Brecht plays, Living-Newspaper type plays, old plays, new plays, and if they were good and done well that would be a fine thing to have done. ERAP could set up little neighborhood drama experiments for providing poor people with a little psychological exercise or for helping them articulate their predicament to one another or to the mayor. That could be fine, too. ERAP could rediscover the method of the medieval mystery and put a bunch of actors on a passion wagon with a good PA system and send them up to Randolph and State with a modern morality about slums, joblessness, social villains. That might even be great.

Anything you do could be powerful if it were powerfully done. Also could be bad. Depends on how you do it mostly, I think, and not really so much on what the world is like. It seems to be just about impossible to predict what would be best. That always remains to be seen.

I'll try to make the point better. The theatre-project idea doesn't seem to arise as a possible solution to a perceived set of local problems. It's not as if anybody is saying Hayden would never have been bitten if only there had been a play. Its appeal is intrinsic, not problem-based. Try, for example, working through a particular case. Say we confront a problem: the coal captains are trying to castrate the krovig pickets. This has to change. The way to get change is to exert pressure where it counts. Public feeling needs to be broadened and sharpened, power mobilized. How about a play to dramatize the issue? Good, the story needs to be told, a play's a good strong way to tell such a story. Assume we make a good play and get good actors to play it (big assumptions). To whom do we show it? The picketers? But they already know. The poor people who are not aware of their stake in this and need to be mobilized? That sounds hard but not impossible and it might even swell the ranks of the picketers. But you might get still more picketers if you used the personnel, money, and time resources used up by the play for an intensified canvass of the poor in their quarters. How about getting the play before the middle class power, the local bureaucrats? All right, but how do you get them to come? And if you get them to come, wouldn't it be more persuasive if some respectable well-brained speaker simply involved them in a dialog?

I think any case you might work through would show the same result, namely, that the direct-action potential of a drama (which, after all, will always be perceived as "fiction") isn't as strong as that of other approaches to social organization; that it costs more in people, time and money; that it introduces irrelevant contingencies (bad acting, bad writing); and that a play (unless it flirts with libel) will never confront a visible enemy with a visible challenge to which he must make a visible response.

So I'm led to draw two conclusions, both shakeable.

First: there should be no effort, at least in the beginning, to associate a theatre project closely with the action quantities of any ERAP mission, nor should ERAP leadership try to summon up such a project from the missions themselves. (But note the important qualification below.)

Second: connectedly, the local problems which the individual projects seek to correct can serve as guidelines for a theatre program only if they are socially generalized. That is, I'm saying it's the overriding problem of the left's failure to achieve real social presence (not to say power) that ought to determine the choices you will have to make.

About the first, here's the qualification. While it seems hard with the information now available to see a project-based theatre program, this doesn't mean that such a program must remain impossible, or that there aren't steps we could take to explore and develop its potential. It might be useful to get a start in the following way.

One man--I think it has to be one--should either be or become completely familiar with all the hotspots in the SDS social-action inventory: all, no exceptions. His qualifications: strong ideologically; able to achieve easy rapport with poor people of all colors, shades, and tints; able to move energetically within local organizations without creating personality issues; a practical instinct for group play and expressive innovation. Formal dramatic training is fairly unimportant, useful chiefly in that training best exposes the inutility of training and thus releases a necessary creative arrogance. Pretty clearly, such a man is no ringer, picked up in the street, not even academic street. He's a first-string organizer.

What does he do? First, he tours the projects, spending probably at least a week at each one. What does he do on this tour? It's exactly because we can't answer that that his tour is essential. Broadly, he might be told: go find out the chances for a field action of artists. Beyond that, no instructions. He makes his own plans, pursues his instinct, is opportunistic, willing even to be diverted up long blind alleys. The result should be a planning paper that deals with some of the questions we've been prematurely thinking about. I can't guess what that paper will say, but I can suggest a title: "An Interracial Theatre of the Poor?"

First-string organizers with the needed skills and temperament are surely in short supply. But it seems obvious that if you're going to make an investment in this possibility, you mustn't do it with half a heart. It's a hard job, so it needs a good man.

Still, it strikes me as a rather luxurious allocation of talent. Maybe it wouldn't be so luxurious if the scout could also be doing something else along the way. What, I don't know but maybe you do.

Another possibility--something that ought to be done in any case--is just to interrogate your mission heads, have them put the question to the people they're working with and find out what they, the poor, would like to see or do and how much they'd be interested. You could do this fairly

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quickly with no expense, essentially no commitment of manpower, and it might also turn up some new things to think about. At the moment, I can't see any reason for doing more than this at the level of a project-based action.

