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Seven Voices From One Organization: What Does It Mean?

by

Janice Perlman

It would be trite to say that citizen action means different things for different people; a cliché to say that it means different things simultaneously for the same person: yet both are overwhelmingly true. Listening carefully to the members of citizen action groups -- not the organizers, staff, or well-known leaders -- but simply the members, reveals the entire gamut of understanding and confusions; gratifications and frustrations; of hopes and fears.

The mini-portraits presented below represent a cross-section, members of a single citizen action organization at a single point in time. Exploratory interviews with members of similar groups in the citizen action tradition do not seem to contradict any of the patterns that emerge from this group, although there are certainly differences in degree and emphasis. Rather than using interviews randomly across organizations, it seemed stronger to present diverse views from within the same one so as to highlight the similarities and differences that emerged. The rough ordering from enthusiasm to disenchantment should not mask the strong presence of both in each interview, and the complex interaction between individual needs, personalities and political awareness.

VIEWS

1. Born Angry

Betty Washburn* is a 61 year old Black woman who first came to the city in 1944 and has lived in her neighborhood for thirty years. She joined the NAACP at 21, the youngest age admissible, and later the National Council of Negro women. She has worked all her life as a cook and caterer; her husband was a "union man." She is a longtime member of "Citizen Action."

"Oh Lord, I think I was born angry. My mother said when I was a little girl in Texas, she didn't know what to do because we used to have to sit on the back of the bus and I used to say 'my money's just as good as theirs, why do I have to do this? ... When she sent me to the store to get things, they'd sit up there and talk and wouldn't wait on me. Some Caucasian could come in and

*In order to preserve confidentiality, the name of the organization and all of the members are fictitious; and the names of the neighborhoods, city and state capital are used generically.

they'd wait on 'em and I'd go back home and say 'I'm not goin' back to the ol' store even again.'

"I've had a lot of fun in "Citizen Action"; I've changed a lot of people's minds. People always say 'You can't fight them, they're too big', but we did a lot of things. We went up against them (banks, oil companies, big business) on property taxes and found eleven buildings underassessed. It was so much fun when we went on this downtown tour of the business section, we were pointing out this building right here, and how much tax they do pay and should pay and who gets stuck with it... We learned that we have some power if you can get enough people together, you can get 'people power.' If you get enough folks working together you can go from the neighborhood to City Hall to the State Capital, and they said 'Oh, I didn't think it could be done.'

It had a good effect on me. I like people. I have no children. I lost one child. it was just a pleasure workin' with these people and seein' these new faces and talking to 'em, and it filled a vacancy in my life, too, after I lost my husband. It's so encouraging when you can do it, like when we got the big businesses to pay their fair share of the utilities. Boy, I was the happiest person in the world. I said, 'this one I did.' "(Laughs.)

2. Cold Waffles

Vera Gomez joined Citizen Action in 1976. She was from Denver originally and had been in Local 2 (Restaurant and Hotel Workers) since 1936. She is now retired and raising her grandchildren in her home of twenty years, but will have to sell it and move into an apartment.

"One day he (organizer) asked me, 'Vera, where did you learn to organize, was it in the union?' I said 'Nope, only thing I ever did was pay my dues; I learned to listen and then use plain old common sense, horse sense... You can win if you believe in what you're doing and I believe our government is going down hill unless we get some pretty strong people to fight it... You know people don't pay attention to the radicals, but they will listen if you give them a straight answer....'

"When we went to the State Capital we had 14 buses and 3000 people from all over the state; it was so moving that day. We were fighting for lifeline utility rates... the gal, Chair of the Ways and Means Committee, got real nasty when we went to talk to her. She never gives us a direct answer, you know, one time it's yes and one time it's no, and then it's something else. So, we went in there and said 'you've been waffling around long enough, we have something for you' -- we handed her a bag of cold waffles. They printed it in all the papers....'

