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ORGANIZATIONAL ADAPTATION: THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION

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This study examines the effect that bureaucratic attributes and the dual function of the National Urban League (NUL) had on its ability to respond quickly to New Deal programs and legislation. With the exception of its decentralized structure, bureaucratic attributes contributed to the organization's effectiveness. Its structure limited its ability to implement national programs and pressure for national policies. The NUL was unable to make a permanent change in its structure that would be more compatible with its targets. Its dual function, attempting to change individual behavior and societal institutions, helped it maintain a support base without becoming more conservative.

The National Urban League (NUL) was founded in 1910 in response to the problems experienced by the large number of urban black Americans who had migrated from rural to urban areas seeking jobs and a better life. Throughout its history the NUL has been a major national black organization, providing leadership and a broad range of resources to help the urban black population make social and economic advancements. The NUL believed that if given an equal opportunity, the black population could compete successfully with other groups in the country. Unemployment and discriminatory employment policies were seen as major impediments to the advancement of black Americans. Its motto, "not alms but opportunity," is illustrative of these concerns.

Prior to the Great Depression, the NUL concentrated on vocational education and the expansion of job opportunities

for black workers in the private sector. Efforts to combat pervasive job discrimination were done on an almost case-by-case basis. The NUL, through its Vocational Opportunity Campaigns and through personal contacts, tried to persuade potential employers to give black workers the opportunity to prove that they could be efficient, honest, and reliable employees. The League rejoiced when it was able to help a black worker become "the first" black milkman in a city or "the first" black office clerk for a major business (NUL Papers, 1930a; Weiss, 1974; Parris and Brooks, 1971).

In 1933, with few private sector jobs available and with the New Deal administration creating work and work-relief programs for the unemployed, the NUL turned its attention to helping black workers make gains through government programs and new legislation. However, the NUL thought it would be necessary to make some basic changes within the organization if it was to respond effectively to the changes occurring in its external environment.

This article analyzes the ability of the organization to make these changes by examining two inter-related qualities of the NUL: (1) its bureaucratic attributes and (2) its dual function. These organizational characteristics enhanced and limited the adaptive capacities of the NUL during a turbulent historical period, the Great Depression. This study relies on primary source data, the NUL Papers and *Opportunity*, the official organ of the NUL.

Bureaucratic Attributes

Robert Michels' theory, "the iron law of oligarchy," indicates a natural tendency for organizations to become more bureaucratic because a weak bureaucracy is more vulnerable to the external environment. However, as an organization becomes more bureaucratic, it becomes less compatible with its social change goals. It avoids controversial issues because it does not want to alienate its supporters. The organization becomes more conservative and more oligarchical. The internal environment of an organization also pushes it towards oligarchy. The personal motives of "managers"

(e.g., promotion and job security) cause them to be faithful to the bureaucracy instead of its social change goals (Michels, 1949).

Few have disputed Michels' observation that organizations tend to become more bureaucratic. It is generally accepted that a primary goal of all organizations is to survive. However, other studies of organizations indicate that this concern for survival does not always result in the organization becoming conservative and oligarchical (Blau and Meyer, 1956; Zald and Ash, 1966; Sills, 1969; Ash, 1972; Oberschall, 1973).

William Gamson, in his study of 53 social movement organizations, found that all of the organizations became more bureaucratic but he did not find this to be incompatible with the organization's social change goals. The more bureaucratic attributes an organization had, the more likely it was to be successful. The bureaucratic structure provided a unity of command and a means for handling internal conflicts. It kept the organization ready to take advantage of opportunities when they came along. The well established organizations were more able to take advantage of opportunities provided by a crisis than were newly established organizations (Gamson, 1975).

Jo Freeman's analysis of women's movement organizations supports the thesis regarding the benefits of bureaucratic attributes. However, she contends that different organizational structures mold strategic possibilities. The effectiveness of an organization's structure depends on its target for change. The organization may create a structure that is effective for a particular target but when the organization moves on to another target, its structure may no longer be effective. It is difficult and time consuming to change a structure and make it more compatible with a new target (Freeman, 1979).