But it's maybe a different matter when we start looking at the broader, less parochial question of achieving an invigorated leftist art, or more exactly, of getting artists to pay more attention to the nation's life with the fundamentally humanist morality that most artists are already committed to. (To be both a realist and a humanist is to be at least incipiently a partisan of the left.) You'll recall I sat in on part of a meeting when I was last at SDS whose subject was the regeneration of an "adult" American left. I'm not sure I know what you want or expect to do, but I think it's not absurd to see some hope in the country's intelligentsia and to imagine that through them it may be possible to exert a tangible (if molasses-fast) effect on policy. Such an end may or may not be well served through the formation (if it's possible) of a new political party; maybe de facto infiltrationism (as in the Institute for Policy Studies) is better than organized opposition in the daylight. One way or another, though, it's still clear that artists ought to be more alive to political issues than they have been, and that if they could become so, that would be good in and of itself. There's a new Grapes of Wrath or Weavers in Appalachia, a new Let Us Now Praise Famous Men or Shadow of a Gunman in the Freedom Movement.

There's no sense just talking about playwrights. If they can come through, good. But the merit of this agony lies in the audacity it licenses; we have to be grandiose just to be microscopic. I have a grandiose idea--meagre enough at that--involving an attempt to enlist established writers in the compiling of an anthology of new writing about the open American sores, the anthology to be published by a major house and to be given such total promotion that its appearance will have to be regarded as a major literary landmark. (Major literary landmark equals mid-range intellectual landmark equals major social landmark equals barely perceptible political landmark, but so what.) It will have to be the collective literary portrait of this country in the '60's. You'll agree that the range of subjects man can write fiction about with fire in his mouth is visible enough without my trying to list them. There is a subject matter. So:

Who might the writers be? You would want a list of say 150 and 50 of these might want in, 25 might deliver, 15 might be good enough to use. I'm not going to name 150 names. But one thinks off hand of Swades, Mailer, the Dissent bunch (maybe Howe would help out in organizing it); James Jones, Malamud, even Salinger and Bellow who for different reasons really owe it to themselves to do something like this. Kerouac, a good clean writer when he's looking at something real. Miller, Albee, Leroy Jones, Baldwin, Wright. An indiscriminate list, one that is completely nonsectarian. Robert Lowell and Vladimir Nabokov. What do we tell them? What we're telling each other, mainly, that there are people drowning out there in the Great American Night who can use a little voice, an outcry in their names. It would take a bastard to say no. (Most would.)

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What about a publisher? Very important to get a major one because distribution and promotion are so important. Maybe Grove Press; or Rhineholt, which I think published The Movement. Maybe Knopf, I don't know. My agent seems to have some moxy about the houses; she might help out.

The first big step would be to get a preliminary commitment from a strong publisher and from maybe half a dozen important writers. With such an earnest of seriousness in hand, two or three months should tell us whether or not such a book could be produced. There would surely be problems like writers' contracts with houses, but I'd bet they could be solved. Maybe through a co-publishing arrangement. Maybe through enlisting the formal or informal support of other left or activist groups like CORE, SNCC, ACLU, some of the liberal magazines, which surely must have fairly powerful contacts among the literary elite.

Isn't it impudent to ask artists to get on a team, even a loose one? Sure! So what? The case we could make to them is strong enough; we needn't worry about offending their Venerable Artisticness. We'd be talking to them about the damn world they live in. That's worth a month of their time, 5000 words. If they don't believe that, so much the worse for them. We should even suggest specific subject matter. Steinbeck, take another long angry look at the indigent poor. Nabokov, give us a tale of the Murmansk-Archangel intervention. Jones, infiltrate the V. Cong! Kerouac, come take a trip through this old underworld of the unmap poor. Not that indelicately, or you'd get a fist in your mouth; but we'd have an interest in seeing that a range of targets get properly hit.

Still toying with the idea of an anthology of new protest literature, I wonder if another approach might be fruitful either by itself, if the All-American notion proves unfeasible, or in parallel with it. I should think that the Freedom Movement and other activist elements are beginning to develop a clandestine literature by this time, young novelists and poets reading to one another and beginning to publish in smaller magazines. And I should think there's also a rich subliterate--I mean the reports in the files, the tapes of shantytown and cityhall and jailhouse dialogs, the lurid graffiti of our best people in extreme situations. That would be some book. If it could be a companion to one made by the prof that would be some pair of books.

I'm not trying to ignore the theatre idea. But it seems to me it just has to take its place in the larger effort that it suggested. Either book could contain short plays as well as short stories. A prime candidate for the second type of anthology, for example, would be McComb USA.

So far, I've made an operational distinction between a possible theatre action at the project level and a literary action on a national scale. Between these somewhere lies the rich potential of movie-making, which ought to be very interesting to ERAP. Roger tells me that the Newark project is making a movie, but that's all I know about that. If what they're doing is like what I have in mind, good. If not, then this is something you'd want to think about: a powerful documentary of the poor man's existence, the long torture not just of being out of work, but of never really knowing that you'll have work next year, next week; the

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social burial-alive of one-fifth of our people. Just one way to pitch such a movie: the story of the SDS community projects. The theme: the poor are neither socially irrelevant nor isolated. The purpose: enlarge the awareness of the poor that they make up a real and important class, that their situation is fundamentally abnormal and changeable (reversing Jesus: "The poor will always be among you"), that they are not just born to be hungry, infected, alienated, scared, but instead that they are the victims of a curable societal fault which it is in their power to help correct. Or what could be a fantastically useful movie: one that tries to show the poor whites and the poor blacks that their cause is common.

