

single issue

ERAP NEWSLETTER

10 Brookford St, Roxbury, Mass.

January 17, 1966

IN THIS ISSUE...

To subscribers and project people:

This issue is small because, as the letter from the Newsletter staff printed below explains, we haven't received any material about what projects are doing. As the letter says, we cannot put out a Newsletter on a regular basis if we don't get this material; so people should expect issues in the future only when they begin to write things.

The three letters from Boston are an attempt to give people an idea of what's going on in that project. Mothers for Adequate Welfare plans a large demonstration at the Commissioner's office Monday (Jan. 17), because nothing has been heard from him in response to Mrs. Bland and Mrs. Nickerson's letter. The communication from Marya Levenson, written to be sent out to M.A.W.'s mailing list, tells pretty much of the state the organization is in; Marya will continue the letter in the next issue we put out. Don's piece is self-explanatory.

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In the future we hope to put out larger issues regularly, but this is impossible without reports from projects. Perhaps it would be good for a functioning project to tell us exactly where it's at right now, to get things going again. In any event, let us hear from you.

BOSTON: Letter to the Commissioner

Mothers for Adequate Welfare
48 Rutland St.
Boston, Mass.
Wed., Jan. 11, 1966

Mr. William Lally
Boston Welfare Department
Hawkins St.
Boston, Mass.

Dear Mr. Lally:

You have just refused to see mothers from M.A.W. (Mothers for Adequate Welfare). We want you to ask for a state survey of Boston rents paid by welfare mothers, and a special rent exception from the state budget for Boston recipients.

We feel we are exercising our rights as citizens to ask you to perform the duties of the office to which you are appointed. The Public Assistance Manual states "if a community feels that the maximum allowance for houses, apartments, or rooms is too low in relation to local conditions, a survey by board of public welfare submitted to the Department through the District Office will be the basis for the

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M.A.W. Letter, cont'd

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determination of a ceiling for the community. Consultat services in this area are available from the Department."

Mr. Victor J. Newton, Massachusetts Director of Welfare for Boston, told MAM representatives that everyone knows that the rent allowance of \$65-\$80 set by the state budget is inadequate for Boston. He suggested that Boston request a state survey of its rents and a special exception from the state budget. Forty other communities have used this means of petition and won more money for rent allowances from the state.

You, however, said personally to MAM representatives that you are powerless, and you later directly refused to ask for a rent exception from the state budget. We do not understand such an attitude, Mr. Lally. Could it be that you care more about not bothering taxpayers than the fact that welfare recipients cannot eat properly because they must use their food money to pay for rents? Such concern on your part seems especially strange to us since the financial relief would come from the state.

Many of us were once taxpayers and do not want to add to the sky-high taxes in the city. But the increases in rents make it almost impossible for us to live in the New Boston. We know that an increase in rent allowances will not solve all the problems of welfare recipients. We have also asked you to publish the welfare rules and regulations so that all recipients will know their rights and responsibilities. We are tired of being dependent on workers and handouts. We want to set up day care centers staffed by welfare mothers and better education programs so that it will be easier for some of us to get jobs. But the most vital thing to us right now is the issue of more money for rent. This is a necessity for us.

We hope you will reconsider your answer to our petition.

Sincerely,
Doris Eland
Gertrude M. Mickerson
for Mothers for Adequate Welfare

Dear Friends,

Community Action Project in New Brunswick does not have any full-time staff workers at the present time, we are concerned that the project may have to close if staff workers are not obtained soon.

The project has been organized for a year and a half and some things have been achieved which lead us to believe that continued activity is desirable.

Conditions in New Brunswick are similar to those in other cities where projects are operating. Any staff worker coming to C.A.P. will not feel strange to the kind of action needed. The community people involved will help in whatever ways possible. We hope with all sincerity you will give this some consideration and that you will respond to our plea. Anyone interested in working with the project we would be obliged if they could begin near the first of the year if possible. Contact me at this address: 196 George St.

New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901

Sincerely,
Mrs. Ethel Rosser

and from an organizer.

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Dear Members of MAM:

Our mailing list of people who were once involved in MAM or the fight for surplus food is so long that it is impossible to visit every one and explain in detail what is going on. At long last, there is a great deal going on, and we want to tell those who stopped coming to meetings because nothing was being accomplished.

First, we were asked to come in and organize mothers in the South End. We found that these mothers were ready to organize themselves and needed very little help from us. There is a regular group of 20-30 mothers that meets every other week, and have been doing most of the work on MAM's new campaign to raise the rent allowance. They have been offered an office by the South End House, and are leasing it for \$3.00 a month. By next month, they hope to be able to afford a telephone. The mothers themselves are going to keep the office open, and at long last hope to do some of the things like putting out a regular newsletter, starting a day care center, a thrift shop, and that famous "welfare book of rights". As a matter of fact, we're going to foundations to ask them to give us money to put out the book of rights, since the Welfare Department has stated that they have neither the interest nor the ability to do so.

Not so much is happening at the Dudley Street Action Center. Many of the older MAM mothers were really tired out after the months it took to get surplus food, and are now discouraged with what they fought so hard to get. Others became disappointed when SDS students that they had become close to left at the end of the summer or went back to school. Still others had their hands full working on Operation Exodus or Mel King's campaign. It is to these mothers that this letter is addressed. We are learning very slowly by our mistakes, but we have changed a little and want to tell you how. First, we are not encouraging more students to come onto our staff. We have decided to hire community people whenever possible. But because mothers and other community people have financial responsibilities and cannot work as volunteers the way students can, we have to do some real fund-raising before we can take on this responsibility. We've begun to do this by writing out a War on Poverty proposal and contacting foundations for big grants. But it will certainly be a while before the money starts rolling in.