These theories lead to an analysis of the NUL's bureaucratic attributes and their effect on the organization's ability to remain viable during a period of severe economic depression and rapid social change. By 1930, the NUL was a well established bureaucracy. Its bureaucratic attributes included

a constitution, by-laws, departments that specialized in certain aspects of its work (e.g., industrial relations, research, publications), an organizational hierarchy, and terms of affiliation. The constitution gave the Executive Board the power to make policy and appropriate funds but there appears to have been a collegial climate within the organization with the staff very involved in formulating policy (NUL Constitution, 1930–36; NUL Executive Board Meetings, 1933–39).

The organization was a confederation with 42 affiliates, mostly in the Northeast and Midwest, and a national office in New York (NUL Papers, 1930b; NUL, 1980). Eugene Kinckle Jones served as the Executive Secretary of the NUL and T. Arnold Hill, Secretary of the Industrial Relations Department, was the main liaison between the national office and the affiliates. There was a dependency between the national office and the affiliates that encouraged cooperation and cohesiveness. The national office needed the affiliates to carry out its various programs and to support its efforts to change national policy. The affiliates benefited from the prestige of the NUL and the information and guidance the national office provided. This mutual dependency was an incentive for the national office and the affiliates to avoid activities that might cause conflict between them. Yet there was tension between the two because the affiliates did not always help to carry out national programs; perhaps because some of these programs were considered too controversial in respective affiliate cities. The affiliates were totally dependent on local contributors so many avoided controversy because they feared this might impede fund raising and limit local support of their programs.

The Terms of Affiliation set standards for the establishment of affiliates and for some aspects of their operation (Terms of Affiliation, 1925–32, 1935, 1939). Shortly after its founding, the NUL sought to expand by affiliating with existing local organizations with goals similar to the League's. Many of these organizations feared that their affiliation with the NUL would encroach on their autonomy. The NUL found that it had to allow these organizations a

great deal of autonomy if it was to expand and become a national organization (Weiss, 1974). This created a loose confederation that caused problems for the League in its efforts to respond quickly to New Deal legislation and it tried to overcome this. Its involvement with the National Recovery Administration (NRA) illustrates its efforts to do so.

One of the first acts of the New Deal administration created the NRA in 1933. Its purpose was to stimulate private industry to produce more and thus enable it to hire more workers. The act was also to regulate workers' hours and wages through the establishment of fair practice codes (Leuchtenberg, 1963). One of the NUL's major concerns, in regard to the NRA, was the exclusion of agriculture and domestic workers from code coverage, thus excluding two-thirds of the black work force. This meant that most black workers had no protection against exploitation by employers (NUL, 1933).

The NUL responded to the creation of the NRA by announcing a new program at its regional conferences in 1933. T. Arnold Hill, Secretary of the Industrial Relations Department, explained that "It might be necessary to recast and reshape the programs of the League in light of new social changes" (NUL Papers, 1933a). Consequently, an Emergency Advisory Council (EAC) would be established, made up of prominent blacks (business men and women, educators, ministers, and other professionals) around the country. The EAC would address NRA issues and educate black workers about the various recovery programs, including how to apply for benefits and programs. Local EACs, which the affiliates were asked to establish, would be coordinated by the national EAC. The program would have an "unofficial relationship" with the NUL (NUL Papers, 1933b). This parallel structure (EAC) allowed the national office to create and control a program at a local level, circumventing some of the resistance the affiliates might have had to the program. This was a significant departure from the League's reliance on the affiliates for implementing programs. There was also a radical deviation from the NUL's traditional policy. Membership in the EACs was limited to blacks. When this policy was

questioned at one of the regional conferences, Hill responded, "The advantages of this form of organization is (sic) that they (blacks) are able better to express in unmistakable terms just what the Negroes want" (NUL Papers, 1933b).

The structure created by the national office worked well. Most of the affiliates became involved along with prominent blacks throughout the country. By the end of 1933, 196 EACs had been organized in 32 states and the District of Columbia (NUL Papers, 1933c). (The NUL had affiliates in only 19 states so this program helped the organization to expand (NUL Papers 1930,b). The EACs enabled the NUL to collect many incidents of code violations and incidents of discrimination in New Deal work and work-relief programs. This information was passed on to New Deal officials. The EACs also helped blacks gain a better understanding of New Deal programs, especially eligibility criteria (NUL Papers, 1933d,e). However, two-thirds of the black work force remained uncovered by the NRA codes.

