

# Dynamics of Organizing

In a series on Organizing and Neighborhood  
Preservation  
published by National Training and Information Center

by Shel Trapp

---

## Table of Contents

- [Introduction](#)
  - [Power Analysis](#)
  - [Strategy and Tactics](#)
  - [Developing an Issue Group](#)
  - [Coalition Organizing](#)
  - [Building Power & Victories](#)
  - [The Myth of the Organizer](#)
- 

Copyright (c) 1976 by Shel Trapp. All rights reserved.  
No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form by anyone  
for profit. Any part of it may be used and distributed by community  
groups. Permission is not required, but please credit National  
Training and Information Center and the author. (Third Printing June,  
1977)

Additional copies may be obtained from:  
National Training and Information Center (NTIC)  
121 West Superior Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60610

---

*"Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never  
did, and it never will. Find out just what people will  
submit to, and you have found out the exact amount of  
injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them;  
and this will continue till they have resisted with either  
words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are  
prescribed by the endurance of those who they  
suppress."*

*-- Frederick Douglass, 1849*

---

*Blessed be the fighters:  
The unknown angry man at the end of the idiot-stick  
with his dream of freedom;  
Jawsmiths and soap boxers, gandy-dancers setting the  
high iron --  
Toward the ultimate Medicine flat: blessed, blessed,  
blessed.  
Blessed the agitator; whose touch makes the dead walk;*

*Blessed the organizer; who discovers the strength of  
wounds;  
Blessed all fighters.*

*-- Thomas McGrath,  
Letter to an Imaginary Friend*

---

## Introduction

Shel Trapp, an organizer for the past fifteen years, is regarded by many as one of the best in the field. Having served as director of two of the best known Alinsky style organizations: Organization for a Better Austin (OBA) and the Northwest Community Organization (NCO), he later organized a powerful coalition in Chicago known as the West Side Coalition.

In 1972, the West Side Coalition sponsored the First National Housing Conference which attracted over 2,000 delegates from 38 states and 79 cities. The purpose of the gathering was twofold--to share information and organizing efforts related to neighborhood deterioration and abuses of federal housing programs; and to develop ongoing local organizations and strategies to deal with causes of neighborhood deterioration and put together a national network of grassroots organizations committed to the preservation of our greatest natural resource: the neighborhood.

Since 1972 much has been accomplished. Local neighborhood organizations have been developed throughout the country, such as the powerful Metropolitan Area Housing Alliance in Chicago, to join with a national network of organizations, National People's Action (NPA, formerly National People's Action on Housing), as an information-sharing, strategy-developing coalition to deal with issues of concern to neighborhood people.

Currently, Shel Trapp serves as national coordinator of the National Training and Information Center which provides training, information, consultation and technical assistance for organizers, community leaders and grassroots organizations. Mr. Trapp is also director of Chicago Area Services Program.

In addition to his time spent consulting with organizations and people around the country, Shel Trapp has put together some of his thoughts on organizing, power and strategy. Some of these essays are included in this pamphlet, Dynamics of Organizing.

## Power Analysis

Whenever an organizer approaches a new community or a new group, he/she should begin immediately to analyze the power structure in that community or group. All communities, churches, clubs, organizations have a power structure, real or assumed, out of which that group operates.

### Who appears to have the power?

This is relatively easy to determine. Who is on City Council; who was honored at the "Good Citizen's Award Dinner"; who is on the Board of Directors of the hospital, bank, largest industry; whose name appears in the paper when an opinion is sought on an issue. Such person or persons may or may not be the real power in the

community, but, at least on the surface, it appears so; and it may even be assumed by the group and observers that these people are the actual power structure. It is important for the organizer not to fall into this easy assumption. The task of analyzing the power structure is not complete at this point.

### **Who has the power?**

In a city, this is not that easy to determine. Much like an organizer, this person or persons prefers to remain a behind the scenes actor. He/ She may well be a member of a family who at one time had great wealth or is respected because of their "name". Quite often this person turns up in the field of finances or organized crime. In a day when political campaign contributions are becoming public knowledge, that is a good place to begin ferreting out where the real power lies. Also, as the organizer talks with those who appear to have the power, a question such as, "Whose opinion do you really respect?" should be asked. This question may begin to uncover names that previously have not surfaced in the press or on the boards of directors.

