

2B155  
6  
TRENTON

521 MARKET

JULY 24 [1964]

22A-6A-7  
TENANTS' COUNCIL

With the establishment of the so-called Mercer-Jackson Tenants' Council, the focus of Trenton SDS activity has switched to the nearby South Ward Tract 3 Area, a clearance area to be demolished within the next two years. In the Mercer-Jackson area, over a hundred signatures were collected on a petition protesting a dangerous and garbage ridden creek which runs through the middle of the area. These signatures, however, were collected almost entirely by our staff. We have been unable to find any significant leadership in this area. We hope to present the petition to city council next Thursday.

In the South Ward area, we have had a preliminary and plenary meeting of the Union St. (6 and 12 indigenes<sup>-</sup> respectively) which drew up a letter calling for systematic extermination of rats, boarding up of condemned buildings cleaning sewers, etc. We will have meetings on Cooper and Bloomsbury definitely and Lamberton and Warren probably, beginning next Wednesday. There is a Negro construction unionist who has been particularly helpful in talking to large numbers of people and in setting up the Cooper and Bloomsbury Street meetings. We hope to have a march on city hall August 26, the day of the federally required public meeting, to demand more public housing and the construction of low-cost housing in the renewal area, as well as some high-cost apartment structures. This is still only a possibility.

BLOCK ORGANIZATION

If possible, we will try to get the S. Ward block organizations to have a "register-in" day at the Public Housing office, as part of the previously mentioned PHOIN plan. The white part of PHOIN though, seems unlikely. If we are able to pull it off at all, it will probably be with only a sprinkling of whites. A news-sheet will be started for the area.

The Mercer-Jackson area seems too deeply split by racism, language and age differences to have block organization potential. While there may be leadership potential in the area, we have not been able to elicit it, and in the meantime it drags along with seven or eight people per block meeting, and with all of the work; practically, being done by us. Another problem is that one staff member who arrived late has decided to leave us, although she was very successful in making contacts, and another is leaving for Mississippi. Although the latter had informed us of his plans at the start of the project, these departures result in disruption of work and some demoralization. Linked with lingering commitment in an area not producing significant promise, these departures may even possibly leave us understaffed. As a result we may take on an additional worker, although only a month remains.

OTHER PROGRAMS

Our film program is continuing success; it gives some legitimacy but no local contacts. The tutorial program is more trouble than it's worth, since in the summer kids and tutors both come and go like flies. The project is in

Trenton, page 2

good financial shape, and the threat of eviction for housing violations is past: Rosie the Slumlady<sup>2</sup> has met about 25% of the city's 65 - Point Program for Improvement of 521 Market Street,<sup>3</sup> and they have to give us 30 days notice anyway.

At the projectmaster's insistence there is an unnecessary appendix to explain three preceding words:

1. indigene -- one who is indigenous to
2. Rosie -- our landlady
3. 65 - Point Program -- our house has 65 violations

---

NEWARK

716 BERGEN

JULY 24

Several block meetings and a few actions on the blocks during the week led us this morning to a new strategy on housing and some new ideas on the relation between block activity and community-wide activity.

On Hunterdon 1 where a woman was being evicted because she had no money and was being denied welfare, 20 people accompanied her to court Monday morning and succeeded in getting the eviction postponed a week and then all went to the welfare office with her and despite the fact that the police kept them out while she was being interviewed succeeded in getting her on welfare. *Victory* She will now be able to pay her rent and we have a victory. Perhaps the most significant thing on this block has been the long hours of conversation with the two men who are the block leaders. One of them is an unemployed guy from the Virgin Islands and is the most promising community leader we've come across yet. The organizer on the block has talked to him about everything from housing to garbage to Cuba and he has really begun to think strategically and take real responsibility for the functioning of the block group. This is our most successful block.