In 1934 the NUL established even more control over the EACs by developing a formal plan of organization that gave the national EAC (essentially the national office) the power to approve all members and the right to remove any members who did not follow EAC policy (NUL Papers, 1934a). This formal plan was probably developed to protect the image of the NUL as well as establish more control. Although the EAC had an "unofficial relationship" with the NUL, the League was visibly involved. It tended to be a cautious organization and did not want the EACs to be "in any way political" or radical (NUL Papers, 1934a).

The activities of the EACs began to decline when the NRA was declared unconstitutional in 1935. This eliminated the reason for them in the minds of many (NUL Papers, 1935a). The NUL considered making the EACs a permanent part of its structure because "a good deal of work (could) be done by making permanent those that do exist, and reviewing some of those that have lost interest." It was decided that "a shortage of staff" made it "inadvisable to list this as a major activity for the coming year" (NUL Papers, 1938a).

The NUL's concern about the substantial gains that organized labor was making as a result of New Deal legislation was the catalyst for creating a structure, like the EAC, for a new labor program. It provides another example of the organization's efforts to make its structure more compatible with its target for change. Organized labor had control of a large proportion of jobs in the public and private sectors yet many unions refused to admit black workers. The NUL feared that blacks would be permanently shut out of jobs and thought that the discriminatory policies of organized labor needed to be addressed in some way. It considered using the EACs for this but decided that a program with a narrower focus would be more effective (NUL Papers, 1934b).

It created a Workers' Bureau that, like the EAC, circumvented the autonomy of the affiliates. The Workers' Bureau established black Workers' Councils and coordinated their activities. The NUL had difficulty raising money for the labor program from its usual sources (white philanthropists and philanthropic foundations) so it turned its attention to the black middle class. It formed an all-black committee, the Committee of 100, to campaign for middle class blacks to support a movement aimed at black workers (NUL Papers, 1934b). Getting support for this program among blacks was not an easy task. Many blacks were anti-union because of bitter experiences with unions in the past. The NUL's labor program was criticized by the black press, the black church, and black fraternal organizations. It was also criticized by more militant blacks as being too mild and "muddling the issues" (Cayton and Mitchell, 1939). The League was able to overcome some of this criticism because the chair of the Committee of 100 was the publisher of *The Chicago Defender* and an NUL board member was the editor of *The Pittsburgh Courier*, two black newspapers with national circulations. These papers provided at least a forum to present the pro-union argument to the black community (Parris and Brooks).

The Committee of 100 was able to raise enough money (\$2000) to launch the labor program but not enough to sustain it for any length of time. The program was more controversial than the EAC and fewer affiliates participated.

Lester Granger, Secretary of the Workers' Bureau, traveled around the country speaking to groups about the League's labor program and organizing Workers' Councils. He also alienated some affiliates when he organized in cities where they were opposed to the program. By 1935 there were 42 Workers' Councils in 17 states and 73 by 1937 (NUL Papers, 1935b, 1937a; Hamilton, 1984; Granger Oral History, 1960–61).

The Councils pressured organized labor to prohibit discrimination in unions; they helped black workers to understand the advantages of belonging to unions; they informed New Deal officials of incidents of discrimination in New Deal programs; and they campaigned for an anti-discriminatory clause in all government contracts that would prohibit the participation of unions that were discriminatory (Hamilton; NUL Papers, 1934c, d, 1935c, d).

The labor program was of short duration due to the NUL's financial problems, but in some areas the councils were instrumental in getting black workers admitted to unions. Supervision of the Workers' Councils by the national office required fairly frequent contacts between the Councils and the Workers' Bureau and the League did not have the staff or money to sustain this program for a long period of time. By mid-1937 the activities of the Councils were on the decline. The Committee of 100 was practically inactive (Hamilton; NUL Papers 1937a). Conflicts had developed between the Workers' Bureau and some of the affiliates opposed to the labor program (NUL Papers, 1938b). Radical groups infiltrated some of the Councils and the NUL closed these down. There were conflicts within some of the Councils indicating that the craft versus industrial union conflict had spilled over into them (NUL Papers, 1936a, 1937b, c, 1938c; Cayton and Mitchell, 1939). Granger took a leave of absence (NUL Papers, 1938d). All of these events contributed to the demise of the labor program. By the end of 1937 only 25 councils remained active. The NUL thought the labor program could be revived with extensive field work but this was never done—in all likelihood because the

resources to do so were not available (NUL Papers, 1937d, 1939a, b, 1940a).