Within a smaller organization or a community it is usually easier to determine whether those who appear to have the power in reality do have the power, because this person will surface at the time of a decision or when an opinion is required. Also, in the smaller group the person who has the real power usually does not have an ulterior motive for remaining behind the scenes. If those who appear to have the power--president, chairman, etc. are not the same as those who really make decisions, it is usually because the real power of the organization is temporarily out of office because of the constitution of the group.

### **Who has power in specific arenas?**

If an organizer is going to use the churches in his effort, he had best be aware of who appears to have the power, as well as who has the real power in any kind of clergy group, whether it be officially organized or an informal network. In any small community as well, there are usually some people that the organizer must know about before making a move. If, in ringing door bells on a block, the name of "Mrs. Jones" comes up as a person that three or four people mention, then the wise organizer touches base with "Mrs. Jones" before he makes a move. Similarly, if the name of the reputed power figure rarely emerges, investigation into his/ her actions ought to be pursued before false assumptions are made.

### **When and why does the organizer take on the existing power structure in a community?**

*(A) When the power structure no longer, if it ever did, represents the community.*

A community organization discovered that there were 300 abandoned homes in their community and 50 more close to foreclosure. People on the streets were very concerned about the issue. However, the organization board of directors, made up of two clergymen, one city official, one county official, one individual who was running for office, and two people who had stopped coming to meetings, did not feel that this was a legitimate issue.

The organizer, without the sanction of the board, pulled ten community people together and they scheduled a public meeting. Three hundred people showed up and they began to deal with the

issue of abandonment and foreclosure. After the meeting, the board's position was, "Well, it probably is an issue, but it should have been handled a different way." The steering committee of the foreclosure issue has now become the real power of the organization although they hold no seats on the board. The organizer had read the issue correctly: there was a latent power base that could be mobilized quickly to override the un-representative position of the board of directors.

*(B) When the power structure is incapable or unwilling to deal with real issues.*

A community was faced with slum buildings, 70 children in a classroom at the public schools, racial tensions at the high school. The community organization held a Memorial Day Parade to increase community pride! Rather than dealing with the pressing issues of concern to many community people, the existing organization (reputed power structure) attempted to sidetrack reality. Community pride may be essential in maintaining neighborhood stability, but it could not change the hearts and minds of absentee landlords who were callous to the health and welfare of their inner-city tenants; it would not convince the Board of Education to ease crowded school facilities nor could it erase the causes of the racial tensions at the high school.

In this case, the organization "looked the other way" as the conditions became worse. The Memorial Day Parade, instead of installing pride, brought about cynicism and anger towards the people who supposedly had the power to improve the quality of life in the community.

The organizer did not have to destroy or take on the existing power structure, in this case. But its unwillingness to deal with the crucial issues in the community it brought about its own destruction when the rank-and-file community people became disenchanted with the existing organization.

### **How does the organizer take on the existing power base?**

*(A) Never by himself, only with a developed power base.*

*(B) By putting the existing power base into a position of reaction.*

When the organizer finds a group of people who have an issue and the existing organization is not dealing with it, take that group into the meeting of the existing organization. The reaction of the existing organization is often, "We have been working on that for a long time. Why haven't you come to our meetings before?" To put it bluntly, quite often the newcomers get shit on. As they leave the meeting confused, they are fertile ground for the organizer to build a base. If the existing group accepts the newcomers and begins to move specifically on their issue, the organizer should have good access to the existing group because he has delivered new people into the existing organization. If he plays his cards right, the entire existing organization should soon be a power base.

*(C) By avoiding the existing power base and the issues they are working on, moving so fast that the existing power base cannot keep up with the newly emerging group.*

A local community had a very articulate group of people who dealt only with school issues. The Board of Education was happy to deal with this small group because they never held public meetings and

the most people that this group could deliver was twelve. This select, articulate group viewed itself as the spokespersons for the community and would not open up their group to participation by anyone else.

The organizer spent six months building forty-five block clubs that dealt with housing and sanitation issues. Never did he attempt to move on education issues. At first, the education people attempted to disrupt his block club meetings, but within a month there were so many block club meetings every week that they could not keep up with all the activity. Since the block clubs did not deal with education issues, the school group soon lost interest in their existence and the efforts of the organizer. In a few months, the block clubs had developed some very strong articulate leadership.