'What keeps me going is the caring and the accomplishment. I'm not sitting here decaying like a lot of 'em are. Keeps my mind active... It's so important to me, cause I want to see change, not to fill somebody's pocket with money they don't need, but to help those who do, the poor people, those who's underprivileged... Those big shots from Washington get all these special rates and vacations. Standard Oil -- both oil companies -- have at least six sets of books. They just show the government the ones they want to cause it's such a big enterprise -- they're running the show.'

"Only three or four of us (friends in her neighborhood) signed up. It depends on the personality. I tried to speak to them but even the ones who are in Citizen Action won't show up for meetings lots of times. This really frustrates me when I know they should be there. But that's the way people are and I can't change them. As for me, I always wanted to be active in an organization. To me, Citizen Action was my salvation."

3. Cat Got Your Tongue

Maybel Pond, 54, is a janitor, the daughter of Black Oklahoma farmhands who came to the city when she was fourteen years old. She is divorced, has raised nine children, takes care of her sick mother and an elderly man. She has been active in the local Baptist Church, and is a confirmed Democrat, though her parents were Republicans. She joined Citizen Action only two years ago and was recently elected area President.

"When I was growing up, there were so many children at the table, I never said anything. Sometimes I would whisper. My mother would say, 'what's wrong, cat got your tongue?'... When I first joined Citizen Action, I never spoke up. The meetings and actions were very educational and informing to me so I rarely missed any. It gave me a sense of accomplishing and doing something... made me feel I had a little input into what's happening, what can happen. I started talking out for the first time... Working with Citizen Action really brought me out; the actions made me feel enthused... (She is now planning to return to school.)

"I think people pay enough taxes and so forth, there should be some results right in there around where people live... (Also) when something affects people directly, they will be more likely to come out to do something... (She doesn't trust politicians to help locally because) I think once a person gets involved in politics and actually holding an office, they forget about the issues and things people really need. Why should I have to worry about my gas and electricity turned off when I read in the stock pages that such and such a company made \$2 billion in profit and they refuse to pay higher utility rates?'

"Well, just people getting together and really working and doing something for themselves... it helps them. I see this as the way it's going to have to be done if there's even going to be a change where poor people will have a chance to get a little higher up on the ladder or better living conditions, whatever. We're really going to have to get out and get involved. I, for one, want to see it happen -- it seems that as long as you sit back and let them put it on you, the more they put on you..."

"I didn't know before what strength a group could have -- things that could help the neighborhood, the community and the state and nation, too, if it goes to that."

4. Something to look forward to

Mr. Weatherford and his wife are retired and live in an outlying residential area of the city, although when they were first married they lived in the Black ghetto near downtown. He is White; she is Black -- both worked as janitors and were in the union. He has been in Citizen Action for two or three years.

Mr. Weatherford: "We had never heard of Citizen Action before the nice young girl, Suzie, came 'round and rang our door in a long time... She was very polite; not often that young people treat you with respect nowadays... My wife has arthritis, so we didn't get out much, but since I joined Citizen Action, I've been to meetings all over the state. It is something to look forward to."

Mrs. Weatherford: "Before he used to be sick, stay home and complain. Now, he has something else to think about... Used to be every night and every day he was going downtown to some kind of meeting. Anytime Suzie called; he'd come just so long as she promised he'd never have to come back to night alone."

Mr. Weatherford: "I've learned a lot there. We went to the convention (statewide Citizen Action meeting) and to the state capital to get them to sign some bill -- I can't remember the number -- about lifeline. They want to go up on you and you're paying too much already -- that's lifeline. We go as a group and split up. I can't remember the name of the person (Senator) I went to see... he treated us very nicely, I didn't say nothing, we picked a leader to do the talking. I didn't understand most of it..."

"Now we're working on a library campaign. I've learned a lot in Citizen Action -- for example, I didn't know this city has a library commission with twelve members on it."

5. Dry and Dead

The following are excerpts from the more disenchanting members of the organization. There was so much repetition that they are grouped here together.