The more centralized, temporary structures created by the NUL appear to have been a viable way for the organization to overcome the limitations its decentralized structure placed on its ability to respond quickly to New Deal legislation, but it was too costly. Its efforts to develop new national programs and to change on-going programs without this kind of structure were rather futile. The following activities of the NUL illustrate this point.

The League continued to be concerned with helping black workers become involved with organized labor and at the 1937 Annual Conference proposed a national program to organize black domestic workers into a union. This would put them in a more advantageous position to bargain for better wages and working conditions. There were affiliates for and affiliates against this proposal. Those against it argued that the League had no control over outside employment agencies and therefore setting up standards of work was outside of its realm of capabilities. Furthermore, such activity might interfere with its financial base because employers, local funding boards, and foundations would be against it. Those in favor of the proposal argued that it was part of the NUL's job; it had a binding obligation to help poor black women. These proponents believed that such a program was likely to improve chances for funding. "Collective action" was "an advanced program approved by liberal thought that generally characterize(d) League supporters" (NUL Papers, 1937e). It was a field where blacks could lead and reap the benefits. Failure to assume this leadership would cause the NUL to lag behind progressive public opinion and lose its dominant position (NUL Papers, 1937e).

Many of the affiliates had been inundated with black women seeking employment throughout the Depression and domestic work was likely to be the only work the Leagues had to offer them. As a result, many of the affiliates had been involved with black domestic workers and concerned about their plight. These women worked long hours for very

low wages. Nonetheless, the NUL was not able to get the financial and affiliate support needed to launch a national program directed at black domestic workers. Some of the Leagues continued their efforts to improve conditions for them but the autonomy of the affiliates as well as the NUL's financial situation mitigated against the proposed national program (NUL Papers 1933f, 1934e, 1939d, 1940b).

Late in the Depression, the NUL weighed the advantages of continuing with its Employment Bureau. This had been a major program in its Industrial Relations Department since the department was established in 1925 (Parris and Brooks, 1971). It had been conceived as a means for helping black workers obtain better jobs, to find employment for blacks in areas where they had been excluded because of race. During the Depression the employment service had become mostly a service to help black workers obtain relief. Since the League had few jobs to offer at that time (those few it did have tended to be at the lowest end of the occupational ladder and paid very low wages), most who sought employment at League offices became certified as unemployed and seeking work, thus making them eligible for relief (NUL Papers, 1939e, f). This service clearly went against a goal of the organization—the expansion of job opportunities for black workers. The NUL firmly believed that it was important for blacks to be gainfully employed. It did not want to facilitate the creation of a large black population dependent on “the dole” (Hamilton, 1984). The NUL thought its resources might be put to better use. Furthermore, the federal government was helping the states set up employment offices, perhaps making the League's services redundant (NUL Papers, 1940c).

The affiliates were surveyed on this matter in 1939. While some of the affiliates considered their employment services essential and helpful, others thought that the service thwarted efforts to remove racial barriers and expand job opportunities. Those who thought the employment service was essential argued that the special needs of black workers made it necessary to have a service tailored to meet these

needs. Those who questioned the usefulness of the service thought it did not warrant the amount of resources needed to provide it. Opinions among the affiliates seem to have been dependent on local conditions and customs. Some states used discriminatory practices that did not "lend a sense of dignity to Negro labor." (NUL Papers, 1939g). Separate seating arrangements in employment offices and the classification of occupations by race made black applicants feel that they were not being given equal access to jobs. In some cities there were separate offices for blacks and whites and referrals were made to the "black office" only when the job order could not be filled with white applicants. Some states had integrated services with few or no black staff members and some states had offices that were integrated with a number of black employees (NUL Papers, 1938d, 1939h, i).