The Board of Education announced that a new school was to be built in the community. The people who dealt with education issues said they wanted the school built in the "middle of the community." If that site was selected, it would mean that seventy-five homes would be razed to make room for the school. The block clubs could not take this seriously because, 1/4 mile away from this site, the Board of Education owned 8 acres of vacant land. Despite this, the Board of Education announced its plan to demolish the homes so the school could be in the "middle of the community."

The block clubs reacted: they invited the Board of Education out to the community and had 400 people at the meeting. The education people came to the meeting and spoke in favor of the "middle of the community site." The block clubs demanded the vacant land site. The Board of Education said that if the community couldn't get together, there would be no new school. The block club leaders requested that the Board of Education come out to another meeting in two weeks, at which time all the organizations in the community would testify as to their position on the school site, and they would abide by the decision of the majority. The Board of Education agreed.

At the follow-up meeting 600 people showed up. The blocks produced forty-three of their clubs, two churches, a union and two other organizations in favor of the vacant land site. The education people produced themselves, one other group, and the owner of a large vacant building that would be razed if the "middle of the community" site was selected.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the leader of the block clubs announced to the Board of Education that the block clubs now had an education committee, and from now on the Board of Education would contact that committee about any plans they might have for the community. Today, a new school stands on what was once vacant land, without one home having been demolished.

One is not always so fortunate as to have an existing power base react in such a strong self-destructing manner as did this group.

One is not always so fortunate as to have an existing power base react in such a strong self-destructing manner as did this group. However, it is the organizer's job to force the existing power base, whether in the church, community or political arena, to react. Existing power bases make a habit of reacting against the people and the people's issues. At that point the organizer has the beginnings of a new people's power base.

*(D) Form a coalition under a new coalition name.*

Organizations with a history do not like to give up their history or their autonomy. If they can see a way that they can maintain their local base, the group may be more willing to give up its name when dealing with a specific issue. This is particularly true if the issue is one that the existing local power base has not dealt with or an issue too big for the existing group to handle. Thus, the organizer offers more participation through a coalition than the local group has ever had before, and the possibility of winning on a big issue. The only condition is that everyone flies under a new flag. That way all groups see that they are all giving up something to participate in the coalition.

When existing, but fragmented groups do not want to lose individual identity and autonomy, an alternative is to form a coalition around an issue common to all groups but too overwhelming for one group alone to challenge.

Taking on the existing power base often requires a united effort by diverse groups so that the people are not played off against each other by the structure threatened by the idea of relinquishing its "power".

### Conclusion

It is important for the organizer to recognize that, once the analysis of a power structure is done, this analysis must be continually reevaluated and updated. Power is not static; it is continually changing and rearranging quite like the rearranging shape of a bean bag chair. The organizer must be aware of that, observe its shifts, anticipate the shifts, and, hopefully, force the shifts in favor of a people's organization. The organizer who cannot do this will find himself reading the want ads.

## Strategy and Tactics

*"Deception is not enough -- the enemy's leaders must be confused; if possible, driven insane."  
-- Mao Tse-Tung*

Strategy and tactics are a critical aspect of organizing. The issue can be sharp, the people angry and ready to go to battle; but, if the tactics are wrong or the strategy unclear, the entire battle can be lost. Therefore, in organizing it is important that the organizer, leaders and constituency be clear on the strategy. In developing strategy the organizer should ask these questions:

1. Will the people accept it?
2. Will it dramatize and build the issue?
3. Will it throw the enemy off balance?
4. Will it personalize the enemy?
5. Will it be fun for the people?
6. What alternatives must be planned?
7. Will it get us to the bargaining table?

### Will the people accept it?

A new organizer eager to prove his ability in getting groups into action pushed the leadership very hard on a block that if the slumlord did not come to the meeting they would go out to his home and picket. The leadership was not ready for this move and thus reacted negatively not only to the strategy but also to the idea of having a meeting. The issue was lost because the people were pushed toward

a strategy with which they did not feel comfortable.

It is important that there be a logical progression in the strategy. Thus, another organizer went into the same block and suggested a meeting of just the people on the block to talk about what they wanted to do about the slum building. At that meeting the residents decided that they would hold another meeting and invite the slumlord. When he did not come to the meeting, the people decided that they should hold another meeting and invite him again because, "It may not have been convenient for him to come tonight." When the slumlord did not come to the second meeting, the people decided that they would go to his house. Thus, the same group which initially had said "No" to going to the slumlord's house ended up doing that very thing because now it seemed to them a logical progression. People like to look upon themselves as being logical. Thus, the organizer will build the strategy in such a way that each escalation of activity seems very logical. This is particularly true with new groups. As groups get battle seasoned, they do not care as much about appearing logical as they do about winning the fight. The strategy with new groups has to build slowly and in a logical progression. This takes time, but if the organizer wants the people to participate in the strategy, then they must set their own pace and as they do so they will be a part of the development of the strategy.