"At first I liked it very well. They was workin' pretty good and I liked it 'cause they was trying' to clean up the streets; get stop signs in; visitin' with the police chief; pul-
lin' out the abandoned cars... at the meetin's the Whip lady would always explain a lot of deals to us and how things work and any information we wanted she'd explain it and I got a pretty good kick out of it. But, now, when I ask a question up there, they can't even give it to me. After they changed chair-
ladies, I couldn't seem to get nothin' in my head what they means about the work of the Citizen Action. I been thinkin' to stop going; there ain't no stimulation in it... it's just as dry and dead as a thing can be." (Mr. Hamilton, 70 year old Deacon of the African Methodist Church, retired longshoreman -- worked and lived in the city since 1943.)

"At first I felt real great about our victories, tryin' to get the dope pushers off the streets and make 'em safe again, an all that, but, recently we haven't been doing very much. It makes you heartbroken... when there are disagreements at our meetings, people stay angry with each other, there hasn't been anything worked out... I haven't been going too much lately." (Donna Jones, Black, hospital assistant in hospital employees union, no church affiliation, 19 years in the city, 4 in her neighborhood.)

"When Lucy came to the door and told about the organization it really made me feel good. I wrote her a check and became a member that same day. She was so wonderful with us, and we was wonderful with her. Whatever she felt was right, she come told us and we also sat down and talked and we come together on those things. We was sure that if somethin' went on in our meeting that wasn't just right she'd look around and whisper and tell us that 'I don't think you do it like this, it's such and such a way... she was a great help to us, we just loved her just like she was one of us. Without Lucy we just haven't been doin' too good. Like now, we vote on things in the meetin's but if I disagree with something I won't say a word... there may be ten or fifteen against it and I go along because seems like there's no time anymore to talk out our differences... I would never do it again, all the work I did the past year and then somebody else gets all the credit." (Dolores Hawthorne, 66 years old, Black, Baptist Deaconess, retired cook -- worked in Louisiana and Texas prior to coming to the city twenty-three years ago.)

Meaning

Clearly "meaning" in this context has all of the uncertainty and subjectivity of the blind men's proclamations on the nature of the elephant. Although at one level it could be said that these people joined Citizen Action because of the "issues" (i.e. lifeline, dope pushers, on the street, abandoned cars, etc.) What keeps them in it seems to be some combination of four elements:

* * *

1. anger, sense of injustice, idealism drive toward
action (redress of grievances)
2. loneliness, anomie, quest for community drive toward
belonging (friendship)
3. impotence/ignorance, search for understanding,
information and increased control drive toward
knowledge
4. lack of dignity, of self confidence, need to feel
useful, drive toward self-esteem

Each of these forces was expressed to some degree by every person interviewed but the emphasis ranged widely. For Betty Wasburn, anger is the major driving force; for Mr. Weatherford it is loneliness and boredom; for Mr. Hamilton, it is the insistence on learning or knowledge; for Mrs. Pond, the gaining of self-confidence. All of them seek a "free space,"* an arena in which dignity, not humiliation is the norm, in which it is safe to ask questions and admit doubts, and through which they gain respect, both internally and in the larger world.

The fact that these drives exist does not necessarily mean they will be fulfilled within Citizen Action or that other types of activities do not compete with community organizing as a way of fulfilling them. For example, anger can be vented through vandalism and violence, loneliness abetted through joining the Moonies, (or belongingness through mass suicide in Jonestown.) The neighborhood-level groups are merely one form of collection action.

Theories of collective action (Mancur Olson**) and resource mobilization (Gamson and Zald***), however, have somewhat missed the point on most of these issues of needs and motivations. The "public goods dilemma" or "free-rider problem" as Olson calls it, is based on the non-divisability of certain benefits. Since stopping a freeway or getting lower utility rates benefits the non-participants in a community group as well as the participants, (and since there is no way to make participation mandatory as with the "closed shop" in labor organizing) there appears, according to this logic, to be no incentive for any one

*c.f. Peter Drier, "The Case for Transitional Reform," Social Policy, Jan./Feb. 1979, pp. 5-18.