The majority of the affiliates chose to continue their employment services. Some may have done so because they believed that the League's services provided an essential black perspective that could not be provided by the government office. Others may have continued with the service because they feared losing a major program and consequently a great deal of financial support. At any rate, the employment service continued to be a prominent part of the NUL program. Few affiliates were willing to redirect their resources. The autonomy of the affiliates prevented a change in the direction of programs.

The affiliates' autonomy seems helpful in the sense that it allowed them to make decisions about programs based on their perception of local needs. For example, it appears that there were some cities where black workers would benefit from the continuation of the League employment service. The structure was not helpful to the extent that it limited the League's ability to respond quickly and to control resources. However, making a permanent change in the structure of the organization proved to be very difficult as evidenced by the following account of the NUL's attempt to gain more control over the affiliates.

At the latter part of the Depression it proposed an amendment to the Terms of Affiliation that would give the Executive Board the power to confirm the affiliates' staff appointments and review the work of an affiliate employee "who, in the judgement of the NUL, is not performing his duties satisfactorily and in accordance with the standards and practices of the NUL" (NUL Papers, 1938c). This was clearly a move on the part of the national office to standardize affiliate activities.

This attempt to amend the Terms of Affiliation created much dissension between the national office and the affiliates, and it was not until 1940 that the Terms were amended. The Executive Board did not get the power to confirm affiliate staff appointments but it did get the power to "review the work of any affiliate employee. . ." (NUL Papers, 1940d). This amendment extended the power of the national office over the affiliates to some extent. The decentralized structure remained and the national office and the affiliates each continued to try to gain more power within the organization.

As the national office tried to amend the Terms of Affiliation, the affiliates formed the Executive Secretaries' Council to air some of their grievances with the national office and to push for more involvement in the NUL's decision making process. The Secretaries' Council was concerned about the infrequent contacts between the national office and the affiliates. This lack of contact fostered "fear, suspicion, and a lack of faith in the national office" (NUL Papers, 1939j). It was unhappy with staff changes, especially since the affiliates had not been officially informed of these changes but had heard rumors about them (NUL Papers, 1939j).

These criticisms occurred at a time when the NUL was in dire financial straits and as a result, had sharply curtailed its contacts with the affiliates (NUL Papers, 1939k, 1940e). To make matters worse, T. Arnold Hill, the main liaison between the national office and the affiliates for about 25 years, was dividing his time between the NUL and the Department of Labor in Washington. In addition, the Executive

Secretary, Eugene Kinkle Jones, was ill and had less energy to devote to the administration of the organization (NUL Papers, 1940f).

The national office's response to the Secretaries' Council did not ease the latter's concern and it asked for representation at the quarterly board meetings (NUL Papers, 1940g). The Steering Committee, acting on behalf of the Executive Committee, denied this request by choosing not to recognize the Secretaries' Council "as part and parcel of the NUL's constitutional set-up." It was not "an organic part of the structure" and therefore the NUL could not "grant the right of the Executive Secretaries' Council to be formally represented at each . . . quarterly meeting. . . . (NUL Papers, 1940g, h). The bureaucracy prevailed; a bureaucratic attribute of the NUL, its constitution, was used to circumvent the secretaries' attempt to gain more power within the organization. This incident shows how difficult it is for an organization to make a permanent change in its structure and how bureaucratic attributes can help to control internal conflicts.

The tension between the national office and the affiliates seems to have some positive aspects. It served as a balance of power and prevented either from gaining complete control of the organization. This slowed the tendency toward oligarchy and fostered a dialogue. However, the NUL would have been a much stronger national organization if all of its affiliates had been involved in its national programs. This would have given NUL leaders much more leverage with New Deal decision makers when they pressured them for certain policies.

The Dual Function

Mayer Zald and Roberta Ash believe that the main problem for social movement organizations is maintaining a base of support. These organizations have goals that are not quickly or easily accomplished so the enthusiasm of members may wane. It is easier to hold the participation and commitment of members, they contend, if the goals of the

organization are directed toward changing individual behavior rather than changing society (1966). Judith Trolander, in her study of community funding boards during the Depression, found that these boards tended to be composed of the more conservative elements in the community and preferred giving to organizations that did not challenge the status quo (Trolander, 1973).