#### **Will it dramatize and build the issue?**

A community group could not get the alderman to respond to their demands on rat abatement. Several meetings were held and the frustration of the community continued to mount. When the alderman refused to come to yet another meeting on the issue, seventy-five people went to his office a dead rat up to the door by its tail. Word quickly spread through the community, the alderman's office was besieged with calls threatening more rats, the press picked it up and did a series of articles on the rat issue in that community. Within one week, rat abatement crews had been through the community twice. In this case the issue was dramatized so well that there was not time to build the issue and it was won without further confrontation.

Strategy should be dramatic so that it is evident even to an outsider that people are upset and want something changed. Dramatization of the issue which gets the organization press makes it easier to build the organizational drive out on the streets, thus drawing more people in to the fight.

#### **Will it throw the enemy off balance?**

A good tactic is one which the enemy is not expecting, something which takes him out of his usual sphere of operation and puts him in an unfamiliar situation. An organization had several very strong confrontations with a city agency. It was felt that the city officials were becoming too accustomed to the confrontational tactics so it was time to develop a different tactic. It was decided that a priest would open the meeting with prayer and in the prayer would speak of the concern of the city officials and their dedication and self sacrificing for the community. This strategy so unnerved the city officials that the organization won its Right. The unexpected had thrown the enemy so off balance that they could not regain their composure throughout the entire meeting.

In another case, a Spanish group went to meet with the Board of Education about the need for more Spanish programs in the school system. They went into the meeting and only spoke Spanish, forcing

the school administration to get an interpreter and carry on the entire meeting in Spanish. Again, the enemy was thrown so off balance that he acquiesced to the demands of the delegation.

Another means of throwing the enemy off balance is to fuse his worlds. The human animal likes to live in logic tight compartments: in the office he may be a tough businessman, but on Sunday morning he is an usher in the local church, or on Tuesday night he is the coach of a Little League team. The good organizer will develop strategy that will mix those worlds together.

A contractor had built some very poorly constructed homes and refused to make any of the needed repairs, despite the fact that under law he was responsible for those repairs. The organizer found that he was a highly respected member of his church and, in fact, had often preached when the minister was on vacation. The group went to the church with flyers that had a picture of the contractor, his name, the facts about the poor housing, and then several quotes from scripture, such as, "Thou shalt not steal", "Thou shalt not bear false witness." The builder's life was hopelessly mixed, no longer could he be the respected church man, for now his fellow church members knew that he had built poor homes.

When you mix the enemy's worlds, he is thrown off balance, giving the organization an advantage in the battle. "An army cannot be run by rules of etiquette." (Ts'ao Ts'ao). By not playing by the "rules of etiquette" the strategies developed fit the circumstances and are designed to hit the enemy when he least expects to be hit, thus giving the organization an advantageous position. Saul Alinsky included as a tactical rule: "Whenever possible go outside of the experience of the enemy", to cause confusion, frustration and fear.

### **Will it personalize the enemy?**

When an organization goes into battle, it is very important that they come to understand that the enemy they are fighting is a specific person. It is much easier to focus the issue and gain participation if the organization comes to understand that there is someone within the structure that they are fighting who can give what they want. It is the chairman of the board, the head of a department or a specific official. It is not all of city hall, or the entire banking industry. It is a specific person. For that reason, the strategies are developed to focus around one person, until that person says that someone else has the power to make the decision or gives the organization what they are seeking.

A Latin Coalition was seeking jobs from the telephone company. They were fighting the personnel department of the phone company, then the training department of the phone company. It seemed that each new week brought a new enemy and they were going around in circles. Then the coalition decided that they would not deal with the entire phone company but would focus their entire efforts on its president. Cutting the issue simply: this man is president and he can give us what we want. The next two months saw a series of activities focusing on the president. Visits to his office, his home, his church, his private club, it even included forty people following him around the golf course one Sunday morning. Needless to say, his game was somewhat off that day. After two months, the coalition won 2,700 jobs for latinos to be spread over a two year period.