Such films could be used to bind closer together the poor of all areas, convincing them they have a social birthright, a political identity, the right and the power to make claims upon society. They could also be used, these films, as an address to the unwounded. A lot know vaguely that something is wrong, and most are vaguely decent people. But the bourgeois imagination never yet went courting pain. Kennedy knew something was wrong before he went to West Virginia. He could quote figures. But it was because he went to West Virginia and smelled it--"Imagine! Kids that never drink milk!"--that antipoverty legislation has even got as far as it has. A movie could even agitate explicitly for changes in the whole legislative approach to antipoverty measures. It could be a damn sight more gripping than what the missile men show congress, powerful enough to win or intensify congressional support for better action, impressive enough to foundation and labor people to gather economic aid for extended SDS action. Endless possibilities. Of all the arts, near-arts, quasi-arts, the movie is by any measure the supreme propagandizer, the compleat change-agent: it's durable, it's mobile, it has the authority of a man's own eyesight, it minimizes irrelevant contingency. SDS should use it.

This letter is too long already. But to get the substance of it in easy reach, let me just sum up the main points.

1. Theatre action is something to think about, but it's just a department of your real interest, a left literature aimed at seducing the center.
2. There can be no useful planning at the moment for a project-based theatre program because there are too many unknowns. To reduce the unknowns, you might:
 - a. Systematically query the local organizers to find out what they think of the idea and to have them find out what the poor think of it.
 - b. Based on information gathered in this way, have a second round of talks with interested SDS and non-SDS people who might participate.
 - c. Along with or following the above, send a strongman to see the projects, his objective being to produce a detailed prospectus for further action.
3. Whether or not you do 2, aim for the publication (18-24 months from start time) of an important anthology of new protest writing by top writers--writers who are for the most part not associated with protest literature. Do this by winning the support of a major publisher and the cooperation of all the viable left groups you can implicate. (If you could get left groups to cooperate in a venture like this, that might already be a light but real blow for a more united left.)
4. Connected to or independent of 3, try to interest a major publisher in compiling an anthology of new writing (and nonwriting) by new writers

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(and nonwriters) who have personal tales to tell about the inchoate crypte-revolution in America.

(I'd guess that both projects 3 and 4 should be operated out of New York rather than Ann Arbor.)

5. If you aren't already doing it, start making movies about yourselves and your work:

- a. To help consolidate the political identity of the poor and stimulate local action.
- b. To promote change among power holders.
- c. To recruit personnel and funds.

6. This is implicit in everything else, though I haven't mentioned it before. It may be that the kinds of action I've suggested shouldn't be lodged in any single SDS segment like ERAP. Maybe the possibilities are broad enough so that SDS would want to establish a project on the lines of ERAP and PREP, calling it something like Artists' Social Action Project--ASAP (more alphabet soup).

I hope these suggestions are helpful, and of course I want to know your reactions. Call me when you want to talk some more.

Best regards,

Carl Oglesby

SERIALS 4 A NO 8

CAIRO REPORT

The Cairo Project has had very good success in dealing with the individual problems of Public Assistance recipients, achieving success also for some general problems. The Regional Director of Public Aid told us, in asking us to go slow, that in the last year the county department had been liberalized more than it had been in twenty years. Notable in this liberalization has been the provision of Household furnishings provided by law but prohibited by custom of the County Department, the establishment of an Adult Vocational and General Education school, offering at present training from 1st to 12th grades and 8 trades, and a shift at least in the head of the County Department towards an attitude of rehabilitation of recipients rather than a punitive one. This program, though successful, leaves us with grave misgivings: first, the individuals who have been benefited have little awareness of the general problems which engulf them, and there has been little involvement of numbers of people in solving these problems and thus little sense of common interest.

Jim Rush, our new staff member, and I are beginning this week to solicit memberships in the Freedom Democratic Clubs. We have already lined up block organizers throughout the 6th precinct and will attempt to cover the entire precinct with the block organizers this week. We are setting up a meeting in this precinct to develop our "platform", a series of demands for betterment of conditions in the precinct. We hope thereby to develop both a wider understanding of the problems and a broader base of participation.

While this report was being written two new staff members were added, Bob Presley and Charles Bauman. These men come from Blackburn College and make a valuable addition to the staff. Also two and one-half new staff members, Marie Horn and John Gray from Blackburn and Tom Gilooly half time from SIU.

The recent emergency fund raising drive was quite successful, paying off rent, water, telephone, and grocery bills and leaving a small balance for operating expenses. The augmented staff should make possible publicity and fund raising programs as of yet untried.

A community organizing program has been established in Carbondale by Southern Illinois University SMEC. Plans are now being drafted for a summer project covering three counties based in Cairo and Carbondale and plans are being made to enlist an extremely capable girl for full time coordination and fund raising.

SERIES 4 A NO 8