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## NEW LEFT ORGANIZERS AND THE POOR

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### INTRODUCTION

The decade of the sixties witnessed a resurgence of radical or leftist movements in the United States as manifested in the political activism of college students, civil rights organizations, community groups and others. Today, in the post-Vietnam era of the seventies, the fires of the New Left appear to have been dampened. But even though these groups may be less visible and vocal today, it would be a mistake to think that their ideas are no longer of interest to certain segments of our society. Some contemporary New Left groups, while outwardly rejecting dramatic Marxist revolutionary tactics have instead engaged in grass-roots organizing efforts at the community level.

What follows is an analysis of one such New Left organization, Western Massachusetts Labor Action (WMLA), an affiliate of the National Labor Federation (NATLFED). Prior literature regarding NATLFED and its branch associations ("entities") has been descriptive of the organization, but heavily propagandistic (National Labor Federation, 1976; Leggett and Mouldner, 1976). Here, we attempt a critical examination of WMLA both as a representative entity of NATLFED and as an example of an independent effort to organize the poor. The essential question addressed is the manner in which grass-roots, community-based groups can best organize the poor to improve their living conditions in American society.

We contend that the most appropriate perspective with which to answer such a question takes into account both recent attempts to organize the poor and a pluralistic model of social power. The obvious benefit of studying recent attempts to organize the poor is the understanding of the actual experience of others as well as the gaining of insight into probable results of methodologies previously applied. Such recent strategies of organizing the poor as the Community Action Programs (CAP'S), the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) and Cloward and Piven's "tactics of disruption" prove especially helpful in this regard.

But as helpful as information about organizing the poor is, such understandings and insights are of limited value to the practitioner without an accompanying grasp of social power in America as a pluralistic model of competing interest groups. Extensive arguments for this point of view have been presented by Robert Dahl (1961), Nelson Polsby (1963), and Arnold Rose (1967). Our position, which assumes the utility

of the pluralistic model, is that the poor can make substantial gains as an organized interest group, but that the traditional Marxist orientation of the New Left which emphasizes discontent leading to "the revolution" is conceptually incorrect and therefore counterproductive as an underlying world-view for organizers of the poor.

#### THE STRUCTURE AND NATURE OF WMLA

WMLA, operating under the auspices of the National Labor Federation, is a community-based organizing drive. The National Labor Federation or NATLFED, strives to organize "unrecognized" labor throughout the United States. Numbering close to fifty million, these unrecognized workers are those who are excluded from the National Labor Relations Act, and thus do not share in the benefits of unionization. Currently there are fourteen separate entities operating under this national umbrella with NATLFED serving to coordinate and synthesize the most effective organizing tactics. In this way they hope that strong and successful programs can be built all over the country.

Operating primarily in Berkshire County of Western Massachusetts, WMLA is one of these fourteen organizing drives. Membership includes the elderly, disabled, unemployed, underemployed, service workers, domestics, factory and farm workers. The basic philosophy expressed by WMLA is to strive for lasting changes in the living and working conditions of these people.

Western Massachusetts Labor Action neither receives nor desires federal or state funding, a fact of which the organization is quite proud. The major reason given for not accepting such funds is that they would influence the nature and direction of the organization's programs, as well as diminish membership participation in problem solving. Instead, support comes from contributions made by private individuals through bucket drives, house to house canvassing, donations, plus monthly dues of 62 cents paid by active members. The programs and benefits of WMLA are, however, available to anyone whether or not they contribute to the organization's support.

WMLA refers to its organizing structure as "systemic organizing." The total daily operations of the organization are divided into fourteen interconnected segments: Daily Operations, Administrative Assistance, Cadre, Procurement, Financial Input, Volunteers, Benefits, Membership, Print, Design and Advertising, Propaganda and News, Transportation, Speaking Engagements and Housing. Each of four full-time organizers

("cadre") is responsible for the maintenance of various segments of the system.