But why have we decided to discourage students from coming in, except as part-time helpers around a core of community people? Many of you know that the students who belong to SDS are very interested in something they call participatory democracy. They really want people to be in and make the decisions that affect their lives. That means that they do not think MAM's actions should be decided by welfare workers, the mayor of the city, or by students. But they found that only big decisions were made at meetings. All the countless little, important daily decisions were made by the staff for MAM. Part of this was because the staff did not know how to involve the mothers in these decisions; part of this was the fault of the mothers, who were too shy or too lazy or too involved in other problems to really work for an organization. In any case, the "community of love" at the Action Center was too often between a student and a community person, too rarely between one mother and another. That is probably why no care of MAM exists at the Action Center now.

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This is why we are trying to have mothers take over from the beginning at the South End.

But certainly the structure of MAW is not the only reason people stopped coming to meetings. One of the reasons was what the meetings discussed, whether they were led by students or mothers. Most of the time was taken up with petty individual grievances. No real program of action was suggested after the surplus food campaign. Even when the idea of a rent campaign started, many mothers decided it was not worth all the effort--to change so small an item in the whole lousy system. I think there was too little thinking about how to change the whole system, do something big, or at least work on more than one item at a time. A rent campaign, or a campaign to change the ruling about the age of illegitimate children allowed into the housing projects is good to bring in new members and give them the nerve to challenge Lally and the system. But I do not think these single issue campaigns satisfy older members. I think it is time to branch out into other issues. One would be a more sophisticated type of politics on a much more basic level. Perhaps we should initiate a national campaign to change some practice, such as the fact that mothers are now responsible for collecting support money from their husbands. This practice makes checks very uncertain, tends to keep apart husbands and wives, and is a tremendous waste of effort for the courts. (To be continued.)

----Marya Levenson

NEW WORK--

In Boston one of the latest new organizing efforts is being put into organizing high school students in the Boston Area. This is taking the form of three major drives. One with a group of teenagers that make up the freedom security council, the youth division of S.C.L.C., that split from the local chapter. Another with kids from St. Ann's church in Roxbury, and the third with boys from Boston Technical High School in Dorchester.

There will probably be three major areas of approach:

- a) the Delano and Waltham strikes
- b) Vietnam study and seminar groups
- c) and Freedom schools and choirs

If there are any projects that have done similar organizing, would they please Don Halfkenny, care of the Dudley St. Action Center, c/o Boston Regional SDS, 1785 Cambridge St., Cambridge, Mass.

What's happening with the "War on Poverty" protest scheduled for the 25th of February? Boston has held off from any further organizing until it hears from the other projects on the state of the protest in their areas, and if the protest is a real thing in people's minds. If so, please communicate (through the Newsletter so other people can know too).

----Don Halfkenny

FROM the STAFF

Dear ERAP and Others,

Hardly any articles or correspondence or project newsletters or anything has been sent to the Newsletter in well over a month. We are beginning to wonder whether it's just a communications problem or there isn't anything to say. Are there projects that are doing things? We hear rumors--we heard that the Oakland project closed down, then re-opened--but no one from Oakland ever wrote about why, or what happened. We heard that some people in Chicago are working with teenage kids, but there's no way for other people to learn from their experience, or to find out what's going on there. Boston people don't know what's happening in Newark, New Haven, Cleveland, etc.--or even where there are still projects.

In Washington in November we got the impression that there was going to be a national conference and protest about the War on Poverty, and that people were going to be travelling, talking, and writing about it. We don't know if this is really going to happen, or how people in different cities feel about it.

All of this makes us suspect that people in other projects probably don't have much of a feeling about what's going on around the country either, unless they happen to have friends working in other cities.

If people share our sense of frustration, and feel the same need to know what's going on in the rest of ERAP, they have to make a commitment to let other people know what they're doing. And also what they're thinking--the Newsletter has been used as a channel for discussion in the past, but very irregularly. People have to write, especially through the Newsletter.

We want to keep putting out the ERAP Newsletter--we still feel that it's important. But this can only partly solve the larger problem of communication. People travelling around to discuss the War on Poverty protest would make a big difference. We also feel the need for a national ERAP meeting of some kind, with at least a few representatives from each project. Perhaps the February conference, if it's still on, could provide a place for general ERAP discussion. If not, another national meeting should be arranged.

ERAP people have often said that the work they're doing only makes sense if it's part of a national movement. From here it looks as if communications have broken down so much that there isn't a national movement any more.

Say it ain't so, Joe, say it ain't so.

----The ERAP Newsletter Staff

FLASH FROM BOSTON

THIS MORNING (JAN 17) ABOUT THIRTY FIVE MEMBERS OF MOTHERS FOR ADEQUATE WELFARE WENT TO THE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE TO DEMAND A SURVEY TO RAISE THE ADC RENT ALLOWANCE (see page 1). THE ENTIRE MEETING WAS COVERED BY TELEVISION AND THE PRESS. COMMISSIONER LALEY, WHO HAS REPEATEDLY REFUSED TO ACT ON THE REQUEST, AGREED TO HOLD THE SURVEY. THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT CONCESSION THE GROUP HAS EVEN GOTTEN FROM THE WELFARE DEPARTMENT, AND CAN LEAD TO A REAL INCREASE IN EVERYONE'S ADC CHECK.

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FROM: FRAP NEWSLETTER
10 Brookford St.
Dorchester, Mass



FIRST CLASS MAIL

Carl Braden
SCEP
4403 Virginia Ave.
Louisville, Ky.