**c.f. Mancur Olson, Jr., The Logic of Collective Action: Public Good and the Theory of Groups, Harvard University Press; Cambridge, MA, 1965.

***Gamson, William, The Strategy of Social Protest, Dorsey Press, Homewood, Ill., 1975; and Mayer Zald, "Resource Mobilization" (n.d.)

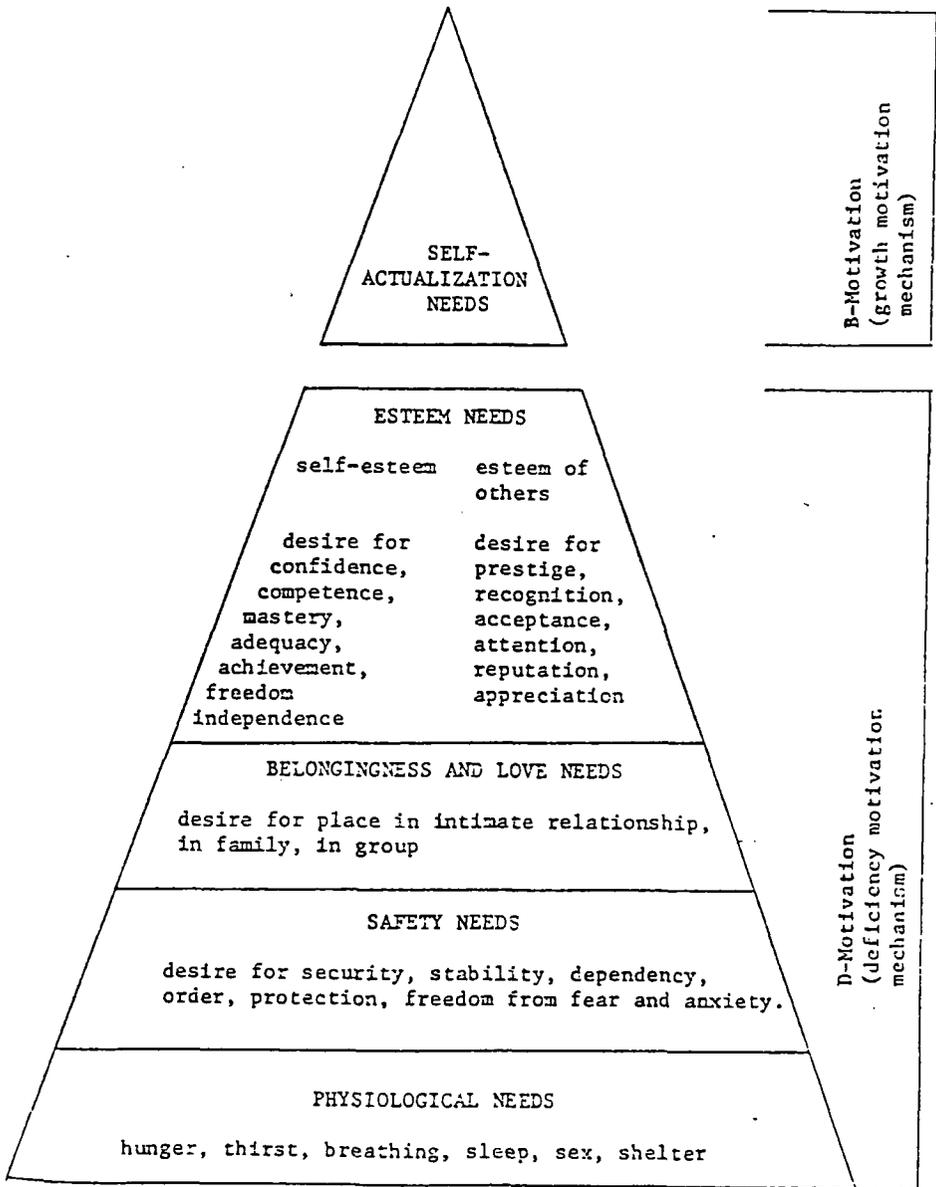


FIGURE 1 · MOTIVATION THEORY: NEED HIERARCHY BY ABRAHAM MASLOW

individual to make the effort. If that were the case, of course, there would not be hundreds, even thousands of community groups organizing around the country -- some of which do not even provide the individual incentives and rewards of ad books (membership discounts at local stores who support the organization). Also, there would not be members discussing the pros and cons in the terms quoted above.