Hillside is planning to hold separate tenant meetings in some of the large apartments on the block rather than trying to bring tenants into the main block group which is now mostly homeowner. They will meet separately and carry out some actions of their own and develop some of their own leadership before they join the main group in order that they not be swallowed up by the already established block leadership. *housing*

Other blocks were less successful. On Ridgewood 2 a group of five people went down to the Board of Health to complain about their buildings. One woman has had no water for a month, several others have no hot water, and all have rats, roaches and other typical complaints. The Board promised to send inspectors to all the buildings the next day. One inspector came to one building and never got to the others. At the second block meeting attendance dropped from 20 at the first meeting to 8. People are very unwilling to do things. This block alone cannot get the Board of Health to

*problems*  
enforce the housing code, and because the buildings on the block did only three or six family buildings and because they are all of different landlords, protests against specific landlords are very dangerous because of the risk of eviction.

On Hunterdon 3, hours spent in leafletting the tenants on the block did not pay off as mostly homeowners showed up at the first meeting. They blamed the tenants for the housing problem on the block and were generally very bad.

Ridgewood 1 is a group of tenants from two apartment buildings. There seems to be a very good possibility of a rent strike in one of the buildings. The tentative plan is for everyone to keep their rent next Saturday and all go down to picket the landlord's office instead. There seems to be a very good chance of getting a majority of the tenants committed to this but by itself the block group could not mobilize enough people to block an eviction or prevent a lock-out by the landlord.

The whole housing problem is complicated by the fact that the area we're working in has been declared blighted by the city and is scheduled for complete clearance within the next 3-5 years. Thus landlords are very hesitant to put any money into their property in the area. It is probably that no amount of pressure by the block group or by the whole community could force the landlords of the apartments on Ridgewood 1 to fix up their buildings. They would sell them first or go on paying fines.

*Urban Renewal*

*0.5*  
*target*  
It was in this context that we had a discussion about three weeks ago about housing strategy. Our basic premise was that eventually housing should be a public utility and that therefore any housing movement must eventually be focused on the city. The question was whether to begin first with pressure on the landlord or whether to hit the city from the very beginning. The arguments against the first approach were that it tended to perpetuate the myth that private enterprise could provide good housing for everyone, and that it was hard to raise the long range issue of public housing in the context of a fight against landlords. The argument for hitting the city was that it made it possible to stress the public utility idea from the very beginning, and that there was a very clear logical sequence of demands: first inspect and serve notice of violations, then if the landlord refuses to fix up have the city itself fix up and put a lien on the property and if the landlord refuses to pay, take over the property. If the housing is too bad to be fixed demand public housing from the beginning.

This was a very theoretical discussion and at that point didn't relate directly to the things that we were doing on the blocks. Since then several of the blocks have begun work on housing and we have found that <sup>the</sup> sharp distinction we made between the two approaches really didn't exist in actual work on the blocks. If people on a block decide that they want to picket a landlord we can't stop them and tell them they should focus on the city instead. This is especially true because they may be able to get certain concrete results from a landlord whereas one block attacking the whole city inspection procedure is very unlikely to win anything. Moreover we have found that people are not at all unwilling to accept the idea that the city is responsible for providing good housing.

A problem remained however, although it turned out to be one of organization rather than one of basic strategy. Up to now, with the exception of the

Newark

Problems w/ housing issue

one police demonstration all of our activities have been on the block level; we've made no attempt to organize any community wide action. Housing is probably the biggest issue that we've done any work on yet and in order to win something in this area you have a lot more horses than you do to win anything on welfare or a playstreet or garbage removal. And while it is true that a few of the blocks like Hunterdon 1 or Hillside may be able to mobilize enough people to win a few things, most of the blocks simply can't muster the horses to get anything concrete done about housing. You have to be able to mobilize 200 people for a demonstration at the Board of Health or to block an eviction. But the problem is that a community wide movement around housing could probably never win a general change in the city's policy of inspection in the area because under the blight declaration the city is planning to tear down the area within three to five years. In other words, block action around block issues either can't get anywhere and community action around community wide issues can't either. The only alternative left is community action around block issues: ie., attack each block one by one, starting with the worst houses when the landlord doesn't do it demanding that the city take over the building. Have demonstrations on the block trying to focus lots of publicity on it. Have the block group on the particular block plan and lead the activities when it gets around to their block, thus developing lots of leadership. This was the conclusion we came to at a staff meeting Thursday which started out discussing whether we should plan a mass meeting to bring together the people on the various blocks to give them a feeling of unity and let them see what other people were doing. WE decided that if we were going to have a mass meeting it shouldn't be just a few fiery speeches to put everyone in good spirits but that some specific program or plan for action should come out of it. So we decided to call a meeting of the block leaders on the blocks we're working on and suggest the idea there and try to get them to plan the mass meeting. That will happen this week.