Freeman's study of women's movement organizations points out the benefits of the dual function in that movement—consciousness-raising (changing individuals) and lobbying (changing societal institutions). Consciousness-raising was a main activity of the newer branches and attracted many new members. In the meantime, the older branch was able to continue its pressure on legislators with a stronger support base (Freeman, 1979).

The NUL had been, since its founding, a dual function organization that provided services aimed at changing individual behavior, e.g., helping black workers develop skills and "good" work habits, and pressured for societal changes, e.g., pressuring for the prohibition of discriminatory employment policies. However, the affiliates were very dependent on their local funding organizations. Fear of losing financial support is a logical explanation for the affiliates' lack of cooperation with the national office. Many of the affiliates that engaged in social action had difficulties with community funding boards (NUL Papers, 1933g,h, 1935e, 1936b, 1937f, 1939l). This caused some affiliates to avoid controversial issues and activities. For example, some of the affiliates promoted employment services that stressed their efforts to develop characteristics of "loyalty, honesty, and industry" in black workers as "safeguards against loss" (NUL Papers, 1939m). This probably seemed safer to them than engaging in social action to fight discriminatory policies. When an affiliate did run into difficulties, the national office, at the request of the affiliate, tried to help. The NUL recognized the difficulties inherent in the affiliates' relationships with their major sources of funding. For example, when considering the labor program, the NUL stated, "It might be necessary

in view of the stand on labor problems for the Leagues to divest themselves of the support of Community Funds and white patronage" (NUL Papers, 1935f).

The experience of the Executive Secretary of the Kansas City, Missouri League is a good example of the problems the affiliates encountered with their funding boards. The Kansas City League was one of the Leagues that had cooperated with the national office in the implementation of the labor program and the Executive Secretary of that League had had on-going difficulties with other groups in the city. When he was on the verge of losing the support of his funding organization, the Council of Social Agencies, he wrote to Hill for help. He told Hill the League's "techniques did not fit in with community mores" (NUL Papers, 1939l). An evaluation by the Council of Social Agencies was devastating. It accused the secretary of political involvement and said he lacked community organization skills. It demanded that he resign along with the entire board, with the exception of the recently elected president. A new board would be appointed by the Council and the League president. The report described the two functions of the League as incompatible. It was not possible for the UL to be a "coordinating community organization agency" and an agency functioning "as an articulation and expression of a minority group's struggle for economic opportunity and increased social equality" (NUL Papers, 1939n). The Kansas City League was accused of stimulating action of other groups, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Negro Congress. Some whites thought "outside agitators" were involved. The immediate source of contention seems to have been a suit filed by the secretary to allow blacks to play golf on the municipal course. This was regarded as advocating for social equality for blacks (NUL Papers, 1939o).

Hill went to Kansas City to help resolve the problem and was able to delay the Council's threat to cut off the League's funds and to bring the parties together to discuss their differences. Hill's report of his visit concluded that it was indeed difficult for a League to "be a coordinating agency

which required the cooperation and confidence of all agencies in the city" and at the same time help black people make social and economic advancement. When "the League attempted to do the latter . . . it would alienate forces that would help it do the former" (NUL Papers, 1939p). He thought it was possible to do both but this "in large measure depended upon the tact of the Executive Secretary and the support the Board gave him" (NUL Papers, 1939p). The experiences of the Kansas City secretary emphasize the uneasy truce that existed between blacks and whites in some urban areas and the difficulties caused by the affiliates' dependency on local funding boards.

It seems feasible that the dual function of the organization helped it to survive. The League was able to emphasize its efforts to change individual behavior and thus not alienate its sources of funding. At the same time, it could engage in activities aimed at institutional change as long as these activities did not attract too much attention and were not too controversial. For example, the NUL's lack of publicity regarding its activities related to the NRA was questioned by an affiliate secretary. Eugene K. Jones responded that "it was often unwise to publicize the type of activities that have been carried on by the League in Washington recently" (NUL Papers, 1933a). It was explained that "the very nature of the work done by the National, certain accomplishments could never be reported as resulting from Urban League work, and over-emphasizing this phase of activity could be more detrimental than beneficial" (NUL Papers, 1933b).

