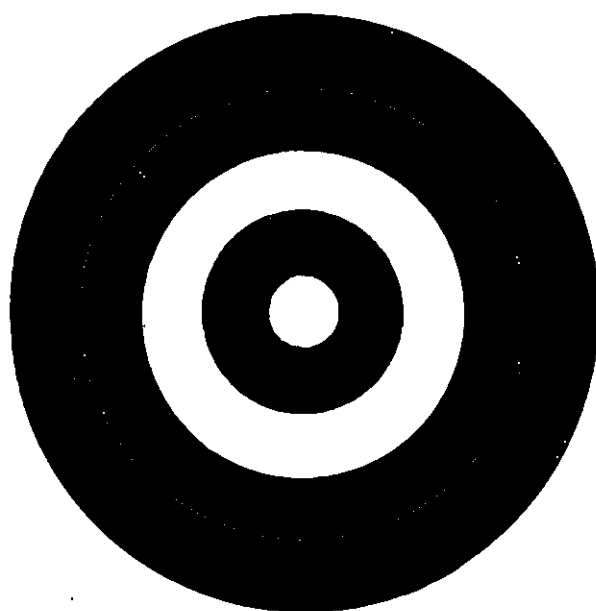


# *A Journey to Justice*



**Presbyterian Committee on the  
Self-Development of People**  
Report of the Special Task Force 1993

## APPENDIX 5:

# COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

by Mike Miller

## Introduction

For many people with concern for social and economic justice, the state of the world is bleak. Hunger, poverty, homelessness, despair, drugs, crime, destruction of the environment, wars, nationalism, intolerant religious fundamentalism, racism, sexism, increasing gaps of power and wealth between the few and the many, massive corruption by elites, and more are what the daily headlines tell us goes on — whether in the communist or former communist, social democratic or capitalist countries. Liberty is suppressed by death squads, torture, the threat of imprisonment and economic deprivation. In western industrial nations, particularly the United States, labor movements are but a shadow of their once influential selves, and the movements on the "social issues" are weaker today than ten years ago. Every place the causes of the poor, working people, women, and racial and ethnic minorities seem in retreat. Are we headed for apocalypse now? Is Armageddon around the corner? Little hope seems to exist if one looks at the dominant forms of social organization in today's nation-states.

There are, however, hopeful signs, but they are to be found beneath the surface and absent from daily headlines. Like many new social forms and ideas, they start at the periphery of centers of power — and tend to be ignored by major media which are oriented to the famous and powerful. They could be summed up with the core idea of participatory democracy. Two organizational expressions emerge from the core idea — community organizing and worker-owned cooperatives. If that has the ring of the 60s to it, be patient. As a participant in the period of optimism of the early 60s, I remember the inflated claims of our work, as well as our failure to fully understand the difficulty of changing large social systems. For the last thirty years, with public housing tenants on New York's Lower Eastside, in the Black community of Kansas City, Missouri, and with African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, and "Anglos" in my native San Francisco, I've worked as a community organizer. Since 1972, I've consulted with organizers and local leaders in community organizations and unions across the country. What I'm talking about works. I've seen it.

These hopeful signs are part of a minor theme in the world today. Their advocates lead no government, nor do they run any major multi-national corporation. But they are real and growing alternatives. They share a deep commitment to continuing, participatory democracy. Underlying this commitment is a belief in the full dignity of the human person, and his or her capacity for self-government, combined with a commitment to community — the idea that full personhood is only realized in continuing cooperative relations with others. They cherish individual freedom, but believe that there must be social equality. They demand cooperative and community action, but eschew dependence on the government. They believe deeply in their own religious or political tradition, but they respect and treasure the fact that others hold different beliefs. With the exception of basic core values, essentially those of the democratic tradition and the social and economic justice teachings of the world's great religions, which they believe must unite society, they tolerate and, indeed, cherish a wide range of opinions.

These signs (and undoubtedly others arising "from below") for optimism are characterized by democratic initiatives from the people at the local level. Politically, this distinguishes them from either initiatives by the Party or State (as in top-down socialism and totalitarianism from the Communists, bureaucratic socialism from the social democrats, or American officially sponsored citizen participation as in a myriad of government programs). Economically, it distinguishes them from dominance by corporations supposedly governed by the consumer sovereignty of an impersonal market-place, or a centralized, state-controlled system.

What is a community organizer? What do they do? Why do they arouse such suspicion and hostility? Who are they? The following three stories of community organizations and the organizers who are instrumental to their success, illustrate the role played by the organizer. In these introductory comments, I'd like to put their work in a broader context and try to answer some of the questions typically asked about organizers.

Like other arts, crafts, or professions, organizing includes deeply dedicated people and charlatans, very talented people and incompetents, those who embody the best of our values and some who are in for their own self-aggrandizement. Just as we don't dismiss medical doctors because there are quacks in the profession, or think carpentry is something anyone can do because some carpenters do shoddy work, or call for the elimination of the clergy because some are self-serving, so we need to discern and distinguish in the field of organizing. While organizing doesn't have a Hippocratic Oath by which its practitioners can be judged, it does have some basic principles which guide its best workers.

A community organizer is a person whose job is to assist powerless or relatively powerless people to build organizations that can be effective voices for their values and interests. The particular organizers whose stories follow are guided in their work by the values of the democratic and Judeo-Christian traditions, as these values are expressed in the guidelines and policy statements of the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People. These organizations are "democratic" in the sense that their members determine their policies and practices, and they are "democratic" in the sense that they believe in and act upon such values as the dignity and worth of the human person, equality in and freedom for all people, social and economic justice, the responsibilities of citizenship or participation in a democratic society, and the need for regular, or "ordinary," people to act together to hold our large, bureaucratic institutions accountable to the public interest.

The day-to-day work of the organizer can be analyzed in four distinct parts, though these blur together in a seamless web when the organizer is at work.

First, the organizer listens to people. The listening process is not simply passive. Questions are asked; the meaning of answers is probed; things forgotten or repressed because of the pain associated with them are brought to the surface. I remember asking a resident of an inner-city neighborhood about what it was like living on her block. "Oh fine," she initially responded. Two doors away, a burned out and abandoned house served as an informal headquarters for local drug-users and dealers. It was an eye-sore in the neighborhood, broken glass from its windows had cut children who played in the yard, guns had been fired on more than one occasion as a result of drug disputes, its presence diminished property values, and neighbors were afraid to go past it for fear of being mugged. To accept "Oh fine" as an accurate answer would have been to ignore the obvious. So I probed. When I did, I learned how this single mother feared for her teenage child, of her struggle against the temptation of drugs, of a multiplicity of problems and what they meant to the resident.

Why didn't she tell me what she thought to begin with? I think there are at least three major reasons. People don't want to admit to themselves how bad things are if they don't think there's anything they can do about it. We rationalize, cover over, and try to ignore those things which cause pain if we don't think we can do anything about them. What people don't want to admit to themselves, they certainly don't want to admit to a stranger and I was a stranger, even though I had an introduction to the woman from her neighbor. In the worst situations, and we don't find this too often in this country though it is widespread among the poor in places like Central and South America, those who have been oppressed for a long period of time may think they deserve their fate, that it is ordained by God or nature or both. The organizer seeks to get beneath the denial or acceptance of oppression. We speak of "internalized oppression" when people blame themselves for unjust circumstances caused, in part, by the policies and practices of institutions which exploit, discriminate against, or otherwise take advantage of the powerless. The other source for continued oppression lies in the failure of the oppressed to act against their circumstances.

The second activity of the organizer is one of challenging people to act together to bring about change. In effect, the organizer says, "until you do something about it, things are going to stay as they are because there's a status quo that is benefitting from the present system." The organizer is a hope peddler, proposing to people that something can be done if they'll get together and begin to do it. This is a dangerous proposition because few people want to be pushed to do things differently; no matter how bad their circumstance, they have typically found a way to accept it, or at least deny any responsibility for changing things. Organizers don't accept things as they are. They think things can be changed for the better as a result of cooperative human activity. Most of the community organizers I know and work with would agree with Lord Acton's famous dictum: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." A democratic society does best when power is widely distributed in many groups.

The simplest challenge, and the typical one in the beginning of an organizing campaign, is to ask a person to come to a meeting where she can share her story and problem and, with her neighbors or co-workers, begin to figure out how things can be changed. For many people, the possibility of change seems remote. That leads to another major activity of the organizer.

The third principal activity of the organizer is to think through with people what can be done. Notice that the operational phrase is "think through," not "tell." As one organizer put it, "If I could lead you into the promised land just by your following me, I wouldn't do it because if I could lead you there that way someone else could lead you out." The democratic organizer must combine anger at injustice, and the desire to do things now with the patience of Job. Step-by-step the organizer is going to think through with a skeptical listener what can be done. The Socratic method—asking questions which make the listener think—is the typical approach. My conversation with the neighborhood resident (after I got her to share with me the pain caused to her and her family by the burned out house, and after I got her to say it would be good if something was done about it) went something like this:

Organizer (O): "What do you think would improve things?"

Resident (R): "Well, I suppose it would help if it were boarded up."

O: "Do you think the gang would just break in again?"

- R: "I suppose that might happen; actually, it did happen. The City did board it up once, but that didn't last very long."
- O: "What if the building was fixed up and occupied, or if it was torn down? Do you think that would make a difference?"
- R: "Yeah, I guess so, but who's going to do that?"
- O: "Do you think the owner could if he wanted to?"
- R: "Yeah, but he doesn't want to. If he wanted to, he would have done it by now."
- O: "You're right about that, but has anyone tried to get the owner to do it?"
- R: "Some of the neighbors called the realty company that managed the place, but they didn't help ... and no one knows the owner anyway."
- O: "What if you knew the owner?"
- P: "Well that might not make a difference either. He doesn't live around here, and he probably doesn't care. Like I said, if he wanted to do something about it, he would have."
- O: "What if some pressure was put on the owner? What if he found out he couldn't just leave the building the way it is without paying a price?"
- R: "Like what? He's not going to have to pay us anything!"
- O: "I know a group who tried to meet with a building owner who had a place like this that was burned down. He wouldn't meet with them. The next thing the group did was to take pictures of the building, put the pictures on a flyer, and go door-to-door in the owner's neighborhood talking to his neighbors about their irresponsible neighbor. The next thing they knew, the owners' lawyer was calling them and asking for a meeting. When they finally got together, something got worked out. What do you think of that?"
- R: "I don't know. Sounds kind of radical to me. What are you trying to do around here, anyway. You're going to stir people up and they're going to get mad. Don't you think the owner would fix it up if we could just talk to him about it?"

- O: "Maybe he would. I'm not saying you've got to do what the people in the other neighborhood did. I'm just saying there are things you could do. Maybe the first thing would be for a group to sign a letter to the owner asking him for a meeting. What do you think of that approach?"
- R: "Well that sounds a little more reasonable to me."
- O: "So would you come to a meeting with your neighbors to talk about the building, other problems in the neighborhood, and what can be done about them?"
- R: "Well, I'll try."
- O: (Laughs.) "You know, I've learned over the years that 'I'll try' means I won't see the person. That's a polite way, in most cases, to get me out of their living room. I'm not saying you're doing that, but would you be willing to make a more definite commitment?"
- R: "When's the meeting going to be? Where's it going to be? What am I going to do with my daughter if it's when she's not in school?"
- O: "Now we're getting someplace. Mrs. Jones, down the street, who suggested that I talk with you has a couple of ideas about a day, time, and place for the meeting. We've also got a plan for baby sitting. Would you be willing to talk with Mrs. Jones about what works for you?"
- R: "Man, you don't miss a trick do you! O.K. I'll talk with Susan. I guess if she's in this thing I'll get in it too."
- O: "Great! I appreciate your taking time to talk with me, and I'll be back in touch with Mrs. Jones to see if you've worked things out. By the way, would you be willing to come to the meeting a little early and help set things up for the people who are planning to attend?"

The conversation was much more elaborate when it actually took place. Mrs. Gallegos, as I'll call her, spent about forty-five minutes with me. We talked about lots of things, and we always came back to the building and the problems it was causing her and her family. I wanted to paint a picture of possibilities for her. Things could be done to get the building fixed. People like her in other neighborhoods like hers had done it. I might even have been carrying around with me a clipping from a neighborhood newspaper that showed how other people faced with abandoned housing problems had down something about them. While I painted the picture in broad strokes, she had to become a painter with me. She had to go step-by-step with me

through a thinking process which concluded in her mind with the belief that not only should something be done, but something could be done and she had some ideas about what should be done. What made the most sense to her was a letter that would ask for a meeting. As an organizer, I know that nine out of ten times such letters are ignored. But if I told her that, she would have nothing in her experience to verify it. I'd be trying to lead her into the promised land on the basis of my experience. I'd rather have her and her neighbors make a decision to write the letter, think through with them what they should say in the letter, what deadline they would set for a response, and when they would meet again to review either the response they got or the fact that they didn't get one.