## YOUTH

Our first youth meeting was harrassed by the police, probably because our leaflet made them think we were going to incite a riot, saying among other things, "are you ready to fight?" On the night of the meeting there were four police cars parked around the office and six or eight policemen standing around in front of the office. The meeting was small -- about 40 kids mostly 13-14 year olds. Almost everyone there was more interested in working on schools than on recreation which was the issue mentioned on the leaflet. The most significant part of the meeting were three of the older kids there whom we have worked very closely with in the last few days planning the next meeting. They are truly a wonder. One is a married guy about 21, a house painter and a good artist. He's really hot on doing something about the schools, told us all sorts of terrible stories about South Side High School and about police brutality. He's going to lead the next meeting. He also has very good contacts with the local gang, the Aztecs. The other two people are two sisters, one 18 and the other 15, both very smart and willing to work. The older one knows a fantastic number of people at South Side. Thus we have three committed people of three different ages; two of them capable of assuming real leadership. The future looks good. The next meeting is being called around schools: "Do you want to go back to the same old school? Same old teachers? Same old bunched up classes? Same old books? Same jammed cafeteria? Same old cop in front of the school? Same old no locker room?" (They wrote it.)

C.6

Newark

## COMMUNITY RELATIONS

We've become very friendly with several people in the neighborhood. Several women invited the project over for dinner one evening. One young woman came to see The Organizer with us yesterday (very good movie). Several people drop by the apartment regularly to chat. We have half a dozen people who will come out leafleting with us anytime we want. This is good.

Reporter: Larry Gordon

CHESTER

342 ULRICH

JULY

As the project members become more deeply involved in block organization we find it difficult to allot our time to other constantly increasing and equally important activities which have appeared with greater familiarization and experience in Chester. It has taken several haphazard and odd-hour meetings to decide whether such problems as unemployment, swimming pool demonstrations, organization and simplification of research material and agricultural shape-ups deserve time previously used by individuals to work in specific block areas. To some extent we plan to broaden our scope of activity but also hope to continue most of our work in the block organization structure.

## BLOCK ORGANIZATIONS

*targets* | The block organizations continue but the focus of their protest is changing from the individual landlords to the city and its officials. As a result of a call-in and petition the dilapidated house in the Ulrich street block organization where we live has been inspected. The Department of Public Safety says the house can come down as soon as the owner is given 15 days notice. However, the project house adjoining the condemned building will probably go with it as well as the entire row of houses which with the dilapidated building constitute a continuous wooden structure. Notified that their house might be torn down, members of the organization generally agreed that they had done the right thing. Now it is important both to demand new public housing from a city which has flatly stated that no more public housing will be built and to refuse to leave the condemned buildings until the city has found a new place for people to live. This condemnation under the new housing code is beginning in several areas due to block organization activity. On Kerlin Street fourteen houses were inspected and will be condemned as soon as they are again vacant. The same pattern has occurred on Front Street and in the Mary St. block landlords are already trying to sell their buildings. Since property is legally and practically powerful in Chester this method may be more effective than a rent strike. The almost irreparable condition of the houses and the city's plans for extensive clearance and renewal means landlords will board up houses rather than fight tenants for rent or make expensive repairs.

*housing strategy* | Although the rent strike is financially detrimental to landlords in Chester its benefits for tenants are perhaps not worth the long struggle. The

tenant faces legal barriers at each step in the rent strike process. In the Front St. block organization a woman singly struck against her landlord and on Monday July 27 disrupted the constable's sale of her furniture by removing it from the house. However she is alone and now subject to arrest for this illegal act if she doesn't move out. The number of landlords makes it difficult to get a lot of tenants to put pressure on one in particular. In the future, trapping the city in a bind by forcing it to condemn a number of houses and then refusing to move until new ones are built may be more effective.