The "resource-mobilization" reasoning argues that organizing is a rational approach for low income people to generate more goods and services and get a better deal, a fairer share. Since they did not have money or personal connections, their strength was in their numbers and in their potential for disruptive behavior. Emotional needs are not taken into account.

Both notions stem from a very rational view of people maximizing economic benefits, and thinking through alternative strategies prior to calculating their decisions. This was, in part a reaction to the "frustration-aggression" model which social scientists had long postulated as the basis for violence and revolution stemming from the deprived underclasses.* It was certainly a step forward from the "angry masses uprising" theory, but not very helpful in looking at the real complexities of meaning in citizen action.

What these few interviews suggest is both a more humanistic and more realistic perspective on the complexities of beliefs and behaviors. Abraham Maslow's work on the hierarchy of needs is valuable in this regard. He hypothesizes a scale of five types of needs: 1) physiological; 2) safety; 3) love and belongingness; 4) esteem (self-esteem and social esteem); and 5) self-actualization -- to become everything that one is capable of becoming. (See figure 1.)**

The notion is not that motivation for each stage proceeds only when the one below is totally fulfilled, but that at least a partial fulfillment of the more fundamental needs is necessary before a person's motivation toward the higher ones can be very strong.

In terms of community organizations such as Citizen Action, this helps explain two readily observable facts: first, that the members are not drawn from the poorest segments of the population (since they are too busy trying to deal with physiological necessities), and second, that most of the members are over fifty years old. Those in their twenties and thirties are starting careers and have little time for, or interest in, community organizing; then for the next two or three decades they

*c.f. Janice Perlman, The Myth of Marginality, U.C. Press, Berkeley, CA., 1976, Ch.4.

**Abraham Maslow, Eupsychian Management, Richard Irwin Inc., Homewood, Ill., 1965.

are busy raising families. Only when they are retired or have moved on to part-time work can their interest in the fun and fulfillment of citizen action organizing come to the fore. As most members said, they had joined groups before (especially the church, labor unions, or the Democratic party) but had "never been active." Being working class, they generally did not have the options of child-care and babysitters, or a non-working parent, which often allow middle-class couples to be active civic participants as well as raise families.

For a citizen action organization not only to attract, but hold the membership of low or moderate income people, it is clear that all four incentives -- anger, community, information, and self-esteem must be operating. The one-shot, single issue group disappears as soon as its victory (or defeat) is definitive. Even a multi-issue organization based solely on actions and anger will very quickly reach the point of "what-have-you-done-for-me-lately" and disintegrate without some value content toward binding friendships, cultural roots, and re-creation of personal dignity.

Dignity is gained, or re-gained, through many aspects of the citizen action process, but particularly through 1) actions which de-mystify the authorities, and provide the sweet taste of power, and 2) internal participatory democracy which gives every member a chance to be heard, a chance to make mistakes (and to learn from these without humiliation) and to disagree with others (and to resolve these differences without rancor.)

As Oppenheimer defines it:

Participatory democracy involves two complementary notions that people are inherently capable of understanding their problems and expressing themselves about these problems and their solutions, if given a social context in which freedom of expression is possible. The second is that real solutions to problems require the fullest participation of people in these solutions, with development of freedom from dependency on authorities and experts.*

There is only one problem: there exists an inherent conflict between action and participatory democracy. Since both are necessary to vital community organizing, a real paradox emerges. If too much participation takes place things take too long, the group gets bored, meeting attendance may drop off, and people feel that "not enough is going on" as Mrs. Hawthorne complained. If too much action and too little participation goes on, people do not learn the meaning of those actions (as in Mr. Weatherford's case) and are objectified as "troops" to be deployed