The last of the major activities of the organizer is training people in skills to implement their decisions. I might take a small group down to the county courthouse to research the ownership of the building. I might show them some letters from other groups to people with whom they wanted to meet. I'm going to work with Mrs. Brown on her skills at chairing a meeting, and with someone else on the taking of minutes, and with yet a few others on how to help a meeting move along. With Mrs. Brown, and the few who are willing to take some responsibility to plan the meeting, I'm going to show them sample agendas, and how they're used as a program for a meeting. Most important, I'm not going to do for people what they can, and should, do for themselves. And if there are things that I do in the beginning of an organizing effort because they are to far outside the experience of people with whom I'm working, I'd better not be doing those same things a year or two into the development of the organization! It's their organization, not mine. They've got to own it and run it. Which gets us back to the beginning: the job of the organizer is to assist the people to build their organization.

There are two indisputable facts about effective community organizations. First, they accomplish things that benefit their members and the broader community. Second, in almost every situation there is someone performing the role of the organizer. Most of the time this person is a "professional organizer."

The organizer raises suspicion and hostility in two places: In the community where she or he might work there is an existing pattern of social relationships. This is true in all communities. In fact, it is part of the definition of "community." Within even the most oppressed community, there are some people who have more influence, status, or power than others. And there is nothing necessarily wrong with this fact! Further, almost everyone has grown accustomed to things the way they are—even to the usual ways they seek to bring about change, no matter how ineffective they have been! There is something wrong with this fact. An organizer threatens this status quo. There is a promise of things getting better, but also a possibility of things getting worse. Those who are respected within the community will, and should, assess the prospects in this new idea and person. For those who don't want things changed, the one thing the organizer promises is change.

In the larger society, there are those who are clearly the immediate beneficiaries of the status quo. Whether they are the heads of major private or public institutions, or elected political figures, or administrators in bureaucracies, they too have not only grown accustomed to things the way they are, but they are principal beneficiaries of things the way they are. To them go the major rewards of "the system:" wealth, high income, prestige, power, influence, status, and authority. While it may be in their long-term interest for change to come about, most people don't function with the long-term in mind. They operate in the immediacy of today, and the concreteness of their specific situation.

These important decision-makers who benefit from and support the status quo know the organizer represents a danger to their interests. It is they who most often seek to stir people

up against the organizer. They know that when an effective organizer is at work they will have to deal with an organization of people with whom they didn't have to deal before.

The Roman Empire wanted Jesus and Paul killed. Southern racists wanted Martin Luther King, Jr. jailed (and probably many welcomed his death). It is usually the case that: landlords don't want their tenants organized; politicians don't want their constituents organized; public administrators don't want the presumed beneficiaries of their services organized; employers don't want their employees organized; bankers don't want their depositors or borrowers organized. Or, if they are going to be organized then it is those who now have the power who want to control the organization. Thus the political landscape is filled with pseudo-participation organizations in which the real control of decision making lies some place other than in the hands of those who are the members of the organization. The point is clear. It is rare that those with the power willingly share it.

At the same time, there are important exceptions like the delegates to major religious conventions, or the American Catholic Bishops, who are beneficiaries of the status quo but whose values and enlightened self-interest call upon them to foster positive and responsible change. They are the principal funders of community organizing all over country. Every major Protestant denomination provides financial support to organizing, and encourages local congregations and laity to explore participation in community organizations as a legitimate expression of their faith. The United States Catholic Conference's Campaign for Human Development is the principal source of financial support for community organizing in the United States, and Catholic Bishops, pastors and laity are key leaders in organizing efforts across the country.

Finally, the organizer is typically someone from outside the community. Not always, but most of the time. If there was already present a builder of a powerful organization that united the community, there would be no need for the outside organizer. But, almost by definition, impoverished and discriminated against communities that are largely powerless when it comes to making important decisions about the fate of their people, lack effective organization. Further, those within the community who may be effective organizers in their own particular sphere of influence may be viewed as rivals or threats by others who might also have influence but in a different aspect of community life.

When I first worked in a major African-American community I was initially struck by the intense rivalry which existed among the Black clergy. A very wise AME Zion pastor told me, "Mike, when the White man divided up power he gave the Black man the church in which to play his power games." The Reverend wanted Black unity, but other pastors initially saw his efforts to develop unity as threats to their power. As an outside White organizer, I wasn't a threat to anyone's power. One of the reasons that the organizer is frequently a stranger to the specific community is that he is a neutral in its internal rivalries. He can move in and out of factions, cliques, circles, and sub-communities. Never a part of any one of them, he can develop the confidence of them all. Further, it is generally understood organizers don't stay permanently in any one place. Their job is to identify, recruit, and train someone from within the local community who will take over their job—usually in a period of from five to ten years, and often in shorter time.

The organizer who starts out as an "outsider" quickly becomes an insider—or else fails in her task of building community and strength. In some cases, this process of legitimation is formalized: an organizer won't go to work in the community until a broadly-based group of respected local leaders invite her to work there and agree to pay her salary. These people are usually the "sponsors." They exhaustively explore the meaning of community organizing, and

make a determination as to whether or not they will benefit from it. An organizer with this kind of initial sponsorship soon knows more about how the community ticks than anyone else in it. She is privy to each of the various sub-communities who make up the community as a whole. Over time, a local leadership will emerge within a broadly-based community organization which will know what the organizer knows. But in the beginning, before a leadership team is developed, it is the sponsored organizer who quickly becomes the most trusted and knowledgeable person when it comes to the intricacies of the working of community life.

Not all organizers are formally invited into communities by broad groups of sponsors. If they aren't, they either will quickly earn the respect and trust of the real leaders of the people or their organizing effort will, at best, become another segment of a disorganized community. As one friend of mine put it, "you have to earn the right to meddle." In the history of the Southern civil rights movement, the first organizers who entered Black rural communities often found themselves sleeping in their cars because no one wanted to have anything to do with them. Often the first people who would deal with them were people who were "on the fringe" of the local community. The wise organizers knew that these people weren't enough. The organizers had to win the confidence of the barbers and beauticians, the undertakers and restaurant owners, the handful of teachers and other professionals who were willing to speak up, the influential lay leaders in some of the lay local congregations and their pastors, the respected day laborers, and, yes, even those informal leaders who were in the pool-hall and drinking crowd but who came to see that the freedom struggle was theirs too.

Those who fail in this task of broadening the organizing effort ignore the fact that the people in the community who have something to protect are not necessarily the enemies of organizing. They have something, and they will not (nor should they) place it in jeopardy just because someone comes along with something that sounds like a good idea. Local leaders, that is people with respect and a following in their communities, will test the new organizer. They want to know that they're dealing with more than a flash-in-the-pan effort. The 24-year old fresh off the campus or out of seminary who thinks he is going to "show this community how to get organized" is in for a disappointment. A year later he may be back in the suburbs anyway. For many, a year organizing is sort of a junior year abroad! The wiser heads of the community have seen many such people come and go; they have heard many promises that have been unfulfilled. It is their responsibility, indeed, to observe and judge those with new ideas. That is why they are often called "gatekeepers." The organizer who fails to win over a significant number of gatekeepers won't build an organization that unites the community.

I once feared being called an "outside agitator." Then one Friday night in the summer of 1963, in a small Black Baptist church in Ruleville, Mississippi, in the midst of a Friday night mass meeting for voter registration, a very old Black man got up to speak. "They calls you (referring to the civil rights workers who had come to the state) 'outside agitators,'" he said. He then lifted his arm up and bent it at the elbow, with the forearm extended down toward the floor. He began rotating his lower arm back and forth. Then he continued, "You know I've got an old-style washing machine at home. It's got a thing at the top that goes back and forth, like my arm's doin' now. They calls that thing an 'agitator.' You know what it does? It gets the dirt out." Then he sat down. Since that time, I have worn the label of "agitator" with pride.

Now is the time to meet some of these agitators and the organizations they have helped to build. The following are three reports from the field -- stories of the kind of organizing that is increasingly going on in the United States and, indeed, throughout the world.

## THE TENDERLOIN SENIOR ORGANIZING PROJECT

"It's been really hard to do this -- I was scared," says Robin King, a younger woman in one of the buildings organized by the Tenderloin Senior Organizing Project. Fear is the first hurdle to overcome in organizing tenants. Her partner, Matt Bixby, adds, "Lydia (the organizer) had to drag us kicking and screaming into these meetings. But we had to do it to save our housing." Robin and Matt's story is the story of hundreds of low-income tenants touched by TSOP's work.

In the heart of San Francisco, one of America's most cosmopolitan cities, lies the Tenderloin. It is a 45 square-block area of contrasts. One of the city's most desirable areas for investors with an eye to tourism, it is the location of expensive hotels like the Hilton and Parc 55. Hotel guests paying \$200 per night mingle on the streets with pimps, alcoholics, the mentally ill, homeless people, transvestites, burglars and pick-pockets, drug-dealers, and prostitutes, all of whom have long been in the neighborhood. The prestigious Hastings School of Law, a part of the University of California, is at one edge of the Tenderloin. Forced from other neighborhoods by gentrification and urban renewal, a growing number of African-American and Latinos, joined by smaller numbers of Yemenites, Filipinos, Native Americans, and other immigrants, live in the Tenderloin and it is the port of entry for immigrants from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam who are now one-third of its population. Between bars, cheap (and often excellent) restaurants, used book stores, porno shops, and single-room occupancy transient hotels are the homes of a more stable portion of the residents of the Tenderloin. Most of them are elderly, though there is also a significant number of mostly single downtown workers who like the neighborhood's warm climate and easy access to the center of the city. Making up 45% of the neighborhood's 25,000 residents, this group is mostly "Anglo," though it includes almost all the aforementioned.

Living in either private-market or publicly subsidized low-rent apartment buildings or "apartment-hotels," these longer-term residents of the Tenderloin are considered "losers" by American's dominant culture. On fixed or otherwise low-income budgets, some struggling with alcoholism and/or mental illness, they frequently choose a relatively isolated lifestyle. Street crime and the prevalent fear of it are additional pressures keeping people housebound. Abusive landlords and site-managers or staff deny minimum standards of decent, safe, sanitary, and secure housing. They charge usurious rates to cash social security checks. They intimidate tenants with threats of eviction. The stigma of the neighborhood leads many to want to distinguish themselves from those around them or even deny living there. Internalizing the dominant society's system of invidious status distinction, Tenderloin residents are sometimes a caricature of the mainstream pecking order. In order to deny their own low social status, they insist on their superiority to some around them. In hushed tones they will tell you they are soon leaving the neighborhood -- and are there, after all, only because of a temporary setback in their fortunes.

The neighborhood invites social concern. Over 40 government or non-profit agencies provide a variety of services to neighborhood "clients," and advocate a variety of causes in their behalf. Where issues are undertaken and won it is frequently the result of the work of professionals: lawyers, doctors, planners, clergy, social worker, and gerontologist. "Tee-SOP" (Tenderloin Senior Organizing Project) has a different approach, making it unique among the agencies. The service it provides is a community organizer. The challenge it offers to residents of the neighborhood is deceptively simple: if you want to act together with your neighbors in a

democratic and non-violent manner to improve your living conditions, we'll help you do it. The challenge is simple but not easy. Abused and exploited by landlords and others, generally ignored by City Hall, the victims of criminals, the objects of wheeling and dealing by big investors who would like to gentrify the Tenderloin for tourists and up-scale locals, most residents lack the ability to have an impact on most of those whose decisions directly effect their lives. Even worse, they doubt their own capacity to have such an impact. Self-doubt is frequently reinforced by the paternalism of professionals who create dependency in their relations with their clients. Even traditional community organizers doubted the possibility of creating associations of Tenderloin residents which could act on their own behalf. At best, they thought Tenderloin neighbors might be organized through such already existing institutions in the neighborhood as churches or some of the non-profit agencies.

The TSOP organizing challenge usually begins when a Tenderloin resident calls up wanting help in dealing with a problem with his or her landlord. Referred by either a tenant in another building or a sympathetic human services professional, the caller expects to be "helped." The "help" she or he receives isn't what was expected. The call usually leads to a face-to-face meeting. In the meeting, the TSOP organizer seeks to learn about the problems in the building, offers a sympathetic ear, and begins to develop what must become a trusting relationship if organizing is to proceed. The tenant hopes the TSOP has some magic wand to solve the problem. The organizer concludes the meeting by making a proposition: we'll help you organize your neighbors so that together you can take care of this and other problems that you face in your building and its neighborhood. Sometimes upset, frequently taken aback, rarely willing, the tenant frequently will say something like, "but I thought you were supposed to help people like me." Thus begins a conversation about organizing, about people doing for themselves rather than having things done for them, about how an organization could begin to hold an abusive landlord accountable to tenants, about how such an organization could begin to break down the widespread feelings of isolation, despair, and powerlessness that characterize the Tenderloin.

