

Community Organizing in Rural California - What should we do next?

Empowerment

1. While thinking about this talk, ran across some unexpected stimuli.
comments of Bill Meyers re 1970s rural econ development projects in CA
Bill worked for EDD and assisted various rural dev proj
nearly all projects failed, didn't achieve objectives
too much focus on production, not enough on marketing & management
review of two books - "Revolution at the Table? The Transformation of the
American Diet," by Harvey Levenstein, Oxford University Press
- "Appetite for Change: How the Counter-Culture Took
on the Food Industry, 1966-1988," Warren J. Belasco, Panthen
the second book review sounded much like Bill
"...in the last ten years we have even raised a kind of vegetarian
necropolis for the counterculture in McDonald's and Burger King:
their new and highly successful salad bars stand like tombstones
to the culinary activism of the '60s."
what both Bill and Daniel Harris express is pessimism
efforts and idealism of the past have failed
implicit is the message of today's media
protest is futile
people today, especially young people, are selfish and greedy
little consciousness of what has actually been accomplished
2. I don't see things quite the same way - "mindless optimist"
understanding the contributions of those who have come before is crucial
we learn primarily from experience
organization is the only hand-me-down thing that conveys experience
collective experience of the past accumulates in organization
passed on to the next generation
absence of long-term organization robs all of us of the elders' wisdom
just for clarity rural means Census def - non-metro
but in CA also means places where ag is a primary activity
#1, #2, #3 counties in U.S. in ag prod are FR, TU, KN
all three are metro counties
at peak season 191,000 persons employed in ag in those three
whole U.S. steel industry employs just 175,000 persons
CA differs from nearly all other rural areas of U.S. - Great Except
first, what has changed and what has been won - over the past 35 years
diet - from sugar, caffeine, salt & grease to fresh fruit & veg
can already be measured in decline of certain chronic illnesses
rising public consciousness about diet and organic food
80% of people think that organic food is better than inorganic
peoples rights
end of legal segregation, right to vote
opening of opportunity for women
my daughters don't have to face what my mom faced in her life
union organizer - learned organizing lessons from her
limits on U.S. military power & colonialism
Vietnam fell back into the hands of Vietnamese
liberation of much of colonial world
release of Nelson Mandela
legal status for millions of undocumented workers in U.S.
rights for farmworkers
UI, SS, Workers Comp insurance, minimum wage protection
ALRA - most important

radical reform vs. reformist reform

rights of disabled, lesbians & gays

even rights of students

end of "in loco parentis"

free political expression on campus

all of these victories won through mass struggle, in some cases world-wide

didn't just happen - rulers didn't just wake up - forgot

absence of on-going organization to teach these lessons

forget, maybe don't even know how it happened

3. distinguish these kinds of victories from creation of alternative structures

cooperative day care centers, free (community) clinics, food coops

rural economic development projects

farmers markets - perhaps most successful outcome of food activists

Federally funded migrant clinics, legal services (CRLA), housing, JTPA

farmworker cooperatives, cooperative marketing ventures, etc

4. distinction is important because it relates to type of organizing

confusion between mass organizing for social change (political process)

vs. building alternative economic structures within the system

both are important but process of each is different

alternative - to majority society, outside the system

"being one of two or more choices"

German Greens - "Alternative List"

advantage: outside critic, don't have to manage things

often distinguish by dress, music, life style

mass organizing for social change - contending for political power

actually seek to manage the whole thing

don't quarrel with people about life style, music, dress

Cesar is vegetarian - never organized people on this issue

5. describe dynamics & methods of mass organizing - agree with Ganz

one world, one set of dynamics

South Africans, Philipinos, Vietnamese, U.S. Blacks, Mexicans

first, oppressed people usually appear to be asleep

people are busy trying to get through this life - tiring process

second, protest always breaks out among oppressed people

but no one knows when it will happen

appears spontaneous, but usually led by local organizer

December 1, 1955 - Rosa Parks - bus boycott

February 17, 1960 - Greensboro four - sit-ins

April 1965 - student anti-Vietnam demo

August 1974 - tomato strike

"when the fruit is ripe" - Luis

third, without leadership and organization no protest will sustain

several prior efforts at bus boycott (Baton Rouge)

worker protests in ag - dozens every year - most are crushed

healthy organization - not come in and steal the energy

many, many people, each doing something small

'60s - join org through act of consciousness - lying in bed

part of "the movement"

problem is that people can just as easily leave

central role of democratic leadership and clear membership

clear statement of basis of unity - membership

who's in and who's not

who's responsible and who's not

characteristics of leaders - those who take on responsibility

fourth, change will take very much longer than anyone expects
mass org is built one person at a time - persuade, join, cooperate
done with fresh people

house meetings of everyone in constituentcy

just when comfortable - move on to another place - start over

contrast with alternative building

focus on service to be provided

best done with professional staff

defend the "institution"

clinics focus on fights on budget

French Camp day care center

atrophy of many - measured by community advisory boards

contrast with groups which are formed to clarify one's thinking

leftists or progressives who get off on fine points of doctrine

purify your thinking by one of two methods

be part of a group of two about to split over ideology

bathe among the people - film about Gandhi

6. what do we have today and what can we do next

a lot of alternative structures in place

food coops, farmers markets, clinics, legal services, others

virtually no mass organization building

comment of Maizlish, Dervin

in fact, most of those that existed in '70s wiped out in '80s

Concilios, NLP, others wiped out

UFW is not organizing farm workers

no political party is doing mass organizing

describe Luis' work

where to find organizers and leaders

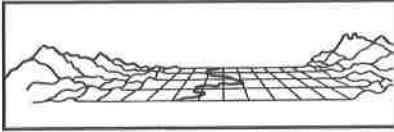
young, immigrants, churches

what about alternative institutions?

need better managers

but must be drawn from those who "bathe in the people"

UC should be training/employing those who have these skills



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Resources on Organizing

1. 9227 Kercheval: The Storefront That Did Not Burn, Nancy Milio, Ann Arbor Books, 1973. The best description available of the process of organization-building and empowerment in a disadvantaged community.
2. Unearthing Seeds of Fire, Frank Adams, John F. Blair-Publisher, 1975. A description of the underlying philosophy and techniques of Miles Horton, founder of the Highlander Center, America's oldest and most important organizer training center.
3. Ready From Within, Septima Clark, Wild Trees Press, 1986. The thoughts and memoirs of one of the great teachers and leaders of the modern Civil Rights Movement.
4. Strategies for Community Organization, Fred M. Cox, John L. Erlich, Jack Rothman & John E. Tropman, Editors, F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 2nd Edition, 1976. A provocative book of readings on social change theory and practice. Mostly written from a scholarly perspective but provides a broad overview of differing perspectives and strategies.