Each segment has specific functions. The Daily Operations segment supervises and coordinates the activities of all systems and is responsible for the overall operation of the organization. Administrative Assistance provides aid for the Daily Operations Manager to insure that activities are carried out as planned. Cadre functions as a personnel department, seeing to it that conflicts between members are mediated. Procurement obtains the donations necessary for the continuation of the staff and programs of the organization. Benefits provides food, clothing, medical and informational services to the membership of the community. Financial Input plans fund raising activities necessary to meet the rent and utility bills. Print prepares and makes copies of literature such as leaflets for bucket drives in front of supermarkets, membership canvassing and upcoming fund raising events. Design and Advertising does the initial layout and editing of this literature. Propaganda and News is responsible for the production of the monthly newsletter. Transportation involves the scheduling of cars and other transportation donated by volunteers and the membership. The system of Speaking Engagements is responsible for lectures and talks at local schools, churches and other meeting places which are done to promote support and understanding of the organization in the local community. Housing is concerned with the upkeep of the staff's living accommodations and arranges for workers or cadre to spend a night or two per week in the home of a supporter or member.

Full-time cadre are responsible for the coordination of their "mini-systems" and report on each at weekly staff meetings. A written analysis of each subsystem is prepared monthly. Evaluation is provided by the Daily Operations Manager in the form of an analysis of the previous month. Evaluation might cover what has been accomplished, what has yet to be done, and feedback from the membership concerning issues of importance. In addition to these reporting devices, each subsystem coordinator must periodically write out tactic sheets and procedures for all activities contained within his or her system. For example, a food stamp workshop might involve preparing: (1) an explanation of its purposes (e.g. reduce the price for certain groups, solidify current membership, recruit new members), (2) the mechanics of the workshop (e.g. devising a worksheet, preparing an outline), and (3) "tools" used in the activity (e.g. worksheet, pencils, press releases, posters).

The rationalized and specialized bureaucratic nature of systemic organizing is clearly illustrated by the filing system used within the WMLA office. Material is numerically filed and designated as "interior"

or "exterior" depending upon whether the content of the information is related to the workings of WMLA only or to the entire NATLFED operation. Files are numbered such that each pair of numbers for a given file can be sequentially broken down to indicate; (1) whether the file is interior or exterior, (2) the system of the organization to which it applies, (3) the subject it deals with, and (4) any further notations or comment.

Membership in WMLA is strictly voluntary and there are a number of ways to enter the organization. Once recruited, all volunteers are subject to a pre-planned training program which includes an orientation to the history of WMLA and NATLFED plus an outline of its purposes and goals. An information sheet detailing biographical data, special skills and the individual's areas of interest is filled out on each and every volunteer. The organization places great importance on volunteers, and all systems, not only Volunteers, have recruitment responsibilities. Training occurs in regularly held classes categorized as Level I, II or III. Level I classes are designed to give newcomers an orientation to and understanding of food stamps, AFDC (Aid for Families with Dependent Children) and similar welfare services. Level II classes serve as a bridge between Level I and Level III. The theoretical and political content of Level II largely depends upon the perceptions and social awareness of those individuals in attendance. Just as a worker who approaches WMLA for an emergency food voucher is not immediately "hit" with talk of NATLFED and a united worker front, so new members are guided into an understanding of Marxist policy a bit at a time. Level III classes involve detailed discussions of attempts made by the working class throughout history to enter the political arena and promote long term social change.

A typical day scheduled for a cadre (full-time organizer) might include an 8:30 a.m. briefing (a run-down of the day's schedule), a 9 a.m. appointment at the local welfare office with a member, a bucket drive in front of a supermarket until noon, a speaking engagement at 2 p.m. and a membership canvas (door to door recruitment) from 4 to 6 p.m. Perhaps that evening there might be a class or volunteer orientation from 7:30 until 10 p.m. Beyond this, cadre must also find time for systems work.

WMLA has a dual organizational nature which is apparent from a description of its major action focus, the Benefits I and Benefits II programs - referred to as "BENE I" and "BENE II." In order to insure membership, WMLA attempts to give immediate and tangible aid to its members. This it does through BENE I, a program that provides members with needed free clothing, food and vouchers for emergency food, food stamp tests for eligibility, non-emergency dental care and information and referral

regarding unemployment and workmen's compensation. In addition, under BENE I the organization also acts in an advocacy role in issues of housing, utilities, legal services, etc.