It is key to the organizing drive that the issue be cut and the strategies be developed to focus on specific personalities. That way,

people see their problem as having its resolution not in some bureaucratic system, but in a specific individual.

### **Will it be fun for the people?**

All of our lives are basically quite boring. That is why people watch so much TV, to live vicariously for a few hours in a different world. Thus, if at all possible, strategies should be fun for the people who are participating. That way, they will come back and in telling their friends and neighbors will become recruiters for the organizer for the next action.

The people had been trying to meet with a banker whom they were accusing of not making loans in their community (a practice known as "red lining"). Finally, they decided to go to his home in one of the affluent suburbs. In addition to passing out flyers to his neighbors, several people brought with them red streamers of crepe paper. This crepe paper was tossed over the roof of the banker's house, wrapped around the shrubs in the front yard. When the action was over, and despite the fact that at the front door the banker had agreed to meet with a group of neighborhood people the following week (which had been the purpose of the visit), the thing that the people talked about most in the following week was the fun they had had tossing the red crepe paper around the banker's yard. By the time the meeting came the following week, it was very easy to get people to the meeting because everyone wanted to come to see the banker who had been "redlined" by the community.

### **What alternatives must be planned?**

Before going into a public meeting or an action it is imperative that the organizer has gone through with the leadership what their alternatives are going to be. What are we going to do if the enemy says "Yes" to demands one and two, but "No" to the third demand? What are we going to do if he says "Yes" to one and "No" to two and three? What are we going to do if he doesn't show up? What are we going to do if he walks out of the meeting? The initial strategy of the group mentioned earlier that nailed the rat to the alderman's door was to present the rat to the alderman in his office. Fortunately, they had thought through what they were going to do if he was not at his office. When they got there and the office was closed, the alternative plan of action was put into operation and the hammer and nail was gotten out of the car and with a great deal of ceremony the rat was nailed to the alderman's door. If they had not had an alternative strategy, someone may have thought of that on the spot, but it might also have resulted in the group deciding to go back home and come back at a later date, a sure way to kill an organizing drive.

Alternative strategies are key to an organizing effort so that even if the circumstances change, the leadership is prepared as far as possible with a variety of plans to meet the changing circumstances. It is the enemy that we want to catch off balance and keep off balance, not the leadership.

### **Will it get us to the bargaining table?**

The purpose of all strategy is to get the organization to a bargaining table so that they can negotiate out their demands. Thus, strategy is not developed which will detract from the issue and take the focus off the main issue. In a battle over an overcrowded school, the leadership decided that they would stage a boycott to show their power. To increase the effectiveness of the boycott, it was decided to pass out flyers to the students the day before saying "No School

Tomorrow". As the flyers were being passed out, a policeman drove up and said that he was going to arrest the group for contributing to the delinquency of minors. An attorney in the group wanted to protest the officer's right to make such an arrest. But immediately the organizer and top leader gathered all the flyers from the people and gave them to the policeman. This satisfied him and he drove off. Had someone been arrested, the battle of the overcrowded school would have been clouded by the arrest. At this time the police were not the issue, the school was; and thus nothing could come into the activity that would detract from the organizing drive on the school issue. The purpose of any strategy is to lead the organization to the bargaining table, not away from it.

## Conclusion

Recognizing the amount of power the organization has and the amount of power it is going against, it is critical that sound strategies be developed which will answer the above questions. In speaking of strategy Meng states: "Drive him crazy and bewilder him so that he disperses his forces in confusion." Thus, the organizer attempts to use strategy in such a way that the organization's power is maximized and the enemy's power minimized.

Having dealt with these questions in his own mind, the organizer then sits down with leadership and forces them to go through the same questions and works with them as to the strategy which they will select for the meeting or action. If carefully thought out and backed by enough power, there should be victory at the end of the battle.

## Developing an Issue Group

1. Identify an issue.
2. Test the issue.
3. Find a leader or leaders.
4. Hold leadership meeting. Determine: a) meeting place b) agenda and alternatives c) assignments
5. Hold meeting. Determine: a) action b) needed follow-up c) next meeting date
6. Put the kill in.
7. Move group to another issue.

### Identify an issue.

This occurs in many ways. Someone may call the organization's office and complain of an abandoned car or a dead tree. As you are talking with people, whether it's in a laundromat, their front door or at an ice cream social, the good organizer is continually looking for issues. A casual gripe like, "Our streets haven't been cleaned in months." can be the seeds of an organizing drive. The organizer may see an abandoned house on a block and begin to talk with people in the area about the danger of that vacant building.