*Oppenheimer, Martin, "The Limitations of Socialism: Some Sociological Observations on Participatory Democracy" in G. Benello (ed.), The Case for Participatory Democracy, Grossman, N.Y. 1971, p. 227.

against targets, or they do not get a chance to raise the questions they need answered, and thus are frustrated, angered, and confused (as Mr. Hamilton expressed.) Oppenheimer summarizes it well:

A paradox exists between the democratic content of a group and the progress of the group towards a measure of power in the community. Too much discussion we stop moving; too little and we are no longer what we were. To achieve a goal we need unity but to achieve unity it is sometimes necessary to compromise, to gloss over some important issues -- which shall it be?*

Political awareness requires political discussion, but political discussion can be divisive. Organizers who lived through the 1960's saw the left fragment itself into impotence over "the correct line." With most of them being middle-class, white, educated males already committed to progressive politics it was hard enough to find common cause. Imagine the difficulties of doing this with a community group of mixed race, class, age and political experience. Whereas it is easy to agree on the negative -- stop the bulldozer, end relining, lower utility rates, etc. -- it is much more difficult to agree on the positive -- start what? support who? being where? The time, effort, and needed sensitivity to carry this out seem overwhelming.

On the other hand, without vision without clarity of purpose, no movement is possible, no organization can sustain itself.** A movement needs four things: an analysis of how things are, an explanation of how they got that way, a vision of how they could be in the future, and a notion of how to get from here to there. If there is no movement, then organizing the 30,000th person will take as much effort as organizing the 30th person, and electing the 10th citizen action candidate as isolated an effort as electing the first.

*Oppenheimer, pp. 229. See also Democracy, A Journal of Political Renewal and Radical Change, Sheldon Wolin, (ed.) Jan. 1981.

**Wilhelm Reich, writing in Germany in 1931-32 observed, "unless people have class consciousness, they will not stay mobilized, from 'What is Class Consciousness' Sex-Pol Essays 1929-34, Vintage Books, 1972, pp. 257-258."

Clearly, the Civil Rights and anti-war movements created such momentum in the 1960's and the "Moral Majority" supposedly has a similar momentum right now. If citizen action is to "catch on" at the national level, there will have to be the sense of channeled outrage and a collective vision of how to rectify the injustices which cause it. The bottom line of direct action organizing then must be growing awareness of the largest possible number of participants in every single campaign. Campaigns may fail and organizations may die, but the learning that people have internalized is for life. Once they own their new understanding, they can recreate their struggle, reform groups, remobilize their friends, etc.

The recent 18-month rent strike and eventual victory of the tenants in Co-op City provides a timely example of this. The residents were so well-organized, clear and militant that their opponents were stunned. They organized building captains in each building; floor captains for each floor; they ran their own printing press; and they knew the entire gamut of their rights and how far to push them. Why? Because these mostly elderly, Jewish tenants, (who had given up their rent-controlled apartments in the Bronx to find a retirement haven in Co-op City) had been through it all fifty years ago in the labor struggles, the communist or socialist political organizing of the 1930's. Although their skills of struggle had remained dormant all those years, they came right back as soon as they were needed.

This by no means implies that political education can be done through community organizations in the 1980's the way it was done in the labor organizations of the 1930's. It is almost a slogan, "you have to start from where people's heads are at," but this is brought home with stunning clarity when an organizer tries to tell the folk what they just did and what they are saying (about the little guy paying for the profits of the big corporations or about how the political parties are owned by the oil companies) is tantamount to socialism. In general, the folk do not come back. The McCarthy era has left its mark clearly enough, the media, especially television, have done the rest. Most group spokespersons when asked about ideology will say they are non-ideological, even anti-ideological. If anything, some will say they are populist.*

Going beyond the spokespeople and listening to the members talk about their view of the world, reveals that they are both more radical and more conservative than their staff and leadership. They are filled with inconsistencies and internal contradictions, but feel no need for consistency. Many will talk about "excess profit," "conflict of interest," "the power of numbers," "corporate ripoffs," etc. They often express outrage at the injustice of companies moving out of town, eliminating thousands of jobs and a much-needed tax base; or against the rampant speculation of landlords who buy and sell properties

*c.f. Janice Perlman, "Grassrooting the System," Social Policy Sept/Oct. 1976, p. 4-20.

for profits, evicting families without recourse. However, in the same breath they will say they believe in private property and in the absolute right of owners to do as they please with their buildings, or companies. They say "everyone should be free, this is a free country."