While BENE I is certainly of prime importance, WMLA organizers are aware that their ultimate goal of working for lasting changes in the living and working conditions of the membership cannot be achieved by providing only hand-outs. They must teach members the methods of organizing. To this end, cadre conduct open "brainstorming" sessions on Saturday afternoons during which activities of the previous week are reviewed and areas of recurring need identified. The organizers discuss these problems, and consider strategies for combating them. WMLA cadre see this process of defining immediate and recurring needs as a strong organizing tool which can be used to map out the direction of planned social change. This strategy, much more theoretical and long-range than BENE I, is known as BENE II. The cadre look to the day when BENE II will be a system in itself and lasting changes in lifestyle and social power will begin to be realized by the membership.

#### RECENT ATTEMPTS TO ORGANIZE THE POOR

NATLFED and the WMLA entity are engaged in a concentrated effort to organize the "unrecognized" workers, i.e., the adult poor, of America. They are not, however, the first group to tackle the task, nor do they represent the only methodology currently being applied. In the past decade elaborate designs to organize the poor have been espoused by the federal government, social policy analysts, community organizers and the poor themselves.

During the 1960's the federal government waged a "War on Poverty" using the Community Action Programs (CAP's) of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) as its primary weapons system.<sup>1</sup> CAP's were locally oriented and operated programs whose mission was to eliminate poverty in targeted urban or rural areas. CAP agencies attempted to involve the poor, mobilize resources, coordinate efforts, plan, conduct and evaluate programs, advocate for the poor and pursue administrative reform in re-

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<sup>1</sup>Although the federal government gives "lip service" to involvement of the poor in current antipoverty funding programs (e.g. grants-in-aid, Title XX, general revenue sharing), it is our position that these mechanisms do not systematically encourage poor persons to be organized on their own behalf.

levant institutional structures. Involvement of the poor was the key and was encouraged by the famous Section 203(a) of the Economic Opportunity act which mandated CAP's to be "Developed, conducted and administered with maximum feasible participation of the residents of the area, and members of groups, served" (Brokensha, 1974). This then was the federal government's major attempt to organize the poor into self-help action agencies. Poor persons, as staff members, board members and advisory council members were organized to impact social institutions affecting the poor and to stimulate structural changes within those institutions.

But CAP's did not prove to be effective in improving the conditions of the poor. One problem resulted from CAP conflict with the local establishment. CAP monies could bypass city hall and even stimulate marches and other protests against locally entrenched power groups. The local political establishment responded by complaining to Washington, which resulted in the cancelling of programs without regard to their success in improving the condition of the poor. The local social service establishment also resisted CAP's by campaigning for antipovertry monies to be channeled into the existing social service network rather than into new, competing social action agencies. Another basic problem was the drain of capable indigenous leaders who were able to escape to middle-class life by means of the CAP agencies and the frequent use of remaining community leaders as mere "window dressing" (i. e. high visibility, but low decision-making power) by antipovertry programs (Clark and Hopkins, 1969).

A second group who might be referred to as "social policy analysts" have also shown considerable interest in organizing the poor. The past decade has seen a multitude of exhortations (for example Terrell, 1967; Thurz, 1966) for social action among various professional groups. The basic argument here is that social workers, lawyers, city planners, mental health specialists, etc. who work with the poor should make their primary commitment to what Terrell (1967) has called "group advocacy." They must abandon ethically neutral positions and take strong value stances in which the interests of the poor are the focus of an advocacy which directly confronts the injustices and inequalities in the system. These action-oriented professionals should create and support groups representing the interests of the poor, form action committees to devise strategies and coordinate advocacy efforts, and enter into political coalitions when advantageous. While this group advocacy argument has received much attention in the literature, in practice organized group advocacy at the local level is uncommon. It is often, however, an important focus of state and national interest groups such as the NASW (National Association of Social Workers) who take stands and lobby re-

garding issues of significance to the poor.

In addition to encouraging an active strategy of involving committed professionals to serve as organizing leaders, some social policy analysts have developed theoretical models of the way in which the poor might effectively organize and act to improve their conditions. An example is Cloward and Piven's (1974) construct of the "tactics of disruption." Such tactics might include boycotts, sit-ins, traffic tie-ups, rent strikes and other behaviors "intended to command attention and to win concessions by the actual trouble they cause in the ongoing operations of major institutions" (Cloward and Piven, 1974: 86). It is felt by these analysts that deviating in particular ways from prescribed behavior is a realistic method by which the poor can place pressure on bureaucrats, cause excitement for the media, displease influential members of the community, create strain for political leaders and convert these "disruptions" into gains. One of the specific proposals of Cloward and Piven was an idea to undermine the public welfare system by organizing nation-wide campaigns to register all eligible poor for relief as well as help existing recipients obtain their full benefits. The hope was that the welfare bureaucracy would become so overloaded (i.e. "disrupted") that it would prove politically and financially expedient to dispose of it altogether and replace it with a guaranteed annual income that would eliminate poverty. Critics of these tactics of disruption pointed to the ability of bureaucratic institutions to repress disruption or resist it by simply delaying or offering mild but appeasing reforms. Critics also felt that the lack of popular middle-class support for the poor and the need for professional expertise (e.g. organizers, lawyers) would undermine large scale disruptive action (Cloward and Piven, 1974).