When probing for an issue, it is important to push to the point where people articulate a specific issue, not a glaring generality. An organizer doesn't accept a response of "I don't like all the slum buildings." The organizer at this point pushes, "Which one is the worst?" or "Would you say that that one across the street is the worst?"

The organizer is continually fishing for issues, when one seems to be hooked, it must be identified and made as specific and clear as

possible so that when the organizer is testing the issue it is clear what is being tested and to what people are responding.

### **Test the issue**

Just because one person brings up a problem or the organizer sees something that looks like an issue does not make it an issue. To an organizer an issue is that around which people can be mobilized. So that when something comes up, be it painting the garbage cans red or that there are rats in the alley, the issue is immediately tested.

"Some of your neighbors are concerned about the rats in the alley; if we have a meeting, would you be interested in coming to the meeting?" If everyone in the area says, "There are no rats in the alley" then the organizer can be reasonably sure that a dead end on that issue has been reached. However, if several people respond that they are sick of seeing rats or afraid that children will be bitten, then it appears that an issue has been found and enough people are concerned that a meeting can be held.

### **Find a leader or leaders**

Particularly with new groups, the organizer has to trust instinct and luck. Who brought up the issue? In talking with people who seemed to be the most angry about the issue, is there someone on the block or in the area whose name has come up several times as someone who knows the community?

When such a person (or persons) is found, the organizer attempts to get a couple of people together to discuss what they want to do. When talking to people at this point, the meeting is not billed as a leadership meeting--rather just a couple of people from the block are getting together to talk about what we can do about the rats in the alley.

### **Hold a leadership meeting**

This is the first step in the training of leaders. The organizer must make the ground rules clear. Involve as many people as possible. The organizer doesn't speak for the group. The people make their own choices about how to move on the issues. We must move on issues, not just talk about them. The following quote of Alfred North Whitehead reaffirms this point. *"We cannot think first and act afterwards. From the moment of birth we are immersed in action and can only fitfully guide it by taking thought."*

After introductions are over and, if the organizer is lucky, a can of beer has been popped, it is time to get down to business.

- What is the issue?
- What are the things we can do about the issue?
- Of these things, which one do we want to do first?
- When and where do we have a meeting of more people so we can get support for this action?
- Who is going to chair the meeting?
- What is the agenda?
- Who is going to pass out flyers or ring door bells?
- Do we want to notify churches or other groups in the area about the meeting?
- Do we want to notify the press?

With new groups and people who are not accustomed to community meetings, it is important that the leadership understand that this is their meeting and they have responsibility for making sure that it

comes off. It is also important that the meeting be held as close physically to the issue as possible. A home, a church, an agency or lodge, or as was the case in one community, a vacant lot on the street. Whatever is easiest and most convenient and comfortable for the people.

### **Hold a meeting**

When the notices for the meeting have gone out, phone calls made and door bells rung, the agenda made up, the organizer can only chew gum, smoke, pace and, in some rare cases, pray that people will show up.

If the prayers are answered and people begin to show up, the task of the organizer is to meet people as they come in and prepare them for the meeting. So that if the leadership has decided that after discussion of the issue they are going to suggest that the group sweep the trash out of the alley and take it to the front yard of a city official, the organizer tests the idea.

*"What do you think we ought to do about the trash in the alley?"*

*"Gee, I don't know."*

*"Well, some people are talking about sweeping it up ourselves."*

*"Sounds good to me."*

*"You know, when we get all that trash together at the end of the alley, some people are even suggesting that we dump it in "Jones", the commissioner of sanitation, front yard."*

*"Terrific idea!"*

With several positive responses like this, the organizer keys in the leadership that it looks like the people are ready to accept the battle plan. If the organizer gets a negative reaction to all or part of the proposed strategy, the leadership is informed that the going may be rough and perhaps a fall back position would be to invite "Jones" to a follow-up meeting.

At this meeting, several things are very important.

1. Make sure you get a sign-in sheet.
2. Make sure that the leadership forces the group to make some decision about the issue. They are going to ask someone who can do something about the issue to come to the next meeting. They are going to write someone about the issue. It is critical that some step toward resolving the issue be taken, so that they don't decide to meet next week to decide what we are going to do about the issue. That was the purpose of this meeting.
3. Just before the meeting is over, there should be a re-cap of the decisions that have been made so everyone understands what the next steps will be. Also in the re-cap, the date, time and place of the next meeting should be set.