The organizer wants a commitment from the tenant to do something on her own behalf. What the something is remains to be determined. Maybe it will be to go door-knocking in the building, or to introduce the organizer to the one or two people in the building the tenant might already know, or to identify someone in the building who seems to know other people who live there. In an atmosphere dominated by fear, the organizer needs a way to slip by the landlord, undetected if at all possible, and meet some other tenants. Doing this without tenant assistance is almost impossible. The watchful eye of managers, desk-clerks, and tenants who are beholden to landlords or their staff for small favors make the access problem a difficult one. A first contact, someone who reached out to TSOP, offers a solution to this initial hurdle to organizing. In TSOP's experience, the majority of initial callers back away from even the first challenge. Those who don't, open the door for a now relatively standard TSOP approach to organizing.

With a resident legitimizing TSOP's presence, the organizer starts making personal visits to people in the building. Ideally, the names of those to be visited come from someone who know them. "Cold contacts" are the hardest to make—often the door isn't even opened for an initial conversation, and sometimes the organizer can't get past the front desk without an appointment with someone who wants to see her. If the organizer can get the tenant to talk, a conversation takes place that parallels the one that got the ball rolling. After a number of such personal visits, the organizer is ready to make another challenge to tenants who seemed interested in doing something together with their neighbors. A small planning committee is needed. The committee makes an agenda for a first meeting, does some basic research on problems that exist in the building and who might be responsible for their solution, learns what

protection tenants have for the right to meet, decides who will chair the first meeting, takes responsibility for personally inviting other tenants to the meeting, and prepares what will be a founding meeting of a tenant association.

Initially, in buildings characterized by widespread isolation, the organizer selects people who might become leaders. Those willing to assume the responsibility from the initial planning committee. Usually the conversation with the tenant will lead those unwilling to assume such responsibility to count themselves out. The process runs counter to the idea that somehow leadership spontaneously emerges in such situations. But once the process is underway, it must be taken over by the tenants themselves.

With a planning committee in place, an organizer can continue a process of continuing adult citizenship education and training. The committee members, very likely to emerge as the elected leadership of an association if the process continues successfully, begin learning a number of skills: research, personal visitation, chairing, public speaking, listening to others and challenging them to act, willingness to compromise with neighbors who see things differently or who have other priorities or who favor different solutions to the same problem, thinking tactically and strategically -- in a phrase, "thinking organizationally." What the planning committee must begin to understand and be able to articulate to others is the relationship between the problems faced by the people, and their current powerlessness to do anything about them. The committee raises the possibility of united action in an organization being the way to both solve the specific problems and overcome general powerlessness. Nor does the educational activity end here. For most residents there is a desire to be part of the country, the state, the city, the neighborhood. Beneath the outer shell of resistance, community organizers find that most people want to participate in the life of a democratic society.

Conversations take place about the relationship between tenant organizing and democratic citizenship. For those of a religious bent, a connection can also be made to their faith. For other the Bill of Rights or Declaration of Independence might be deeply meaningful. Action rooted in deeply held values is more likely to be sustained than that which relies solely on addressing a specific injustice. If a building association forms, more and more discussions of values will take place, and building leaders will begin to meet with counterparts in other buildings where larger issues are discussed and the discussion of values begins more systematically to challenge American rugged individualism, consumerism, and a status system which internalize oppression deep in the soul of the poorest and most exploited. And at every step of the way, generally at the end of every meeting or other activity, evaluation takes place to draw lessons from the experience.

Committee members learn the importance of beginning with small, immediate things that can be won by the united action of a relatively small number of tenants in a relatively brief period of time. It is out of such victories that self-confidence develops. People don't think they can accomplish goals when most of their experiences are of failure. Further, one of the most important jobs is to convince the skeptics that something different is happening. Most people have at one time or another in their lives participated in a frustrating public meeting that ended with nothing to show for it, voted for politicians who promised one thing only to do another, or seen an organization that seemed only to serve the interests of those who held its offices. The planning committee must show results which can speak for themselves. The ten or so buildings of the Tenderloin where such results have been demonstrated illustrate the nature of first actions: pet deposits reduced from \$300 to \$100, with time to spread the payment over a few month's rents, new chairs installed in a lobby, a furniture rental overcharge returned and finally abolished (saving low-income residents \$96 each); a change in a security system increasing tenants' sense of well-being in their building. Tenant associations organized with

TSOP assistance have a long list of such victories. As confidence increased in some of the buildings larger victories were won: a \$10,000 refund, ordered by the city rent board, to residents of a building with a broken elevator, in another building, owned by Hastings Law School, a precedent setting award to tenants for the loss of building security patrols.

Perhaps more important, in the best organized buildings a new sense of community or solidarity has emerged. Isolation, suspicion, and competitiveness over scarce favors distributed by managers who know how to divide and conquer are giving way to a cooperative spirit among tenants, and respect by owners and managers for tenant groups. The goal is a mutually respectful process which includes negotiations between an association and its landlord. More enlightened managers and owners come to see in such a relationship a way to stabilize buildings and create a sense of greater responsibility for facilities on the part of tenants. Tenant leaders, elected by residents in democratic and sometimes competitive elections, know how to deal with the city rent board, the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, their Police Precinct Captain, and elected officials ranging from local government to their Congresswoman. These leaders have told their story to local news media, seen themselves in print and on screen, and learned some of the joys and sorrows of an active civic life.

The stories of the leaders, and their understanding of the significance of what they are doing, best tell what TSOP is about.

On being prodded to do things themselves, Robin observes, "Lydia got us to find out ourselves what we were supposed to do." Matt says, "I hated school, and here comes Lydia acting like a teacher. I don't want to say she 'taught' us. I think she instructed us. Is there a difference?" As we continue, he says, "I care for the people I live with. I didn't used to know them, but now I do, and I care about what happens to them." Matt then says, "I learned to cooperate with people...I was kind of an exclusive kind of person...a shut in. Really, I used to hate most people. You know I didn't know anyone in my building -- and that's my building -- except for a couple that live next door. But I've been able to get together with a lot of people I never knew even existed and I didn't care." Describing how some other non-profit service agencies in the neighborhood treated the tenants, Matt says, "They use us like a puppy dog. They want to use us as a front. They know what they want, but they want a tenant up front."

Robin's and Matt's building was a particular challenge. The leader of the management-supported tenant association was also on the management staff. He wanted tenants to bring things to him for him to solve. Generally thought to be well intentioned, he was a solo player. The new tenant leadership had to struggle to get a role in the building, and it wasn't easy.

Lois Swift, age 83, is experiencing leadership for the first time. Her participation began when she discovered that "some of the supervisors in the building felt it was their place to inform us of what they wanted irrespective of whether it was the right thing or not. If they could prevent complaints from going beyond them that was their aim. As long as any problems didn't go past their position, they felt secure. When we found out that they ignored our requests and our complaints, we decided to have our own association and we'd go to the top. And that's where we succeeded. Not by letters, but by going directly to HUD (the Regional Office is in San Francisco) as a group, not as a single person. It's much more effective when you have numbers. People pay attention to you. They're not going to pay attention to one person complaining."

For Lois, as with Mat and Robin, the experience is much more than the victories won. "It's given me a personal feeling of self-esteem and confidence in anything that I attempt to do." Like other key tenant leaders, Lois attended an ORGANIZE Training Center (OTC) 4-day

workshop on community organizing. There she met people from all over the country who are engaged in organizing. "I listened and I saw how important it is that people exchange ideas on the right way to approach problems that are concerning everyone in this country, not just a particular group."

Diana Duncan, a leader of a building whose tenant body includes a number of people from Yemen, talks about the language barrier in organizing. "We have to translate to include everyone. Luckily, some of the people from Yemen know English. They translate for the others. Anglo people in the building never used to talk to the people from Yemen. Now we've gotten to know one another, we're neighbors." She, like other tenant leaders, comes to TSOP's effort to link the buildings together in an inter-building leadership group. She shares in a vision of something bigger. "Maybe we can get together people in all the buildings in the Tenderloin and begin to change the neighborhood as a whole, you know, make it safer, make it an o.k. place for people to live."

Phyllis Bursh, a young African-American Hastings Law School graduate, lives in the Hastings-owned apartment building. With a history of participation in student government as the student body president, she brought organizing skills and organizational background to her participation in the tenant association. She sums up the experience of most participating tenants in her descriptions of TSOP. "TSOP was initially the string that connected everyone together. The tenants were alienated from each other and Hastings and did not consider themselves a group. Lydia and TSOP were the centerpiece of trust, and created individual relationships with each of us that allowed us to get to know other people...What TSOP has done is created a community, not just individuals with similar problems...It's a lot different from other organizations that try to work with tenants. A lot of those people make assumptions about other people and their abilities. A lot of them are attorneys and they have a real attitude problem. For one they don't let anyone else talk because they think it all has to be done their way and that creates a lot of problems for people who are trying to be empowered."

TSOP is now in its 13th year of operation. Co-founded by University of California Public Health Department Professor Meredith Minkler, and graduate students Sheryl Franz and Robin Wechsler, the effort has always sought to create community among the residents of the Tenderloin. At first, this was done by coffee hours and other social events. The students became more sophisticated, as did their professor. They began to mix discussion of tenant concerns in their buildings and neighborhood with the socializing, and began also to figure out how to move tenants into action. Initially, small mutual aid and self-help projects were the way, under the part-time direction of doctoral student Frantz. Two students, Wechsler and Lisa Toalson, became full-time staff for the new organization. Wechsler then became TSOP Executive Director and dove into the world of organizing, directing more and more of her time to developing leaders through individual visits and action by tenant associations. With support from Minkler, and the Board that governs TSOP, the organization changed the "O" from "outreach" to "organizing." TSOP enlisted ORGANIZE Training Center to provide continuing staff and leadership consulting and training. Wechsler recruited and trained organizer Diana Miller. Miller eventually succeeded Wechsler as Executive Director for the organization. During Miller's tenure, the shift to an organizing orientation was completed. When Miller left her position, tenant leaders assumed a new task. They were actively involved in the hiring of the new director, Lydia Ferrante. TSOP's Board, made up primarily of concerned professionals, is a typical non-profit agency board of directors. It has discussed the question of tenant representation, and has chosen to deal directly with the tenant organizations rather than coopt a few of them to the board. The decision allows the tenant leaders to devote their attention to building their associations, and effectively substitutes for what is often the paternalistic inclusion of token representation on non-profit boards from "client" communities.



In many ways, the TSOP Board acts as a more traditional "sponsor committee" would for a community organizing project. Unfortunately, there is little prospect that the tenant associations could financially support the core budget of \$100,000 + for a lead organizer/director, additional organizer, and related expenses. That budget comes principally from foundations. It is a simple but largely ignored truth that a community organization can only fully control its own destiny when it raises its own money from its membership and constituency.

Many challenges remain. Freedom, as the slogan of the Southern civil rights movement of the '60s put it, is a constant struggle. The inter-building leadership group, after a promising start, failed to stay together. Issues large enough to unite several buildings often are too big for the tenant groups to impact. The immediate prospect is for several buildings under the same ownership or management to come together. Death and illness, always a concern among the low-income elderly, have taken a number of promising leaders out of action. Alcohol, drugs, and mental illness lead others to withdraw from participation. The growing Southeast Asian community doesn't participate in any TSOP organizing activities. The tendency of newly emerged leaders in the building associations to form a closed circle, forgetting how they fought to break open a circle that had excluded them is always present in organizational life.

External threats are always present. The scarcity of funding for organizing has always been a difficulty for TSOP, making it impossible to hire the two full-time organizers it needs. Lurking in the background are the investors who would dearly love to take the Tenderloin away from its present residents. Some of the HUD subsidized buildings will be eligible for conversion to market-rate housing in the next few years. Whether meaningful action can be taken by the tenant associations remains to be seen. Unlike cities of the industrial belt in the East and Midwest, San Francisco has a disappearing stock of affordable housing. As the economy gets worse, in some buildings tenants who were active in building associations now sell marijuana to supplement their incomes. One lives with a pimp whose "girls" use an empty apartment in the building for sexual encounters with Tenderloin "tricks." "It is hard to fight the dealers when they are us," observed a leader in another community organization.

TSOP, and the associations it helps build and continues to support, represents an important contribution to organizing:

\*Beyond their specific victories, the TSOP supported tenant associations demonstrate the capacity of some of the most marginalized Americans to learn, to grow, to become active in organizations that act to improve the quality of life for themselves and their low-income neighbors. TSOP's approach challenges advocates who believe that they can better speak for the oppressed than the oppressed themselves.

\*TSOP's experience bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds defies the prevailing view, widely believed by many people of good faith, that racism, sexism, ageism, classism, homophobia, and other destructive "isms" are so deeply ingrained in most Americans that only an educated elite can liberate them from their prejudices. In addition to Anglos, key participants include Filipinos, African-Americans, a Native American, and people from Yemen. The elderly are now joined (TSOP expanded its base to include "the elderly and their neighbors") by young and middle-aged people.