This type of mentality has been characterized by Hobsbawm as "pre-political thought," as contrasted with "political consciousness." Consciousness, he says is a "coherent viewpoint providing an interpretive framework for the understanding of relations between society, culture, and political economy." He goes on to say it suggests "volition in the development of a long-range political program and strategy as well as a set of tactics and immediate demands." In contrast,

Pre-political thought is less coherent, has little conception of long-range goals or programs, responds in a fragmented fashion to immediate grievances, and frequently sees little relationship between the concrete problem at hand and the larger social system.*

Wikler, in a study of consciousness among Vietnam veterans found many patterns of "pre-political thinking" similar to those among community organization members. She characterizes the components as 1) diffuse anger and strongly felt grievances, 2) political fragments rather than a coherent ideology, 3) spontaneous, sometimes anarchic behavior, 4) rudimentary notions of a system, and 5) disobedience.** Because of this relatively amorphous and contradictory political comprehension, some were extremely radicalized by their Vietnam experience. Some became defensive of the war and the U.S. role in the world, and some remained confused and unclear.

According to Leggett who did a similar study measuring the class consciousness of Detroit workmen, a 4-stage process can be traced from pre-political thinking towards class consciousness: 1) class verbalization -- the tendency to discuss topics in terms of class; 2) skepticism -- the belief that wealth had been allocated within the community to benefit primarily the middle class; 3) militancy, the pre-disposition to engage in aggressive action to advance the interests on one's class; and 4) equali-

*Eric Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels, Praeger, N.Y. 1963.

**Norma Wikler, "Vietnam and the Veteran's Consciousness: Pre-Political Thinking Among American Soldiers" U.C. Berkeley, Ph.D. dissertation, Sociology, 1973.

tarianism -- favoring a redistribution of wealth.* Al Heskin has adapted this scale to a study of tenant consciousness and is presently testing it in Los Angeles finding a much greater receptivity than expected and more skepticism and militancy.**

The logical question this discussion leads to is whether or not participation in a community organization affects the development of political consciousness. No simple answer is forthcoming. However, a few things are clear from the interviews conducted. First, that there is a great deal of pre-selection in who joins a neighborhood organization. Not only do relatively few people know about a given organization in any community, but even among those who know intimately about it (through friends, neighbors, or relatives) many do not have the time or inclination to join. Thus, any serious study of this topic would have to match pairs of members and their most similar non-member acquaintances to begin to sort out the factors accounting for this first level of difference. Second, for those who are members, even most longtime members, it is clear that their experience in the organization is only a minute part of their lifetime process of political socialization. Their previous experiences -- in their families, schools, churches, labor unions, etc. -- play an overwhelming role in shaping their view of the world. To use Berger's phrase, one's "social construction of reality"***is already fairly established by the time that person joins a community organization. Furthermore, given that in Citizen Action very few people had succeeded in bringing their friends, neighbors or family members into the organization, there is very little support for a new definition of reality even if the seeds are sown for this within the organization. One might argue that this can happen among new friends made within the organization, but the vast majority of those interviewed said they did not socialize with Citizen Action members outside of the organization, and those who did socialized almost exclusively with the organizers or staff rather than with other members. (In fact, both Mrs. Gomez and Mrs. Hawthorne were rather disdainful of the other members.) This is not true for all community organizations, but was revealing in that it seems more often the case than not.

CONCLUSION

The above caveats notwithstanding, people do, in fact, learn and re-interpret the world around them all the time as long as

*John Leggett, "The Periodicity of Working-Class Consciousness," in Taking State Power, Ch. 5, Harper and Row, N.Y. 1973, p. 111.