Other theorists have formulated more abstract principles and models by which organizing strategies and tactics can be analyzed and evaluated. These social action theorists are concerned with the basic issues common to all organizing efforts, how they interrelate and how they are resolved. Pruger and Specht (1969), for example, subdivide organizing efforts into three major areas; the problem, the methods of action and the assessment of outcomes; and proceed to develop a set of analytical questions useful in the understanding and evaluation of organizing techniques.

"Community organizers" represent a third category of persons who have shown an interest in organizing the poor. These organizers have devoted their efforts to refining tactics out in the community, as was the case with Saul Alinsky. Alinsky has endeavored to form "People's Organizations" (or "mass organizations") of "Have-Nots" who desire to



take power away from the "Haves" and participate in the operation of their communities in a democratic way (Alinsky, 1946). Ideally, Alinsky would see such communities with mass organizations as the building blocks of a national popular powerforce. These mass organizations would create a "popular reformation" of values and institutional patterns which would, in turn, lead to a revolution where the "Have-Nots" would take power away from the "Haves."

It is not, however, these grandiose schemes of change on a national or world-wide scale that Saul Alinsky is most remembered for. His more useful contribution has been a "nuts and bolts" approach to organizing tactics and strategies. Drawing upon his own forty years of organizing experience and those of his followers, Alinsky has developed a body of pragmatic, realistic precepts, useful for the organizer of a "Have-Not" community. These "rules for radicals" which include such topics as communication within the experience of others; the understanding of power, self-interest and compromise; the entrance of an organizer into a community; building organizational power; and the use of morality, law and justice against the "Haves" (Alinsky, 1971) have proved important in several successful organizing efforts, such as those in Chicago, Rochester, Oakland and New York.

The "Alinsky Ideology" has become quite popular and influential among organizers since World War II. Critics of Alinsky contend that he was too limited by his concern with specific, immediate activity in a small geographic area and possessed no basic critique of American society that could serve as direction for a program of major institutional change on a national scale (Reissman, 1967).

A fourth category of persons who have expressed concern in organizing the poor are the poor themselves. In the past decade only a few organizations of poor people have been able to command a nationwide audience. Among the more notable were the Poor People's Campaign of 1968 and the National Welfare Rights Organization. The Poor People's March on Washington and its five week encampment in Resurrection City was an attempt to arouse the conscience of the nation, make known the needs and problems of the poor and gain tangible reforms from Congress and the social welfare bureaucracy. The Campaign succeeded in promoting a great deal of national media attention, but was otherwise ineffective. The Campaign's focus proved to be much too broad (e.g. fifty-seven pages of demands ranging from public relief to diplomatic ties with Portugal). Leadership was also a problem. The death of Martin Luther King removed charismatic leadership from the March and internal disputes among the remaining notables precluded solidarity. But the major weakness of the Poor People's Campaign was its inability to sus-

tain the protest over an extended period of time. The government merely waited for them to go home (Steiner, 1971).

The National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) seems to have been the poor people's association with the most potential and the greatest success. Begun in 1966, the NWRO peaked organizationally in 1969 with a membership of 100,000 welfare recipients in 350 chapters nationwide. Membership was characteristically black, female, urban and northern. Its central office was headed by the competent and highly regarded George Wiley, a chemistry professor who had been a leader of CORE (Congress on Racial Equality). Wiley worked hard to establish a self-sufficient, dues supported, formal organization that would be attractive to potential members. NWRO's issue focus was specific and immediate: improve access to and increase levels of AFDC (Aid for Families with Dependent Children) benefits. It sought to impact the political establishment by creating a powerful nationwide lobby of welfare recipients who utilized non-violent but disruptive tactics such as sit-ins, rallies, advocacy and mass benefit programs (i.e. recruiting large numbers of eligible recipients to demand inclusion on the roles or all the benefits due to them) (Steiner, 1971).