#### COMMITTEE FOR FREEDOM NOW

more

The CFFN has recently decided to place emphasis on housing. Twice during this past week we have talked with Stanley Branche who is now anxious to make housing a dramatic issue in Chester. We correlated what we have learned about landlords during our block work into an indictment which he will use against the big slum lords. We have also planned to begin street corner rallies to emphasize Chester housing conditions to both city officials and neighborhoods. These will begin sometime this week and should continue regularly every night. The CFFN is also asking us to prepare an extensive geographical outline of Chester's population distribution, employment status, educational conditions and housing conditions, which it will present to the Greater Chester Movement in hopes that this will strengthen their demand for GCM's emphasis on the lower west side of Chester.

#### YOUNG ADULT COUNCIL AND VOTER REGISTRATION

The Young Adult Council is in the streets working on voter registration. Having obtained street lists of who is registered and for which party, they have begun canvassing the East Side in an effort to register as many people Democratic as they can in order to vote out the McClure Republican machine eventually. They have also planned a mass voter registration rally which hopes to join anti-Goldwaterism with anti-McClureism. Although we are not involved in voter registration, we have found groups of people and organizations interested in working in this area.

#### NEW SWIMMING POOL

The march last Tuesday which brought thirty children down to City Hall to the mayor's office to demand a place for children to swim was such a success that it was repeated the following Monday. On the first march we were denied entrance to an open meeting of the city council but were met by the head of the Department of Recreation. The kids shouted that they wanted a pool so no more children would drown in the swift and rocky Delaware River. Trying to buy the youngsters off with trifles about the difficulty of finding the money to build such a pool the head of the Recreation Department was cut down with shouts of "what the \_\_\_ do we pay taxes for" and "let the mayor pay for it." The Delaware County Times carried articles for the following three days about the pool as an issue. It seems that a new swimming pool has been desired for some time and is as popular an idea among grownups as it is for the children. We were promised a meeting next Tuesday (July 28) to discuss the matter again. Stanley Branche will attend this meeting with the kids. On Monday the 27th another march to City Hall was staged for the pool. The number of kids had doubled by this time and so had their enthusiasm. After talking again

Working w/ other orgs

CCP July 21  
after this

Chester page 3

With city officials and reminding them about the meeting the following day the kids picketed outside the City Hall and marched around the block.

#### STAFF DECISIONS

gender  
CA  
At our meetings this week we decided to devote energy to the organization of unemployed men. On the Mary St. block we have run into a number of men interested in this issue. We hope soon to start a new block organization on Union St. where there seems to be a concentration of men. This is an experiment for block organization since in almost every previous group there has been a predominance of women. We have started a file on unemployed individuals and hope soon to have a meeting with them.

We also recently learned of the agriculture shape-ups in Chester for picking peaches and beans in New Jersey. We called the employment office which gave us the locations of stops and wages for the pickers. It's surprising that this work, in violation of the child labor law is condoned freely by the employment office. We plan to investigate this area and join the pickers on shape-up to find out conditions and the possibility of organizing.

private → public  
Already mentioned was our decision to change the focus of block organization from slumlords to city and urban renewal officials. We hope to get a number of houses condemned and a number of refusals to move with demands that the city go back on its pledge of no more public housing. We also thought that a mass application for projects would help put pressure on the city. There are only 62 vacant project units. The change in demands from repairs to new and good public housing seems both more favorable to tenants and more feasible as a means of protest.

---

#### Note from R<sup>2</sup>

We are getting a lot of requests for Rennie's community organizing bibliography (the one that was sent out with the first newsletter-P, L&B), but we are not at all satisfied with the biblio. A new one can be made quickly for the end of summer evaluation meeting, campuses, and the general public, if each project member sends us a list of pertinent books and articles he has read or heard of. Please do send us your list- annotated or at least categorized- when that next spare moment comes. Thank you.

---