\*For many who participate, the mental health gains are striking. Healing results from being part of a responsible community that democratically acts on its interests and values. As one doctor said to a patient, "I don't know what you're doing different, but keep doing it." As they talked, it became clear that the only new variable in her life was her involvement with a local community organization.

\*The associations also challenge the view that most Americans are too cynical or too apathetic to participate. Apathy, in many cases, is the label placed on people who won't attend the meeting of the labeler. Rather than examining what he's doing wrong, it is easier to blame

the non-participant.

\*The associations demonstrate the deep yearning of most Americans for participation in something beyond their immediate family, or the pursuit of purely personal goals.

In Professor Minkler's views, TSOP brings together strands of thinking drawn from social support theory which connects health status to more general social support and a sense of control over one's destiny; from Paul Freire, the radical Brazilian adult educator whose work with illiterate peasants combined literacy with civic action; and from Saul Alinsky, the now deceased dean of North American community organizing.

Summing up her six and a half years as an organizer in the Tenderloin, Diana Miller put it this way, "both my religious faith and my democratic convictions have grown as a result of this experience. I will never doubt the capacity of people to do just about anything if they put their minds to it."

## BROOKLYN ECUMENICAL COOPERATIVES

"BEC gives me a structure for my life. It's a cause, a movement to do something better in the community. It has helped me grow as an individual, got me to identify my gifts and talents, and gives me a place to use them. It taught me that anger doesn't have to be a negative emotion. When there's something wrong, you should be angry about it. Now I have a focus for the anger, a constructive way to do something about it." That's how Panamanian, Brooklynite John King describes his experience in Brooklyn Ecumenical Cooperatives (BEC). "We're building a vision, and giving people the hope to dream and create the vision together." King is a volunteer leader of BEC through his Residents' Association, and an employee of a non-profit housing and financing corporation created and directed, though with its own Board, by BEC. He is one of the people making new things happen in Brooklyn.

BEC is emerging as a major voice of the low- to middle- income people of Brooklyn, a community organization with the clout to get things done, and a group with one of the boldest visions in North America's emerging community organizing movement.

The first task of the organizer, once she has been accepted in a community, is to learn the 'lay of the land' of the community in which she is going to work. In more formal terms this is called 'community analysis.' Its purpose is to learn about the people of the community, including their problems, beliefs, and various affiliations (religious, social, labor, cultural) and the major political and economic institutions whose decisions effect their lives.

Brooklyn: once the workhorse of the boroughs of New York, and a stable working-class community, Brooklyn is in trouble. Its housing stock is deteriorating. Its blue-collar jobs are disappearing - 40,000 of them in the 1980-90 period. 250,000 Brooklynites are unemployed. If Brooklyn were a city, it would be one of America's largest. Its population, if you take into account the undercount that is typical in innercities, and add another factor for illegal immigrants, is estimated at 1.2 million, almost half a million higher than the official count. Its public services are in decline. Drugs and violence are on the increase. Many of the White ethnics who could move to the suburbs did. Their place has been taken by African-Americans with roots in the Deep South, Caribbean-Americans, and by Latinos from South and Central America.

Central to Brooklyn's problems is a massive flight of capital: capital to invest in jobs; either for modernization or new enterprises, capital to invest in housing, either for rehabilitation or new construction, capital to invest in physical and social infrastructure, such as education, city services, and law enforcement. It is a place that has been "red-lined." Not only is it difficult to get a loan (the typical redlining problem,) but insult is added to injury -- Brooklyn still has millions in communal wealth: there are local deposits in Brooklyn banks, including those of many small, family-owned, manufacturing firms and of the many who are still working. But the money leaves Brooklyn in search of more profitable places for investment. Increasingly controlled by absentee corporate managers and bankers, capital that once was willing to accept a "reasonable rate of return" now seeks to "maximize profit." Managed by faceless decision-makers who crunch numbers on a computer screen, the wealth that belongs to the community is taken from it and shifted around the world in our increasingly global economy.

BEC's beginnings are in the energy crisis in the later 1970s, when 17 churches in Central and Downtown Brooklyn came together and formed an energy conservation cooperative. The very process of creating the cooperative was one of involvement of members of the congregations. Lay teams were trained to do "energy audits," and to analyze the way the church was spending its energy budget. From its initial focus on energy, the 17 churches expanded their activity. In 1983 they became involved in issues of affordable housing, forcing a major change in City policy making it possible for low and moderate income families to utilize city-owned vacant buildings as a resource for home ownership. In the same year BEC started a community credit union which now has more than 2,000 members, \$2+ million in assets, and over \$750,000 in outstanding mortgage loans. In 1989, a revolving loan fund was established to help underwrite new housing construction; the fund now has over \$1 million invested by religious and labor organizations. In 1991, a new commercial development bank was opened with two BEC members on its Board. Its mission included financing affordable housing and small businesses. In 1989, BEC entered into a joint venture with Bronx 2000 to set up a new recycling plant. In May, 1989, the organization expanded its agenda to include issues of City services, family health, and crime and drugs.

Organizer Dick Harmon was the catalyst in this effort. When he began work with the churches in the late 1970's, the energy crisis was at its height with utility bills rising at astronomic rates every month. For struggling churches in low-income neighborhoods, utility bills were an item of major interest. Thus the organizer's "handle" to begin the conversation with the pastors was an immediate self-interest. The conversation was elaborated around the question. "Do you want to do something about your utility bills?" Needless to say, many pastors were interested. The next step, a standard step for an effective organizer, was to get the problem owned by a group of key leaders. Many people are used to reacting to proposed solutions presented by someone in authority. That's how most boards of directors, sessions, parish councils, and other lay decision-making bodies relate to even the most democratically oriented pastor. The pastor proposed, there is a discussion, a decision is reached, the pastor is now delegated the task of implementing. The organizing approach makes leaders and members co-creators in the solution.

Harmon, sometimes joined by the pastor, sometimes dividing the work between himself and the pastor, and sometimes simply with approval from the pastor, visited key lay leaders and repeated the questions: "Do you want to do something about your utility bills?" They did. From that agreement came the teams that learned where their congregations were spending their utility bills, did energy audits, negotiated agreements with energy conservation companies that did energy retrofitting, and developed their own company to do the work as well. This kind of participation is key to the organizing process. It shifts people from a "consumer" relationship to their organization to one of "co-creator" of their organization. From this new role comes a real sense of ownership.

BEC has grown to some 43 active member organizations, including Roman Catholic parishes, Protestant, Unitarian and Jewish congregations, and Ethical Culture Society, one faith-based hospital, and three religious high-schools. About 80% of its roughly 40,000 members are Latinos, African-Americans or Caribbean-Americans. It is structured as an "organization of organizations." Delegates from member groups attend an annual convention which elects officers, and establishes action priorities. The elected leaders, special task-forces or committees focused on problems and issues, and between Convention "Assemblies" conduct the ongoing business of the organization. With an organizing staff of four, BEC operates on a \$250,000 + dollar core budget, most of which is raised by member-organization dues and local fundraising. It has also started non-profit corporations to address specific problems such as housing, financing, new business starts, and job training.

"What Is BEC About" describes the organization's purpose and strategy:

"We aim at both civil and economic justice.

"On the economic side, our communities require capital flows that recirculate, and new work that expresses our dignity and imagination.

"Civil justice requires civil empowerment, which centers on establishing a new relationship of accountability between our communities and the structures and leaders of government.

"Economic justice requires empowerment also. Economic empowerment centers on building up new institutions to recirculate capital through our communities, and on worker-owned enterprises."

This combination of pressure to hold mainline institutions accountable combined with the internal development of the community through new institutions is one of the many dimensions of BEC. Past efforts to do both have usually led the latter to drive out the former. For example, community economic development activities so absorb many community organizations that they are unable (or unwilling) to mount pressure on large institutions that undermine the quality of life for a neighborhood or area. A housing development corporation might build affordable housing while ignoring slum lords, gentrification, or other forces whose net effect is to diminish the total supply of affordable housing.

BEC brick and mortar results include new and renovated affordable housing, loans to home working-class home-buyers, new business enterprises, increased responsiveness from local government on a wide variety of fronts. But to focus on these is to miss the essence of the organization.

BEC is one of North American's most mature community organizations. It draws on many traditions, weaving them together in a inspiring vision statement. The Hebrew and Christian Testament, Greek city-states, feminist historians, the American democratic tradition with emphasis on Jefferson and Jackson, the nonviolence of King, Gandhi and Poland's Solidarity, modern liberation movements in Africa, Latin America and Asia, the history of mutual aid expressed in Medieval craft guilds, pre-Monarchy Israelite villages, the early Christian Church and the American populist movement, Saul Alinsky and the Industrial Areas Foundation, and economic justice teachings of the Catholic Church as elaborated and implemented in the Mondragon\* (see footnote below) worker-owned system of cooperatives in the Basque Region of Spain -- all these inform the work of BEC.

\* (Footnote: Mondragon deserves special attention. Begun some forty years ago by a Basque parish priest and several of his polytechnical college students, it is now a successful network of more than 170 worker-owned-and operated cooperatives serving over 100,000 people and

providing over 21,000 secure, well-paying jobs for its worker-members. With almost 2 billion dollars in annual sales, over \$2.9 billion of assets in its cooperatively owned bank, and its own cooperatively owned and operated social service system. Mondragon extends the idea of democracy into economic life. The system is totally owned by its members, has a 6:1 ratio between its highest and lowest paid workers, and has had virtually no business failures. It is increasingly studied by people from around the world who are seeking new path of economic development).

You know something is different about BEC when you read the conclusion of its vision statement: "Our perspectives on both civil and economic empowerment rise from, and intertwine with, a creation-centered spirituality. Key parts of this spirituality are: (a) sacredness of the universe...; (b) the role of the human enterprise is to respond to God's full creation, in awe; (c) the role of civil and economic empowerment is to expand the capacity of communities, families and persons to respond to God's creation, and to expand our capacity to celebrate; (d) civil and economic empowerment, therefore, serve sacred ends, and their elements cannot be seen as commodities. Empowerment gives birth to justice. Justice serves - and expresses - creation. This sweeps aside many traditional barriers to universal creation, such as discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, age, even species."

Yet another dimension of the role of the organizer is that of creating a vision for new possibilities of civic life. It is important to understand that this vision emerges in a shared process. It is not something that the organizer dictates from "on high." Rather, it comes out of a dialogue that connects religious and secular democratic values to possibilities for action. The vision of the organizer will determine the questions she initially asks, but it is the discussion in the local community that will dictate the vision that finally is agreed upon.

None of what BEC say could be translated into programmatic activity and issue victories without its major focus on leadership development. Another thing that distinguishes BEC from groups whose programs may appear to be similar is the fact that with a relatively small budget the organization is translating words into deeds. It is increasingly taken seriously by the local political leaders. During the mayoral campaign of 1989, some 1,300 BEC delegates, through a panel of seven leaders, questioned then-candidate David Dinkins and obtained from him a commitment to work with the organization if he was elected. Since that time, hundreds of specific issues have been resolved with various departments whose heads were instructed by the Mayor to negotiate with BEC.

Those who addressed the candidate emerged from the BEC leadership development process which "...has brought forth a continually expanding pool of real community leaders, who can recruit and train others. It has bonded strangers together across religious, cultural, ethnic and gender lines. Our process starts with listening and relationship-building." BEC began sporadic formal leadership training sessions in 1987; these matured into the "Institutes," of which there are two levels: "Intro" and "Advanced." The introductory sessions now are offered in English and Spanish, with a Creole session to begin in January, 1993. Now over 200 persons per year complete the six workshops and their 19 hours of training. Participants are selected by BEC member organizations, and are accountable to them. It is expected that those who participate in the introductory series will use what they learn. Built into the culture of BEC is an emphasis on accountability. Just as the organization holds the Mayor or a banker accountable, so its leaders learn to hold one another accountable. If a participant in the first series didn't participate in on-going organizational activity she or he wouldn't attend the advanced sessions.

Subjects that are "worked through" in the highly participatory sessions include: "gift" (what each person has to offer, everyone is assumed to be able to bring a gift to the organization -

- it is a matter of discovering what that gift is); "self-interest, as contrasted with selfishness, sources of anger, relations of anger to organizing, values and vision; different dimensions of empowerment; the public arts (How to listen, speak, run a meeting, negotiate, and distinguish a problem from an issue); and, implications of the paradigm shift from Industrial to Post-Industrial society." The larger purposes of the sessions include: "relationship-building, understanding each other's heritage (including culture and history); strengthening the networks within and among member institutions, articulation of values and vision, and strategic planning."