**c.f. Al Heskin, "The History of Tenants in the U.S.: Struggle and Ideology", Dept. of City Planning, UCLA, Los Angeles, The Tenant Consciousness Study grant is from the NIMH Metro center.

***Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, The Social Construction of Reality, Doubleday, Garden City, 1966, pp. 45-107, 119-169.

they are alive. Participating in a community group, while perhaps not decisive, cannot fail to contribute to this reassessment process. This happens to a greater or lesser degree depending on three factors: action, interpretation, and internalization.

By action is meant that if a group does not engage in some activity or confrontation that challenges the normal course of things, they generate no new data for re-interpretation. In most citizen action organizations the fun of it all comes from the creative planning and execution of these actions -- they are the "spice" while doorknocking, fundraising, meetings, etc. are the "meat and potatoes".

Interpretation means two things. First, how much attention the organizational style gives to learning from both failures and victories to open discussion and analysis before and after actions, and to ongoing leadership development. Second, how well the leaders are able to interpret and explain to the membership the connections between what they saw happen and why. Making the victory is only part of the challenge, giving it meaning is equally important. If people perceive only a "black box" effect where you do "X" and "Y" results, they will never be able to own their own successes or re-create them in other circumstances.

Finally, internalization refers to the process by which the lessons learned from action and interpretation are incorporated into one's daily operating assumptions and reinforced in one's own home or neighborhood among trusted friends and relatives. In the absence of this, some members expressed the feeling of not really believing what they had just experienced; it seemed like such a different world, almost as if its reality disappeared when they left the group and went home.

In short, it appears that the greatest change in consciousness will occur in active groups which have indigenous leadership with some degree of ideological clarity, and a process of internal discussion within the organization, and a high degree of solidarity and friendship with friends, neighbors and relatives also in the organization.

As the citizen action movement has come of age, and as new insights have been gained regarding the issue of "meaning" and consciousness, some very interesting approaches have evolved to focus more attention on what Mike Ansars of Massachusetts Fair Share calls "value-based" rather than "issue-based" organizing. People feel concerned about the loss of traditional guidelines, culture, and values in their lives and are as able to talk about this as they are to complain about the garbage on the street or the needed stopsign on the corner. Some groups such as the South Bronx People for Change, and the Mutual Aid Project in Coney Island and Brooklyn are adapting Paulo Freire's methods of

bottom-up dialogue and consciousness raising* to their own styles of organizing. They work more in the Chavez tradition, whose approach among the farmworkers was to reinforce ties of culture, trust, and community, within the groups and its institutions, rather than in the Alinsky mode which focuses on the enemy -- "them" out there to create the sense of "we."**

M.A.P., for example, is setting up a series of cooperatively owned community "cafeterias" in which people can congregate, talk, eat good food at reasonable prices, and hold cultural events for their community. They are already running a cooperative food buying service, a food services training center, and an assistance service to groups interested in establishing worker community cooperative food enterprises. They take the Highlander Center in Appalachia as one of their organizing models.

The South Bronx People for Change works through a combination of theological reflection (the "why"); social analysis (the "what"); and community organizing (the "how"). Before they take any action each group goes through a lengthy process of discussion (half are in English, half in Spanish) including a needs assessment, recruitment, training sessions, and follow-up into action goals. They are as concerned with asking the right questions, and building a process of popular education as with "winning victories." They are planting the seeds of a movement in the South Bronx and are moving slowly and sensitively, turning negatives into positives along the route. The problem, as Nelson Rodrigues said, "is not apathy but powerlessness." What they deliver is a little hope. It is a matter of common sense, he says, "if you're going to the top of the mountain don't go naked and don't go alone."

*C.F. Paulo Freire, The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Herder & Herder, N.Y. 1970 and Education for Critical Consciousness, Continuum Books, Seabury Press, N.Y. 1973.

**For this distinction, I draw upon conversations with William Friedland, Board Community Studies and Sociology, U.C. Santa Cruz.