NWRO successes were substantial. Nationally, the organization's recruitment drives and welfare consciousness-raising contributed to the doubling of the country's relief rolls during the 1960's (Piven and Cloward, 1971). Locally, mass benefit programs proved economically successful in many instances. For example, the NWRO effort which informed welfare recipients of their eligibility for "special grants" for clothing and furniture in New York City increased benefits fourfold over one year's time from \$3 million in June 1967 to \$13 million in June 1968. Organizationally, NWRO was noteworthy as it (1) provided mutual support for groups fighting the welfare establishment, (2) provided a vehicle for recipients to be represented on committees by peers rather than by social workers, and (3) established an associational (i.e. civic) tie for AFDC mothers (Steiner, 1971).

Much of NWRO's success in the late 1960's can be linked to its association with various federal programs fighting the "War on Poverty." NWRO's and OEO antipoverty agencies were closely related. OEO agencies frequently organized and funded NWRO chapters. VISTA volunteers were common as organizers. Legal assistance programs brought suits against the welfare bureaucracy on behalf of NWRO clients. Sympathetic welfare social workers became inclined to approve applications and less apt to arbitrarily terminate cases (Cloward and Piven, 1974). In addition, NWRO entered into contract arrangements with federal agencies, most notably a \$435,000 grant awarded from the Department of Labor to place

welfare clients in leadership roles in the WIN (Work Incentive Program) program (Steiner, 1971). However, as Vietnam came to supercede poverty as the nation's war, and Nixon replaced Johnson in the White House, OEO began to fade from the scene along with its associated antipoverty efforts, including the NWRO.

Other problems were evident beyond NWRO's heavy reliance on federal sources of support. NWRO was never able to generate substantial power on a national level. Membership reached about one to two percent of its potential, and little money was ever available for organizing greater numbers (Steiner, 1971). A key weakness of NWRO involved its inability to move from a focus on individual grievances to concentration on mass campaigns which would have provided greater potential for large scale participation (Piven and Cloward, 1971). Finally, NWRO suffered from a deficiency of indigenous leaders as those most fit to lead were also in a position to remove themselves from the ranks of the poor (Steiner, 1971).

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Any attempt to organize America's poor and thereby improve their position in society must take into account certain basic realities. As Whitney Young of the Urban League stated to the 1969 national convention of NWRO, "What makes America tick is organization. It only respects power organized." In other words, the poor must become an organized power element within America's pluralistic power structure if their goals and interests are to be supported and furthered. How can this be accomplished?

We would contend that for WMLA or any grass-roots organization interested in building social power for the poor, at least six basic issues must be addressed:

- (1) The goals or game plan should be specific, have both short and long-term components and reflect realistic, accurate knowledge of the target system. For WMLA, short-term goals would include a gradual increase in the BENE I program, an accompanying recruitment of core and active personnel and a thorough study of the organizational values and workings of governmental relief bureaucracies. Long-range goals such as consciousness-raising through educational programs and objective improvement in the status of the poor will be discussed later in the paper.

- (2) The target system(s) of any organizing effort must be explicit. Those systems in which change would be most beneficial to the conditions of the poor should be clearly identified and focused upon. WMLA and its parent organization, NATLFED, have sought to organize "unrecognized" workers through grass-roots campaigns. Their successes (e.g. the Eastern Farm Workers Association on Long Island) have been primarily in terms of "point of production" Labor-management issues resolved by organizing labor into unions powerful enough to carry out long strikes. But, WMLA<sup>2</sup> identifies with no such "point of production" issue involving labor-management conflict, at this time. What WMLA has instead is a large number of unemployed workers and relief recipients toward whom they have directed their BENE I efforts. It is our contention that this unemployed, welfare and workfare (e.g. CETA, WIN) population represents legitimate and needy "unrecognized" workers. They embody a "point of production" (i.e. target) in the form of local, state and federal relief bureaucracies. Government relief agencies are indeed exploiting the poor by creating a cheap labor pool which forces recipients to accept poorly paid "make work" jobs.<sup>3</sup> This should be the logical target for WMLA organizing efforts.
- (3) Leadership should be centralized and composed of respected and identifiable persons with the skills and knowledge of planners and organizers. Charismatic leadership should be avoided unless it can be successfully routinized.<sup>4</sup> We recommend that WMLA leaders

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<sup>2</sup>See also the Eastern Service Workers Association of New Brunswick, N.J. discussed by Leggett and Mouldner (1976).