Garry Braithwaite is one of BEC's leaders who has gone through the Institute process. A 52-year old Black veteran of many struggles for justice, he says, "The unique thing about BEC is the institutes. No other organization I know spends so much time educating its members. The Institutes take place in the evenings and on week-ends so that working people can take part. In a lot of other organizations you can't fully participate if you have a regular job. The Institutes brought my past experiences together, providing me a conceptual overview. There are aspects of power we never gain control over so our dreams aren't realized. For example, I was active in the Ocean-Hill Brownsville community control of public schools effort of the early 1970's. We got in a major struggle with the Teachers Union. In retrospect, I can see we didn't realize that 'the powers that be' allowed the union and the community to clash in order to dissipate the power of both. I'm seeing the same thing now with the banks. They want community groups which could have the same interest fighting one another."

Braithwaite sees BEC as an opportunity to translate his Catholic faith into effective action. His job is in the investment banking business. He gets to use his business acumen as a volunteer leader helping BEC understand how finances and economics works.

John King, now a resident building "super" in a 65-unit non-profit development, also went through the Institutes. He remembers the experience vividly, and excitedly shares his lessons from it. "The main lessons are that you have to build relationships. I do that all the time. 90% of it is listening, asking people questions, and sharing your own story. The tenants know I'm on their side. Identifying my gifts and talents was another lesson. I have the gift of gab; now I put it to good use. We also looked at how economic pressures on the individual lead to all kinds of stress in the person's life. You can't isolate the family or the individual from the pressures that the person's facing. We have a fictional character named Miss Ann. Then I learned about the positive uses of anger, and we got into discussions of the cosmos and ecology." King emphatically concluded, "It was a unique experience."

The careful, intentional, highly focused leadership development process is the heart of what makes BEC grow. It creates an ever larger pool of leaders, an emphasis on team leadership as distinct from one that looks for the single charismatic leader, and an expectation that deep relationships of trust must be built between leaders and their followers. Braithwaite thinks this shared leadership is critical. "I've seen someone rise up from community leadership then want to keep his own power. He'll say, 'you do it my way.' What he's really saying is that now he's got the power, and no one's going to take it from him. In BEC we build toward shared leadership. We constantly remind ourselves that BEC is a tree whose roots are in its member organizations, and in the member groups it is the individual members who are the roots. Every year we rotate elected leadership. Delegates have to continually do one-to-one visits with members. Your influence in the organization grows as you teach others to develop their power. We have too many self-confident leaders who won't tolerate a big ego leader who wants the power for himself. The way this organization is constructed you couldn't get away with trying to monopolize power." Then Braithwaite wryly notes, "We've lost some churches because pastors began to get threatened by lay people asking questions. But the pastors who remain see how this helps build their congregations. Stronger leadership helps in the congregations too."

From its inception to the present, BEC has been guided in its development by Richard Harmon, who cut his organizing teeth with Saul Alinsky in the mid-1960's, worked with Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation, then began charting his own course. As Harmon puts it, "Organizing is teaching, not academic-type teaching which is confined for the most part to stuffing data into people's ears..(but) teaching which rests on people's life experiences, drawing them out, developing trust, going into action, disrupting old perceptions of reality, developing group solidarity, watching the growth of confidence to continue to act, then sharing in the emotional foundation for continual questioning of the then-current *status quo*." Nothing is more central to the work of the full-time organizer than the development of new leadership, and the continued training and education of more sophisticated leaders. All situations are seen as opportunities for learning. Thus pre-action preparation and post-action debriefing and evaluation are as important for the future of the organization as the actual agreements (or lack thereof) that come from any meeting with decisionmakers in the "power structure." Both training in skills (how to negotiate, run meetings, conduct personal visits, do research, etc.) and education in civic life (political theory, religious values, economics, etc.) are continually on the leadership development agenda.

BEC is creating political power for the people of Downtown and Central Brooklyn. Having established its ability to hold public officials accountable, BEC shifted its focus to the business community. The organization targeted area banks aiming to create home ownership loan programs. As reported on July 1, 1992, in *Newsday*, "At a spirited convention in downtown Brooklyn last month, 1,000 BEC delegates celebrated an informal agreement with Citibank, Chase, Chemical, Banco Popular, Republic National and National Westminster Banks. Under the agreement, the banks will work with nonprofit organizations to develop...programs to help potential homeowners -- especially first-time minority home buyers -- qualify for mortgages..." Celebrating the bank victory, BEC President Rev. Ariel Lord, said, "We are at a turning point in the history of our communities in Brooklyn. We are holding the banks accountable. Capital for home ownership and work can stabilize communities and heal our pain."

Bob Rosenbloom, Vice President for Corporate Social Policy at the Chemical Bank, sits across the table from BEC. He's eager to describe a number of programs the bank has to assist low-income communities, and wonders why BEC approached Chemical Bank confrontationally about issues that hadn't previously been put on the negotiating table. At the same time, he recognizes BEC as "an important catalyst," and says that BEC action "prodded" banks to establish a consortium to assist low-income potential home-owners to qualify for mortgages. He calls BEC "very representative of its membership."

While BEC is building community power, it is also carefully non-partisan. "We do not endorse candidates. We ask candidates to endorse and actively work for BEC's Justice Agenda," a BEC document explains. Too often, community groups and leaders become involved in electoral politics without the power to hold politicians accountable after elections. Communities are often divided, with different politicians bringing each of their respective followings into the fray and dividing people whose interests and values are similar. But no matter who is elected the community loses. Caught in the web of bureaucracy, pressured by the cost of present and future campaigns with its attendant dependence on large contributors, and the desire to move a political career along, the politician too often forgets his promises. The current withdrawal from the electoral process by a majority of Americans is testimony to their disgust with politics as usual. BEC has reversed the process. It invites candidates to respond to its agenda; lets its constituents know what they say, then holds them to their promises after the election is over.

BEC addresses one of "institutionally-based" community organizing's weaknesses. Typical participation in congregation-based organizing projects is from working-class and middle-class members of congregations. In many cases, lower-income "unaffiliated" people have no avenues to become involved. BEC's solution to this problem exemplifies its willingness to tackle the toughest organizing questions. In its effort to address the affordable housing problem in Brooklyn, BEC created "New Communities," a developer providing housing for homeless, low-, moderate- and middle-income families. Then BEC took a step that takes it qualitatively beyond what most nonprofit community based agencies are willing to do. It helped the residents organize with two objectives: "First, to negotiate with New Communities over building management items; second, to participate in the larger development process of BEC." For housing management items, tenants receive staff assistance from New Communities. This could lead to the creation of management controlled groups, but there is a check of two types. Coming "from the bottom up," residents can participate in the Institutes and become active in BEC where they learn how to hold decision makers accountable. And, coming "from the top down," BEC is the (democratic) parent body for New Communities and is itself able to hold its development organization accountable. And, such a structure makes it possible to attract a high productivity/high integrity staff. Non-profits generally don't support the independent organization of their "clients." At best, an in-house staff person, employed by the agency, organizes an advisory body to the agency. At worst, "clients" are involved for fundraising purposes, but rarely heeded when substantive issues arise. Nor do the client groups have access to independent staff assistance. BEC structurally and programmatically addressed both problems.

"People (now living in "New Communities" housing) who were formerly homeless, many of whom are still on some form of public assistance or who are in minimum-wage jobs, are coming alive. They are discovering that BEC is not going to do it for them, and that they have vast gifts to develop as they participate in the wider empowerment process." This development takes place in the Institutes to which building association leaders are sent as delegates for training. The Delegates "are going through the Institutes alongside more working class and middle class church members, from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, discovering they do not have to be intimidated, and that they can utilize this process to focus their anger and energy." They begin to know each other not just over their own housing questions, but in sharing their life experiences and dreams, discovering gifts and talents, and taking hope from the sharing that is built into the Institute process.

The resident association leaders who go through the Institutes now are part of BEC's program of mutual aid and institutional change that is pressing for more housing for other families and for capital to help the total community. Unlike the typical "client group" that is captive of its institutional sponsor (on-site committees at public schools; HUD sponsored tenant associations in public housing; non-profit agency "advisory committees," and so on), BEC integrates the building association leaders into a larger organization while preserving their autonomy to deal with local matters in their housing developments.

As it matures, BEC is addressing some fundamental questions about the American economy, and other major American institutions.

As the economy continues to decline, it is harder for BEC victories to stem the tide. A recent BEC internal discussion paper notes the difficulties now facing the organization in reaching significant agreements with major government and private sector decision-makers. For example, demands raised by BEC for job and affordable housing, not jails, met with a deaf ear in the Dinkins Administration. Efforts to "leverage" the private sector into intervening in the fight were "for the most part greeted with wordy avoidance." BEC describes jail construction

as "the biggest economic development program in most rural counties in upstate New York. It is certainly one of the growth industries of this city government, led by Mayors Koch and Dinkins. That policy is the result of having, as a nation, given up on the question of work and race. We have...no jobs program, but we certainly have a jails program. We say, as a nation: we won't employ 'em, so let's jail 'em." The paper then makes the connection to congregations and families:

"Against this tremendous loss of work, it is easy to understand what has happened to the families of our congregations. Also against this loss of work, the smart marketing people who finance sophisticated drug organizations moved in with heroin and cocaine. They know that loss of self-worth, when blue-collar breadwinners lose their work, produces family chaos. That chaos is a massive marketing opportunity for drugs and guns and jail-building." The paper pessimistically continues, "But we are not going to get work in large numbers. Government (at all levels) is bankrupt--both morally and financially. Private sector leadership has run out of answers."

Part of the BEC strategic response is to look to the internal resources of the community. "Over the last 30 years, most strong community organizations have assumed that the resources necessary to cure the ills of their communities lie OUTSIDE those communities. Their strategies have been to move against, then negotiate with, major government or private sector decision-makers who would deliver, usually, public and private capital into those communities.

"Conditions have changed. Those outside moneys are no longer available. Oh, they are available, but they are going to buy Congress, or buy cheap labor in Third World or Eastern European markets, or pay off private and public debt from the 80s."

BEC identifies the internal resources as the gifts of its people, their networks and congregations, their work skills, and the capital which they can "trap" and keep in the community through their credit union and newly opened bank. We are, the strategy paper continues, "in an unprecedented cultural-social crisis in this society (which is) the result of being 'in between myths.' We are at the end of the Industrial Paradigm, and the emerging Ecological Paradigm is only barely visible far out on the horizon." The paper then describes a new sequence of questions to be asked in the leadership training institutes, questions that would lead to the programmatic development of new ways to organize work and community life. At the heart of these new ways is cooperative ownership of local enterprises.

Again, BEC is at the cutting edge in its exploration of what is to be done. It raises the use of mutual aid and community developed institutions to a strategic level in the community organization tool-kit. At the same time, after a period of flirtation with withdrawal from negotiations with major institutions, the organization seeks to balance this approach with negotiations with banks and others thus returning to the balance expressed in the BEC purpose statement. Rather than walking away from the "outside money" because it is too difficult to get it back into the community, BEC is looking for ways to make the two approaches mutually supportive. For example, a negotiated settlement with banks for an end to red-lining practices might also involve those banks investing in New Communities housing. Other negotiations might lead to deposits or investments in the community-owned bank that has two BEC members on its Board. As Garry Braithwaite sees it, "One of our weapons is the Community Reinvestment Act (which requires investment and lending in low-income communities) and the regulators. The mega-banks have to go to the regulators, and that's one of our handles. There's still a small degree of leverage in the political arena, and we have to use it."

Too many organizing efforts have turned inward; indeed a whole strategy for renewing inner-cities is based on the assumption that either you can't or you shouldn't challenge the dominant institutions of the society. Most community economic development corporations implicitly or explicitly accept this assumption. The only thing they are willing to fight for is their own funding. The idea seems to be that a New Jerusalem can be built in Old Babylon without Babylon's Tower tumbling down! BEC has moved beyond the "either-or" choice of looking inward versus changing the larger world. It seeks to do both. There is both opportunity and risk in this strategy, but it is the one most likely to pay-off in the long run. The opportunity is to both hold dominant institutions accountable and build models of what new institutions can be like. The risk is that the new institutions begin to absorb so much of BEC's time and talent that the accountability strategy gets lost. The organizer's question about "running programs" shouldn't be either-or. Rather, it should be whether any particular "program" (typically operated through a non-profit run by community residents) will swallow the larger purpose of the community organization or help further it.

In a July 12, 1992 strategy discussion paper, "Unpacking Re-Investment," the central questions facing community organizing are explored systematically. Insurance, utilities, pension funds, the medical system, and the food system are all critically examined. How does each take money out of Brooklyn? Where do they invest it? What are the people of Brooklyn paying for? For example, in its discussion of the food system the paper asks, "How much (of our money) re-circulates in the Brooklyn economy? How much goes to Florida and California? How much of it is for diesel oil for cross-country trucks?" And a bigger question is raised as well. Do we want to increasingly move toward a world economy in which multi-national corporations bring us oranges from Brazil, lettuce from California, running shoes from Indonesia, and automobiles from Korea, Japan or Mexico? How do we control such corporations? How do we stop them from moving their capital whenever communities make demands on them that challenge their sole prerogative to do whatever they want or ability to maximize their profits? Is it acceptable to us that such corporations move pollution from the United States to countries where workers earn \$5.00 a day and organizing a union is likely to cost you not only your job but your life? Or do we want a de-centralized economy in which local communities control their politics and economics? Indeed, can one control the former without controlling the latter?