Although the organization was cautious and preferred not to call attention to its efforts directed at institutional change, it was willing to take risks on some issues about which it felt strongly. In addition to creating a labor program that was initially unpopular among its black constituents and many of its white supporters, it testified in favor of a controversial social security bill, H.R. 2827 (Hill, 1935; NUL, 1935). This bill was regarded as a communist proposal to get the support of the workers (the Lundeen or

Workers' Bill). The bill emphasized that unemployment was "a disease of the capitalist system" and therefore the beneficiaries of that system should compensate the victims (Mitchell, 1947). According to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "the Unemployed Councils controlled by the Communist party persuaded Ernest Lundeen, a left-wing Farmer-Labor congressman from Minnesota to introduce the bill. . ." (1959).

It is not possible to know exactly why the NUL risked testifying in favor of this bill but perhaps it did so because the bill embodied policies that the League strongly favored. Social security would cover all workers, it would be administered by the federal government, and it would be entirely funded by employers. Those most in need were to be given priority for benefits (Hill, 1935). The organization's realization of the importance of this bill for black workers seems to have superceded its concerns about protecting its image. The dual function of the organization may have helped it to survive this testimony.

Conclusion

The NUL's bureaucratic attributes, for the most part, enhanced the organization's ability to adapt to changes in its external environment and these attributes increased during the Depression. The League created temporary structures that were more centralized and therefore enabled it to exercise greater control over local programs. However one attribute, its decentralized structure, limited the NUL's adaptive capacities. It did not lend itself well to national programs and efforts to change New Deal policies. The NUL tried to change this structure by amending the Terms of Affiliation but this proved to be very difficult. Although the League's bureaucracy controlled internal conflict, the decentralized structure remained.

Its efforts to gain more control over the affiliates show some tendency toward oligarchy but the organization did not become more conservative. It wanted control of the affiliates so that it could implement programs that many of the affiliates regarded as too controversial for their respective

communities. In addition, it deviated from its usual interracial policy by creating all-black groups. It also testified in favor of a radical social security bill.

The dual function of the organization, changing individual behavior and changing societal conditions, seems directly related to its ability to survive the Depression. In all likelihood, this was not a conscious strategy developed by the organization. Shirley Jenkins' study of modern day ethnic organizations indicates that these organizations tend to be multi-service organizations because their clients are poor and in need of help in many areas (Jenkins, 1980, 1981). This appears to be the case for the NUL. It tried to meet the various needs of its constituents in different ways. However, it was able to emphasize one aspect of its work over another when it appeared that this would help the organization hold on to its supporters. Thus the dual function helped the organization avoid becoming more conservative. It remained a fairly flexible, pragmatic organization, important adaptive qualities.

This study has focused on two internal characteristics of the NUL and consequently, does not include many important dynamics. It is not the intent of this article to assume that the NUL's difficulties were entirely related to these internal qualities of the organization. They appear to have had some effect on the organization, limiting and enhancing its effectiveness; but a major reason the NUL proceeded cautiously seems related to its position in society. It represented a minority constituency that lacked status, political power, and financial resources. This limited its access to resources and decision makers and made it a very vulnerable organization.

The NUL was a well established organization at the onset of the Depression and was able to help many black workers take advantage of New Deal programs. However, it was not able to bring about any significant change in the plight of black Americans, particularly legislation to prohibit discrimination by organized labor and employers. Some blacks gained employment through union membership,

others through the new civil service system; but too large a proportion of black workers were unemployed and on welfare as New Deal work and work-relief programs ended. Two-thirds of the black work force, domestic and agriculture workers, were excluded from coverage under the Social Security Act (Wood, 1939). Perhaps a reason for the conflict within the organization at the latter part of the Depression was related to the disappointment that staff and board members felt when they realized that not as much had been accomplished as they had hoped. The organization turned inward. The national office tried to make the organization's structure more centralized by amending the Terms of Affiliation and the affiliates tried to make the structure more decentralized with the formation of the Executive Secretaries' Council. Less time was devoted to social change issues and more time to the maintenance of the organization. During this critical period, the bureaucracy controlled internal conflict and the NUL survived to continue its struggle to help black Americans make economic and social advancement.

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