<sup>3</sup>See also the discussion of "re-stratification" as applied to domestic and welfare workers in National Labor Federation (1976: 4-15).

<sup>4</sup>For a discussion of routinization of charisma, see Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, translated by Talcott Parsons, (New York: Free Press, 1964); material regarding NWRO's George Wiley as a leader may also be instructive here (Steiner, 1971).

increase their abilities as social planners and endeavor to establish closer working relationships with key members of the relief bureaucracies.

- (4) Resources are essential to organize the poor. Three key resources are money from dues or other sources; manpower in the form of core membership, general membership and friends and the capacity to disrupt the smooth functioning of the target system. For WMLA, member dues and bucket drives are inadequate and financial backing from organizations and wealthy or middle-class individuals whose contributions would not require significant compromise of activist aims is needed. WMLA's manpower core appears to be a strong point, but the existence of a mass of supportive membership and influential community friends is yet to be established. The capacity to disrupt, whether real or simply a threat, is essential, and WMLA should work to create the ability to mobilize sizeable numbers of discontented relief recipients.
- (5) Tactics are the means whereby goals are achieved. The means we see as appropriate to a community-based organizing effort such as WMLA might be termed "limited co-operation" with the relief bureaucracy. WMLA should seek to organize the clientele of the relief bureaucracies (e.g. the unemployed, CETA employees, welfare recipients) in order to further their interests. These interests could best be furthered by humanizing the relief systems, i.e. making them more responsible and responsive to the clientele. This humanizing effort entails some cooperation since presumably some relief system employees would support this type of clientele effort. However, it is inevitable that situations will arise when clientele needs conflict with those of the relief bureaucracy to such a degree that employee support cannot be expected. In these instances, WMLA must be able to exercise its capacity to disrupt the operation of the bureaucracy through the use of some form of confrontation.
- (6) The image that an organizing movement presents to its constituency, its target system(s) and the public is important to its continued success. WMLA would bene-

fit by presenting itself to its membership as a strong, capable, and active advocate. A toned down public self-image emphasizing WMLA's humanitarian concern for the treatment of needy persons would appropriately complement the promotion of an image of the relief bureaucracies as important helping programs which consistently fail to meet client needs.

### CONCLUSION

We would suggest that the self-definition of WMLA and NATLFED as a community-based benefits agency is a passing stage and would further suggest that their ultimate concern is the elimination of inequality on a societal level. However, to date neither WMLA nor any other New Left group has presented a workable program for accomplishing this. Even suggestions as mild as Negative Income Tax and Credit Income Tax (Gans, 1968) have met with little support from the public or Congress. A similar proposal contributed to the downfall of McGovern in the 1972 Presidential election.

Economic and social inequality have, to date, been persistent facts of community life. The current approaches of the New Left are unlikely to change this. While they may succeed in redefining poverty (i.e. upgrading the monetary circumstances of the poor and increasing their share of the total wealth of society), poverty will continue. All societies have shown a history of stratification (i.e. superior-subordinate relationships) and we do not anticipate this pattern to wither away.

This does not mean that patterns of stratification are always rigid. China, Cuba and other societies which have experienced recent socialist revolutions are cases in point. Differential rewards of money and power have not been completely eliminated, yet the differences in lifestyle from the top to the bottom of these societies have become less visible and presumably less real. It may be possible to accomplish similar reforms in American society, not by means of revolution, but by means of powerful organizations of poor people.

All New Left organizations, including WMLA, share a utopian vision of the future. They see the possibilities for a Marxist "Garden of Eden" where all people are equal. We think that this is unrealistic. As a community-based benefits organization they may make a worthwhile contribution to the poor (BENE I), but they cannot change the way technological

societies operate. WMLA and NATLFED may, however, be able to improve the relative conditions of the poor by slowly narrowing the economic gaps separating class groups. If this is to happen, significant power bases need to be established at the local, state and national level so that the poor can begin to influence the course of political events.

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