The circle of empowerment is completed as BEC looks at each set of negotiations with external decision-makers and explores opportunities for leadership development and expansion. Organizing involves "builds" and "wins." Each campaign undertaken must not only win something for the community, it should also strengthen the capacity of the community organization to successfully engage in new campaigns which bring about even more significant changes in the quality of community life. The BEC strategy paper concludes by exploring how reinvestment campaigns will train new leaders, recruit new member organizations, deepen the understanding of participants of the world in which they live, and deepen the values of the people of the organization.

Questions remain. Should BEC be seeking out other allies in the community organizing movement so that it can effectively take its agenda to the regional, state, and national levels? Community organizing is increasingly characterized by national "networks": National Peoples Action (NPA), Association of Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), PICO, Citizen Action, Direct Action Research and Training (DART), the mid-west based Gamaliel Institute, and the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). There are signs that indicate that within the movement power is shifting from local groups to organizing centers or national leadership. Is that good? Should BEC be seeking to influence and/or be part of one or more of the networks, while at the same time insisting on its autonomy?

Similarly, BEC's pioneering look at worker ownership need not be done in isolation from all the workers who will remain in the mainstream public, nonprofit or private sector. Should BEC look at new stirrings in the labor movement for another arena of strategic engagement? Can it translate its understanding of work as creation (and the priority of labor over capital) into arrangements with public employee unions which bypass bureaucracies and seek to create horizontal partnerships between those who use and produce public services--with such partnerships preceding negotiations with public boards and bureaucracies? Can it encourage its members who want to raise these questions to do so in their own unions--whether present leadership wants to hear them or not? Can it work with private sector unions to support their more traditional struggles for the wages, hours, benefits and working conditions of workers while raising with these unions such questions as worker ownership, worker control over the work process, and worker voice in planning and investment decisions?

Whatever BEC does in the future, it is likely to be defining issues and approaches that others will follow. Its mistakes will be valuable lessons for its leadership, as well as for others who toil in the vineyard of civic and economic justice. This, of course, is BEC's most fundamental lesson. If what is done is democratically arrived at by the people who are an organization's members, then setbacks are also lessons, defeats can strengthen the will to resist, and community-building will only be deepened if the process of listening, analyzing, reflecting, acting and evaluating is a continuous one. The magic of democracy is that the cure for its ills is more of it. BEC takes democracy to its furthest edges, teaching all of us something in the process.

## FARM LABOR ORGANIZING COMMITTEE (FLOC)

"Harvest of Shame" was the title of a 1950s television documentary on the plight of farm workers in the United States. Produced and narrated by renowned radio and TV journalist Edward R. Murrow, the film vividly portrayed the conditions of the tillers of the soil: low-wages, long hours, poor working conditions, no health care. They were without protection of Federal or state laws. Their children often were unable to go to school because of their migratory work life. They were often without toilet facilities where they worked, living in shacks, and often victimized by unscrupulous labor contractors. Little in their conditions has changed since. Today, as a result of mechanization in the U.S., and the movement of production and processing to low-wage, Third world countries, there are only about two million farm workers in America. There is also a new danger to workers and their families: death and illness brought on as a result of heavy chemical fertilization and spraying of agricultural products. A few rays of hope shine; one of them is the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), based in Northern Ohio, and now spreading its wings into other parts of the Midwest, Texas, Florida and Mexico.

FLOC has done what few thought possible. Since its founding some 25 years ago it has won major contracts with growers and processors of two major agricultural crops--tomatoes and cucumbers that are grown for canning pickles. In the course of winning these contracts, FLOC faced the most extraordinary difficulties, invented some new strategies and tactics, and confounded those who said it couldn't be done. Inspired by the work of Cesar Chavez in California, whose farm worker organizing efforts began a few years earlier, FLOC is now emerging as one of the few successful farm labor organizing efforts of the century.

There are some important distinctions to be made in the story of FLOC and its organizer. Unlike the other community organizations in this report, FLOC is principally an organization at the workplace. That difference makes organizing both simpler and more complex. Successful organizing of a workplace into a union is ultimately expressed in a contract between the employer and the employees which recognizes the union as the "sole bargaining agent" for the workers. The contract goes on to specify the wages, hours, benefits, and working conditions of those who are covered by it.

For the worker, participating in an organizing effort at the workplace involves the daily prospect that she or he might be fired--thus losing the principal means of livelihood. In addition, a representative of the employer in the person of a supervisor or foreman is almost always present. High risks face the worker in an unorganized situation if the employer is determined to prevent a union from gaining recognition, and is willing to back up that determination with harassment, intimidation, and firing. It was this situation that Baldemar Velasquez faced as the founding organizer of FLOC.

## FARM WORKERS AND GROWERS

Farm workers have always been "The Other." On the mainland of the United States, Blacks, Filipinos, Puerto Ricans, Jamaicans, Mexicans and Mexican Americans, and poor whites were dominant amongst those who worked in the fields. They were "wetbacks," "rednecks," and "niggers." As The Other, they could be less-than-fully human to those who hired, housed, and educated them. It was thus tolerable that they did backbreaking stoop labor with a short-handled hoe; that their children were out of school at harvest time or when the family had to move to follow the crops; that they were paid below minimum-wage because the law didn't cover them; that they lived in shacks; and that they had no health care.

Most farm workers move with the crops in "migrant streams" that begin with Winter crops in the South, and move with the sun to the North. There are three principal streams, beginning in Florida (fed by seasonal workers from the Caribbean), South Texas, and Southern California (with both the latter fed by Mexican seasonal workers). Others, smaller in number, "settle out" in "shoestring communities" where they live year-round, working a variety of crops if they can, and getting whatever other source of income they can find when no farm work is available. In places like California, where there can be almost year-round agricultural employment, farm workers are more able to live stable community lives. Finally, a small number are simply day-laborers, hoping to find work at daily hiring centers.

Migrant farm workers are typically signed up by labor contractors who served as the intermediaries between growers and their workers. The grower deals with the labor contractor who, in turn, hires a crew. Labor contractors often demand a "kick-back" (a portion of the farm workers' pay) in exchange for hiring. Other patterns exist as well. At peak harvest time in some states there are "shape-ups" where hundreds of unemployed, often people with alcohol or other problems, show up hoping to be sent out as a day laborer to be part of the harvest. In the Deep South, tenant farming was prevalent. A tenant farmer lived on a plantation, and was paid a percentage of what was grown on the land he planted and harvested. Never having enough to buy seed, fertilizer, and otherwise pay his bills, he would be in debt to the "bossman" at outrageously high interest rates. National investigatory commissions exposed the near-slavery practices, but they persisted until tenancy no longer made economic sense to the land-owners. Yet another variation was "share-cropping," in which the farm worker was

treated as a self-employed person who received a share of market price of his harvest. Both tenants and sharecroppers faced another kind of abuse: they often had to sell to a farmer and/or processor who cheated them on weights or to whom they were in debt for equipment they rented--again at high interest rates. Sharecropping was the dominant mode of work in Northern Ohio when FLOC began organizing there.

At its best paternalistic, and at its worst highly exploitative, the labor contractor system allows contractors to play individual worker against individual worker. Those who won't give to the contractor what he wants don't get the job. The task of the organizer in such a situation is to convince people (in this case farmworkers) that not only is there a better way, but that it is possible to achieve that better way without totally sacrificing everything that is important.

Until the 1950s when corporate farming began to boom, and with exceptions such as Deep South cotton, Hawaii sugar and pineapples, and the California Central Valley, most American growers were "family farmers." Many were themselves "self-made men," often first generation European immigrants who settled on land that was uncultivated before they created something with their own blood, sweat and tears. Swedes, Germans, Danes, Croatians, Slovenians, Armenians, Dutch, Italians, and others developed ethnic enclaves characterized by pride and a strong work ethic. Themselves often marginal, The Other, the farm worker, was the lower status person over whom they could assert their own status.

The small farmer has his own problems. Susceptible to the vagaries of the market, often the victim of droughts, hail storms, floods and other natural disasters, dependent on bankers, grain elevator owners, food processors, the railroads and other large private institutions beyond his control. He is discriminated against by governmental policies which favor the trend toward concentration of ownership in larger and larger units. The family farmer faces extinction. The Populists organized such farmers at the end of the 19th century, and the Non-Partisan League made major gains for them in the early 20th Century, especially in North Dakota. But the Populist vision of small farmers forming producer cooperatives, developing their own marketing and financing systems, and forming alliances with urban and rural workers was destroyed by racism from within and the power of an alliance of bankers, food processors, railroads, and government from without.

By the 1960s, the largely ethnic-German tomato and cucumber farmers in the town of Leipsic, Putnam County, Northern Ohio worked on contract for such major corporate enterprises as Campbell's, H.J. Heinz, and Libby's. Themselves unorganized, they had no bargaining power of their own. But the farmworker was below them on the great American social pecking order. Though the resident (as distinct from migrant) farm workers and the growers both went to St. Mary's Catholic Church and were civil to one another, there was an unbreakable line between them.

## EFFORTS TO ORGANIZE

In the 1930s, efforts were undertaken by social gospel religionists and political radicals to organize farm workers. But when labor's Magna Carta, the Wagner Act, was passed, farm workers were excluded from its protection. Urban workers needed southern Democratic Party votes, and a scattering of others, outside the emerging procedures of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) which provided for a democratically selected "sole bargaining agent" to represent workers in negotiations with their employer. Similarly, conservative rural Democrats teamed with Republicans to destroy the Farm Security Administration, a New Deal

agency which provided farm worker housing, and whose work was made famous in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Without NLRB coverage, farm worker organizing declined. Intramural jurisdictional battles, differing organizing strategies, and rivalries among left political groups all contributed to the failure to organize the farm workers. But the horrible wages, hours, working and living conditions persisted.

With the end of World War II, concern for the plight of the farm worker again emerged. The National Farm Labor Advisory Committee and The Sharecropper and Tenant Farmer Fund became national spokesperson organizations of concerned religious, labor, minority, liberal, and radical leaders who sought to focus the attention of the country on farm labor conditions. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) started an organizing effort in California, and the Packinghouse Workers Union of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) tried to organize farm workers as well. But the efforts sputtered. Largely crippled by the anti-Communist scare tactics of the McCarthy era, as well as its own internal purges of "Reds," the labor movement as a whole failed to provide the support that efforts such as those of the Packinghouse Workers required. The highly-touted post-World War II CIO organizing campaign in the Deep South ended in failure. In California and the Southwest when workers were willing to strike they were almost immediately replaced by imported Mexican workers who came to the United States as part of the "Bracero program"--this despite the fact that the Federal legislation which created the program explicitly prohibited the use of Braceros as strikebreakers.

The efforts of concerned groups continued. The Bracero program was terminated. Small gains were made on a state-by-state basis for farm workers. The problem was made more visible. Migrant health care and education programs were established. Church groups started ministries to farm workers. Dedicated lobbyists, working on shoestring budgets, tirelessly sought to convince legislatures to extend protection to farm workers. Study after study repeated what was already known: the plight of the farm workers.

In California, an organizer named Fred Ross, Sr. was developing the largely Mexican-American (and mostly urban) Community Service Organization (CSO). Hired by Saul Alinsky, Ross pioneered the development of a direct-membership community organization. Since the hierarchy of the Catholic Church wouldn't involve itself in the issues of its Mexican and Mexican-American parishioners, Ross went underneath the official structure of the church. Finding sympathetic priests and nuns, along with others who had the confidence of the people, he got himself introduced to respected Chicanos and Mexicanos up and down the State. In the then still rurally oriented city of San Jose, in the Sal Si Puedes ("get out if you can") neighborhood, Ross met Cesar Chavez. Thus began a 40-year partnership that lasted until Ross' recent death in 1992.

For Cesar Chavez, CSO was a new beginning. From a farm working family, he was uninvolved in social causes of any kind when Ross met him. Indeed, Chavez was offended by this "outside Anglo" who had come into his neighborhood, and had a plan to beat him up. But as Ross spoke in a small "house meeting" to Chavez and his friends, the plan evaporated, and Chavez got hooked. From local leadership, Chavez moved to statewide leadership, then became the full-time paid Executive Director of the CSO. As he tells the story, he tried to persuade the CSO to expand from its largely urban membership to organizing farm workers. But the working and middle-class Chicanos weren't interested. By the end of the 1950s Chavez left his position, and with his family returned to the farm worker town of Delano where he slowly began organizing farm workers. Chavez called Ross "my secret weapon," because of the lanky Anglo's organizing savvy. Chavez assembled a talented group of Chicano and Anglo organizers, later merged his effort with a predominantly Filipino farm worker group into the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFW), took on growers, the Teamsters, and the

indifference of the AFL-CIO, and won a charter from the labor movement as an independent international union. By the late 1960s, the UFW had catapulted the farm worker cause into the national news media with a series of strikes in the California table grape and lettuce industries. Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King were allies; nonviolence was a major principle; tactical ingenuity was ever present. With a national boycott, Chavez won a series of farm labor contracts in the California grape industry, then spread to other crops. And the UFW inspired other organizing efforts as well. One of them is FLOC, whose founder and President, Baldemar Velasquez, calls the UFW "the standard bearer of the farm worker movement."

## FLOC COMES TO OHIO

FLOC was founded in 1967 in Northern Ohio by Velasquez, a third generation Mexican-American son of a farm working family who had moved to the area from South Texas. Velasquez went to public schools, starred as a football player, got good grades, and went on to college. With the rise of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, he joined others as a volunteer in Cleveland's Black community where a civil rights activist said to him, "Balde, why are you here? Why aren't you helping your own oppressed people?" He returned to Putnam County, driving from one farm worker community to another, telling migrants and locals "you've got rights too." With Cesar Chavez in the news media, a sympathetic national climate for the farm worker, and the civil rights movement around him, Velasquez became an organizer.

As a local person from a farm-working family, Velasquez had no problem becoming legitimate in the community he sought to organize. Like Cesar Chavez, he represents a combination of roles. In organizing terminology, he is a "leader-organizer."

Velasquez' early efforts to organize single growers failed because if a grower signed an agreement with FLOC, then raised his price to his corporate customer, the buyer would simply go to the lower-priced competition. In August, 1978, after sporadic efforts and few wins, FLOC organized a tomato strike. Sue Gorisek described the impact in Ohio Magazine: "The strike affected Campbell's processing plant in Napoleon and Libby's cannery in Leipsic. And it affected every farm in Northwest Ohio that was under contract to provide tomatoes for either company. It was the largest agricultural strike in Ohio history. Some 2,000 migrant farm workers walked out of the tomato fields, refusing to pick. An estimated forty percent of the tomato crop was lost. Libby's plant at Leipsic claimed over \$1 million in losses during the first three days of the strike."

Putnam County exploded: A cross was burned, a FLOC volunteer lawyer badly beaten (he still suffers the effects), a nun punched in the face by a farmer, pickets sprayed with pesticides, and the sheriff's office served as a strike-breaking arm of the growers until a Toledo state court enjoined it from its illegal behavior. In Leipsic, St. Mary's pastor Fr. Charles Ritter put it this way: "The farm owners felt betrayed; they truly believed they had treated the migrants fairly, and FLOC's literature made them out to be monsters. They also felt that Baldemar should have been more grateful for everything Putnam County had done for him (meaning food baskets, hand-me-down clothes, and athletic opportunity at the local high school)."

The new farm worker behavior didn't fit the stereotype of The Other. The Mexicans were thought to be a happy, docile people, of low-energy, intelligence, and ambition, who enjoyed

their Gypsy life. It was a classic in paternalism. Since "our Mexicans" wouldn't act this way, there had to be "outside agitators" behind Velasquez.

The strike continued into 1979 when Campbell told growers to mechanize tomato picking if they wanted a contract. Those who couldn't afford the \$50,000 - \$100,000 for a harvester lost their contracts. One-third of the jobs were eliminated. State government agencies warned that if strikers' demands were met, local tomatoes would be too expensive to meet the competition. The State Employment Service recruited strike-breakers. In 1980, farmers shifted to less profitable (and less labor intensive) grain crops. Eventually, the Leipsic cannery closed. Everyone was hit hard - the farm workers the hardest. But they persisted. The strike lasted seven years.

In 1979, FLOC also decided to target Campbell's as the real power in the situation. It called a boycott, and soon won the support of the same national cast who had supported Chavez and the California farm workers: the National Council of Churches, individual denominations, some Catholic Bishops, some unions, minority community organizations, liberals, and progressives. Campbell's claims the boycott didn't affect their sales, but its corporate image began to be tarnished.

Soon after the boycott began, FLOC also introduced the "corporate campaign," and its principal advocate Ray Rogers. The idea of a corporate campaign is simple: isolate a targeted company from its sources of money, whether they be banks who lend and invest, other investors, suppliers, or anyone else against whom some kind of pressure might be placed to make them an ally, though often an unwilling one, against the principal target. Rogers had pioneered the use of the corporate campaign in the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union campaign against the textile giant, J.P. Stevens. One such target was the Philadelphia National Bank. Churches, unions, and progressive groups picketed. Depositors organized to close their accounts.

Whether sales were affected or not, Campbell's responded to the cumulative impact of the boycott and corporate campaign by establishing what came to be called the "Dunlop Commission." Headed by John Dunlop, who had earned a reputation as a mediator in tough management-labor disputes while serving as President Gerald Ford's Secretary of Labor, the Commission was initially set up to aid Campbell's in starting a private "poverty program." It soon became involved in the farm labor dispute, and was a key in bringing the parties to the negotiating table. Influenced by Dunlop and his Commission, and having discovered that FLOC was not going to disappear, Campbell's abandoned the claim that it couldn't negotiate because the growers were independent.

FLOC came up with an important social invention. While many had argued that smaller businesses were often only fronts for large corporations behind them, no one had thought to bring both to the same negotiating table. In 1986, a three-party agreement was signed. There was a modest wage increase - \$.55/hour for workers on mechanized farms, a paid holiday, limited medical insurance, and the installation of toilet facilities where workers would have easy access. The most important feature of the agreement, however, was that Campbell's had to purchase a fixed portion of each grower's crop. A further benefit was that the growers themselves began to become organized, making it possible for FLOC to deal with a single association rather than a multiplicity of small farmers, and for the farmers to deal with the processors as a bloc as well. Following the Campbell agreement, similar accords were struck with H.J. Heinz and Libby's. Velasquez also learned an important lesson. "If you follow the money," he says, "you will get to the power."



Other aspects of the organizer's role is highlighted in this long struggle. The organizer is a strategist and tactician. Like the general of an army, or the campaign manager in an election campaign, the organizer is a key person in the development of the strategy and tactics of a campaign. Velasquez had to think at two levels. On the one hand, what was likely to win. On the other, what would be acceptable to the people he was organizing. A tactic that violated the basic values of the people or that frightened them away from the effort would be useless no matter how effective it might be with adversaries.

At times, the organizer is also a principal source of belief that this campaign can succeed. A long-term campaign has to be broken down into winnable parts. If not, morale will decline and people will drift away. Thus, for example, endorsements by various religious groups of the organizing effort and its subsequent boycott would become the interim victories that could be used to shore up morale.

Having brought the majors under contract, FLOC then proceeded to negotiate over the sharecropping system itself. In 1993, sharecropping will be eliminated in the tomato growing and cucumber industry where there are FLOC contracts. As a FLOC publication tells the story, "Though 80 years of legislative and legal effort have not brought a demise to the sharecropping system, FLOC has launched a project that has already made significant headway towards ending sharecropping in the pickle industry." It continues, "These agreements represent forward strides in creating a more stable and professional workforce aimed at greater productivity. These gains benefit the industry as a whole. According to the Heinz Corporation's own statistics, in the three years since the first contract, worker wages and incentive pay have increased by over twenty-five percent. And productivity is up over forty percent. The conflict resolution and grievance process has virtually eliminated costly lawsuits and replaced them with effective, face-to-face problem-solving."

The other major crop in the region is cucumbers, which are grown for packing as pickles. Unlike tomatoes, no one has yet invented a mechanical picker for the cucumber. Harvesting is labor intensive, and requires skill. Only twenty percent of the cucumbers meet the standard for high quality pickles. Second and third grade cucumbers are used for sliced pickles. By the time FLOC targeted the pickle industry, it no longer was willing to deal just with the growers. Vlasic, Heinz, and recently Dean Food (better known for Kate's and MJ Pickles) were brought to the negotiating table and are now under contract. Vlasic and Dean's have the two biggest market shares of pickles in North America. They also operate in North Carolina, Texas, and Mexico.

## THE U.S. - MEXICO EXCHANGE

Faced with higher costs as a result of FLOC organizing, tomato and cucumber processors threatened to move to Mexico where they hoped a more compliant and cheaper labor force would be found. Cucumbers were already grown in Mexico by the same companies with which FLOC deals in Ohio and Michigan. The threat was (and is) of a run-away industry that would render meaningless the recent FLOC victories -- leaving local growers without markets, and farm workers without jobs.

To counter this threat, Velasquez and his associates went international. They discovered where cucumbers for pickles were grown in Mexico, and traveled there to see the state of farm labor organizing. It was a good strategy...and they met with some luck. The farm worker union there is an affiliate of the Confederacion de Trabajadores de Mexico (CTM -- Confederation

of Mexican Workers) which, in turn, is the labor arm of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI -- Party of the Revolution Institutionalized). PRI is the Party that made the Mexican revolution. Despite remnants of its revolutionary past, PRI is now a largely corrupt vehicle to protect political incumbents, a huge government patronage system, and the status quo. In Mexico's last national elections, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, son of one of the country's most popular presidents during the 1930s who was a leading figure in Mexico's land reform, split from PRI, officially won over 40% of the vote, and by many accounts had the election stolen from him and his newly formed Partido Revolucionario Democratica (PRD). The Cardenas departure from PRI eliminated most of its vestiges of a revolutionary past. The CTM shares in most of the features of PRI. But, according to Velasquez, the farm worker union FLOC met is "a progressive and activist one with 50,000 members. It's doing a good job in the pickle industry." The two unions are now developing plans to coordinate their efforts. For the sake of both FLOC and Mexican farm workers, one hopes Velasquez' assessment of FLOC's Mexican partner is right. And, if he is right, one also hopes that the Mexican union will be able to deliver in a climate in which independent unionism hasn't been allowed to flourish.

There could be no bigger challenge than this one. Faced with higher labor costs and unionized workers in the U.S., many labor intensive, relatively low-skilled industries have moved to Third world countries where dramatic reductions in cost can be combined with governmental protection from labor unions. The garment and shoe industries are a classic example. Once the source of hundreds of thousands of relatively well-paying blue-collar union jobs, these industries are all but non-existent in the U.S. "Buy American" campaigns, boycotts, efforts to build protective tariff walls, and other approaches by the various garment worker unions have largely failed. The pattern is present in the agricultural industry as well. Hawaii is a major exception to the long standing absence of farm worker unionization. Shortly after World War II, the International Longshoremens & Warehousemens Union (ILWU) successfully organized Hawaii's sugar and pineapple workers, earning them model contracts with decent wages, hours, benefits, and working conditions. With improved international transportation systems, pineapple growers were able to move in the 1970s to the Philippines and Thailand. With Ferdinand Marcos and martial law in the Philippines and a right-wing dictatorship in Thailand, a free trade union movement was non-existent in either place. Efforts by the ILWU to "follow the crop" were considered, but never systematically pursued. Can FLOC do better? Only time will tell.

## FLOC PHILOSOPHY

As founder, organizer, and President of FLOC, "Balde" has a big impact. It is his philosophy which largely imprints the organization. He wants to do more than win contracts. "The strikes, the boycott, the corporate campaign, the pressure -- these are all tactics to get someone to the negotiating table. But we want to do more than get them to sign an agreement." Velasquez is a follower of Gandhi, Cesar Chavez, and Martin Luther King in his belief in non-violence. The belief in non-violence is in part predicated on the idea that the adversary cannot simply be defeated; he must be converted. He must be brought into a human community that is based on respect for all. "We used to try to change things by changing people's minds, and then we'd get them to change the laws to make things better. And that was good, as far as it went, but now we understand we have to change their hearts. Because if you don't do that, then they will always be looking for the loopholes... We should hate the sin, but not the sinner; we must find the humanity of our adversaries."

What happens if the hearts of some are changed, and not those of others? What happens when those who change can no longer stay in business because those who are willing to be more

ruthless take their place? For now, at least, it appears that some minds and hearts have been changed by FLOC. A Heinz spokesman called the FLOC agreements "a noble experiment," and others against whom FLOC struggled now seem to take pride in what has been accomplished.

The Velasquez philosophy was tested as the organization prepared for its recent triennial constitutional convention. Velasquez wanted to invite to the convention representatives of the growers and the food processors. He initially met with some stiff opposition. "These are the people who exploited us," he was told by some union members. To which he replied, "Let them come and see that we can organize, speak, think, and do a lot of things they never thought their farm workers could do." Velasquez persuaded the pre-convention committee of his view, and major grower and processor representatives were invited to the August, 1991 meeting. One of the guests was Thomas Anderson, a key player in the Toledo Area Chamber of Commerce, and a member of the Dunlop Commission. As reported in *The Blade*, a Toledo daily, by Assistant Managing Editor John Nichols, "As he finished his speech, Mr. Anderson shifted from English to a Midwest-accented-Spanish, and proclaimed, "hasta la victoria." When the crowd heard the until-the-victory slogan of the farm workers' movement, they roared approval. Men, women, and children jumped to their feet, cheering, clapping, and waving the red and black flags of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee."

Another convention speaker was Wally Wagner, a leader of area tomato farmers. "As you know," he told the delegates, "Baldemar and I have covered a lot of roads, and we went down a lot of them in different directions. We still don't agree on some things, but a lot of the mountains that stood between us have been removed." In another setting, Wagner said that, "A lot of things have changed because of FLOC. Now we (the growers) have more say-so on price, higher productivity in the harvests and a sense of doing what's right."

Were these changes of the heart; were these the "opening of the eyes" that Velasquez hoped for...or were they the sophisticated recognition that "we can't beat them, so we might as well join them?" No doubt there is great power in destroying stereotyped images and replacing them with real people. Extending the human community beyond one's own particular ethnic, racial, gender, class, nationality, or other group requires knowing others as human beings. But it also requires some common values and interests, and institutional arrangements in which people must cooperate with one another to pursue common ends. Only time will tell, for with time the parties to these agreements will face tests as to whether or not they want to extend and deepen them or abandon them. In either case, FLOC will do well to continue to build its own strength. It is in that strength that the dignity of the farm workers will best be realized, as well as the protection of their day-to-day interests.

## STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP

FLOC now has 5,000 members. Its longer term goal is the organization of some 75,000 midwest migrant laborers who come into the region in the Florida and Texas migrant streams. Thus the organization must bring Mexican, Mexican-American, Caribbean, and African-American workers under its umbrella. To do this, FLOC has developed an organizational structure of its own, and sought relations with other farm worker, tenant farmer, and sharecropper organizations.

The basic unit of organization is the farm worker camp -- the place of residence of the migrants when they arrive in the area. An elected "Camp Rep" serves as the link between the workers

and the union. the Rep gets \$25.00 a week to deal with worksite problems. If a problem can't be solved at the site by the Rep and Grower, it moves up the grievance process to a Grower Grievance Committee, and if still unresolved it goes to the Union headquarters. There are now 90 Camp Reps in farm worker housing. Earlier this year, 15 of the Reps went to Washington, D.C. to lobby for Headstart and other programs that benefit the farm workers. Training sessions for the Camp Reps are held both in Florida and Michigan, as well as in union headquarters in Toledo, Ohio.

Workers at the local camp-sites also elect delegates to the triennial Constitutional Convention, the basic decision-making body of FLOC. For every 40 members there may be one delegate and one alternate. The Convention elects a seven-person National Board. Velasquez presides over meetings of the Board. The daily organizing and contract servicing work is done by a staff of eight, most of whom were either farm workers themselves or the children of farm working families. The Union emphasizes recruiting from within its ranks to its full-time staff. Three of the organizers are now organizing in Florida.

The Convention is organized by four pre-convention committees: resolutions, constitution, rules, and credentials. These committees begin their work at least a month before the Convention, meeting weekly or more often if there is a need. Fifty to a hundred workers are on the resolutions committee which actively debates the issues facing the organization and prepares policy statements for the consideration of the delegates, who may adopt, amend, or reject the resolutions. Given the breadth of the committee, and a desire to come to common agreements on issues so that unity may be preserved, it is highly unlikely that a resolution hammered out in committee will not pass on the floor.

What remains to be seen is whether these democratic forms, certainly necessary in themselves, will express a rank-and-file run union. And herein lies one of the contradictions FLOC must overcome. To take on Campbells, national allies helped, and perhaps were critical. And, contradictorily, the greater the reliance on allies for a victory, the less the determination of the membership of a union is tested. The boycott and corporate campaign rely on the organization of allies, but the role of the farmworkers themselves is relatively marginal to its success. That, for example, was the experience of the highly successful Chavez' led grape boycott. Contrast, for example, to the sit-down strikes of the 1930s that were central to the growth of the industrial union movement of the 1930s, and were expressed in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). In the strikes of the 1930s that were central to the growth of the industrial union movement of the 1930s, and were expressed in the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). In the sit-downs, tens of thousands of workers had to put their bodies on the line. The nature of the occupation of the factories was such that deep organization was developed at the membership base. That depth of democratic participation was translated into the very character of the United Auto Workers, and was contrasted to the United Steel Workers Union which won a contract at U.S. Steel without a strike. The method of struggle, and the degree of rank-and-file participation in and control of it, largely shape the institution that emerges. FLOC will have to overcome the problems its method of victory inherently created for it. A convention with democratically elected delegates is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for a democratic and participatory organization.

The combination of leader and organizer in one person may hold the seeds of another problem. Will too much authority be given to Velasquez? Will he gain too much power within the organization?

When the functions of leadership and organizer are clearly separated, and the organizer is a relatively invisible person best known within the organization, this separation can be of critical

importance to the maintenance of a democratic organization. The organizer is continuously working with secondary and new levels of leadership. As they are trained in the skills of organizational life, and as they develop an appreciation and understanding of democratic theory and practice, they learn to hold their own leaders accountable just as they hold other institutions accountable. Fred Ross, Sr., for example, would insist before working with a group that neither its president, nor its executive board, could tell him as an employee not to raise questions with the members of the organization. As an organizer, his ultimate responsibility was to the membership of the organization. The clear separation of these two functions within an organization creates a check and balance against the conscious or unconscious abuse of power.

Yet another issue faced by the organization had to do with the role of women. Migrant families work the fields together. Reflecting this fact in union leadership was not an easy accomplishment. "Machismo" runs deep in Mexican and Mexican-American culture. But the challenge was made, and three of the seven national board members are now women. Like other controversial issues in the organization, Velasquez says, "the resolution of this issue was preceded by a great deal of debate and discussion."

## THE FUTURE

"Basically," says Velasquez, "whether we are farmworkers, family farmers, or tenant farmers, we all want the same thing. We want a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. We want equality and power in the industry to shape our own destinies. We want a decent life for our families. We want our children to have the choice of becoming doctors and lawyers, but also the choice to make a profitable living by staying and working on the land."

FLOC is in a race with two forces: mechanization and the globalization of the American economy. The combination of elimination of farm workers by machines and the movement of corporate growers to places where neither FLOC nor any other union can organize are its major external threats.

How much can be won is the story yet to be told. If FLOC's past is any indication of its future, it is likely to do more than skeptics think possible.

## CONCLUSION

Each of these organizing stories represents a different process, structure, and approach. To be true to itself, democratic organizing must be "contextualized," that is, it must fit the unique historic, cultural, and socio-economic context in which it takes place. Just as the architect works with the style and culture of a client for whom she is a designer, but must work within universal principles of engineering, physics, and soil science, so the organizer works with the uniquenesses of a particular group of people, in a particular place at a particular time, who face particular problems within the context of a larger particular society. And, each of these organizers brought to bear universal principles having to do with psychology, sociology, anthropology and political science.

Each of the organizers came to know the people and gain their trust. They identified, and strengthened, indigenous leaders and potential leaders. They helped these leaders build their own organizations. They appealed to both the immediate self-interest of the people with whom

they were working, and their broadest values of fairness and justice. They developed and encouraged the development of relationships among people who had not worked together before. They taught important lessons on the workings of power, how large institutions can be brought to the negotiating table, the development of campaigns to bring about change, and how to use campaigns to further build organization.

TSOP works with people who are largely outside such formal organizations as churches. Robin Wechsler, Lisa Toalson, Diana Miller, and now Lydia Ferrante went directly to people who resided in the neighborhood. To reach the residents of the apartments, subsidized housing, and single-room occupancy buildings of the Tenderloin required a different approach. In its earliest days, TSOP didn't even talk about action on issues: most of its time was spent bringing people out of their rooms into common area coffee hours just to talk with one another about what life was like in The Tenderloin. The basic unit of organization is an apartment building association. The challenge is to make these organizations broadly representative of the residents of their buildings, to develop leaders who have an on-going accountability to their fellow residents, and to develop members who understand that it is their right and responsibility to hold their leaders accountable. The next challenge is to bring leaders together in order that they might assemble the power they each represent in their own buildings to tackle the more resistant problems of The Tenderloin--problems that will respond only to large power because bigger interests are at stake in preserving the status quo.

The strength of TSOP is in its ability to work with the "unaffiliated." Since it works directly with leaders, and develops new leadership in its own organizational framework, it can define expectations, set standards, and develop its own culture. Its weakness, as in most cases, is to be found in its strength: to the extent that there are existing churches, ethnic clubs, or other voluntary associations in the neighborhood, TSOP has to figure out how to get itself into a relationship with them; so that even greater community power can be built.

BEC works with people through their religious institutions. The approach is called "institutionally based organizing," and the most important institution in such community organizations is the local congregation. BEC recognizes that the single most important, and respected community institution in the lives of most low to moderate income people in its Brooklyn neighborhoods is their religious congregation. Already "in place" are: gatherings of people who have relationships with one another; leaders with talents that have already been tried and tested; a value system that, if taken seriously, supports action in behalf of justice; institutional and individual member self-interests that can be served by participation in a community organization; a capacity to financially support the community organization from money coming from members of the congregations; and much more.

Again, there are weaknesses in the strengths: congregations are often in a struggle for their own institutional survival and aren't always focused on the organizing; pastors may have ambitions in their denominations that might not be served by providing the kind of leadership that a particular campaign calls for if it is to be won, or they may be more interested in preaching or counseling than organizing, or they may have other considerations at stake; the congregation itself may have cautious members, some of whom could be important leaders, who don't support organizing.

BEC appears to have found ways to make use of both approaches. Its direct individual or family organizing in housing owned by its development corporation, and its institutionally-based approach that is its anchor in the neighborhoods where it has a presence.

FLOC represents yet another approach. Its focus is people at work, the dignity of the worker, and on issues emerging from the workplace. Because its members are both migrant and local workers, it has had to adapt its tactics and strategy to the mobility patterns of its members and those it hopes to recruit.

Unlike TSOP and BEC, its leader is also its principal organizer. There was no problem of initial legitimacy because the leader-organizer came from within the ranks of the people being organized. The experience of the organizer and of those being organized was essentially the same. No one could challenge the organizer as an "outside agitator."

If there is any single risk in this approach it is in the fact that the central leader is also the central organizer. The professional organizer is typically invisible as a public figure, not a formal member of the elected leadership body, someone who will move on to another assignment after a prescribed number of years, and not a spokesperson for the organization. She can be an objective evaluator of the top leadership, and she can remind secondary leadership of their responsibility to hold top leaders accountable to the rest of the organization. Whether FLOC can successfully address the question of how democratic organizations prevent power from moving to a smaller and smaller circle at the top of a decision-making pyramid in the organization remains to be seen. This, of course, is the tendency that Lord Acton warned us against. It is not, however, limited to the FLOC situation.

As organizing itself has become more professionalized, with networks of organizers and community organizations emerging, a number of danger signs have appeared among the professional organizers. An esoteric language is emerging which distinguishes organizers from others, and which can insulate organizers from the leaders with whom they work. The tyranny of expertise is imposed by the use of language that makes layman think he doesn't know anything. Careers now develop within organizer networks, and organizers who are concerned with their careers might as often be listening to those who supervise them from "headquarters" as to those who live within the communities where they work. As networks become like guilds, controlling the craftspeople of organizing, communities become dependent on networks to provide them with organizers. Hierarchy threatens to weaken the egalitarian spirit of the field. While some organizers have prided themselves on their poverty wages, and in so doing made it impossible for people with families or people without other resources to fall back on to enter the work, a new trend is to seek wages that are too far beyond what is the norm of earnings in the communities where the organizers work. A wage of \$30,000 to \$40,000, with adequate health care, sick leave, vacation, and pension benefits, and dependent allowances for family members who don't earn income elsewhere seems entirely justifiable. But when organizers make \$70,000 a year plus benefits something might be going wrong.

All of this is to say that the world is not a perfect place, nor will it ever be so. As we are born with the potential to do good, so have we the potential to do evil. The one lesson we can conclude from all these tales, and from all our theorizing, is that wherever there are great discrepancies in power, there are likely to be great injustices visited upon the powerless.

"In cities, suburbs, and rural communities across the country, and indeed throughout the world, community organizing is taking place to redress some of the great imbalances of power, and the resultant economic and social injustices that flow from these imbalances. Community organizers are working with people of all colors, nationalities, ages, and sexes to assist them to build powerful grassroots organizations that can provide them with vehicles to bring about change. Not only do these organizations bring about change in the society in which they exist, but they are transforming the lives of those who participate within them. Every organizer has endless stories of how participation in a community organization became an opportunity for a

person to see talents unfold and gifts expressed. Countless community leaders will describe their community organization as their school, their extended family, a great source of pride and personhood, a place where they learned self-respect and to respect others.

If we as a nation are to move away from an era of greed, me-first and watch out for Number One, consumerism, and materialism to one of caring, sharing, justice, a sense of the spiritual, and respect for all life it will be in no small measure as a result of the community organizing going on in the late 20th Century.

While the devil may tempt, and it is human to sin, these organizers and organizations are on the side of the angels.