### **Put the kill in.**

The issue has been cut, a meeting held, a course of action determined. Now the organizer's task is to continue to work with the leadership and group to win the issue.

### **Move the group to a new issue.**

As the group is celebrating its victory, the organizer is attempting to get them to take the next issues. This can be something that has come up at one of the meetings or something that the organizer has heard while on the street. Then the process starts over again.

Using this outline, let's take a case history and apply the previous outline to the case.

## **Case Study**

### **Identifying an issue**

An organizer working in a changing neighborhood has found three homes that whites had sold for under \$20,000 and within two weeks blacks had bought for over \$30,000, the realtor walking off with the difference. A school built for 800, with an enrollment of 1,600 (one class was even meeting in the boys' lavatory). A slum building where a child had lead poisoning. All of these seemed like good issues to him. It was impossible to get people to buy into any of these issues. Finally, he began to ask people what they thought was the issue.

Finally, at one door the lady said that the thing that was wrong with the neighborhood was that shopping carts from the supermarket on the corner were being taken out of the store and left around the neighborhood. Children were playing with them in the street, scratching parked cars and someone almost hit a child last week. In addition, they were left out in the alley and you had to stop your car and get out to move the cart.

### **Testing the issue**

The organizer could not believe that anyone would be interested in such a petty issue, particularly since he had identified so many major issues in the community. In talking with other people on the block, he mentioned that some of the neighbors were talking about the shopping carts which were out in the community. The response was unanimous -- people wanted to do something about the issue and were willing to come to a meeting.

### **Finding a leader or leaders**

The organizer went back to the woman who had originally brought up the issue and told her that several people were interested in coming to a meeting. He asked the woman if she and a couple of her friends and the organizer could sit down tomorrow night and talk about the meeting.

### **Leadership meeting**

The organizer introduced himself and stated that a lot of people were concerned about the shopping carts and that they had to plan a meeting and an agenda for the meeting and a location for the meeting. It was decided that the meeting would be at the woman's home who had originally brought up the idea and that she and a neighbor would co-chair the meeting. They would try to get out of the meeting a committee to go up to the supermarket to talk with the manager about the problem. The three people present agreed to

bring two neighbors each and pass out flyers on their block.

### **Hold a meeting**

Twelve people came to the meeting and spent a great deal of time discussing the fact that the Chicago Bears didn't have much of a team this year. Finally, the organizer had to say, "I thought we came to discuss the issue of the shopping carts." After much discussion, it was agreed that a committee would go to the supermarket the next Saturday morning to talk with the manager. It was agreed that only six people would go because they were sure that the manager was a nice guy who would be helpful in solving the problem. Six people signed up to go. They agreed to meet at the woman's home at 10:00 a.m. Saturday.

### **Put the kill in**

Five people showed up Saturday morning so the group stopped by the sixth person's home on the way to the supermarket and picked him up. When they got to the supermarket, the manager kept them waiting for twenty minutes. Then, when they told him what they were there about, he looked at the blacks in the group and said, "I didn't have this problem until you people moved in." This triggered the group and they began to shout at the manager; he ordered them out of the store or he would call the police. Immediately, the organizer suggested that they go to someone's house and plan their next step. The people said they wanted a meeting on Tuesday night and they would suggest to the group that the next week they go to the supermarket and everyone would buy one item and take a shopping cart home with them.

The meeting was held, 21 people came. The committee made its report of what had happened and suggested the battle plan. Someone volunteered their garage to store the shopping carts. It was also decided that everyone would meet the next Saturday morning to return the shopping carts to the store.

The group was so successful that by Saturday morning the supermarket had no shopping carts and the garage was full. Seventeen people showed up to return the carts. So a parade was held taking a very indirect route to the supermart. By the time the group reached the supermart, there were over 75 people -- each one pushing a cart. The manager saw them coming and called the police.

When the police arrived, it was explained that they were law abiding citizens and were returning this man's property to him and that if he couldn't figure out a way to keep the shopping carts in the store then they would have to do this every Saturday morning. Immediately, the police were on the side of the people and became an ally in the confrontation. The manager called the district office and obtained a promise that by Monday poles would be installed 18" apart so that carts could not leave the area in front of the supermarket.

### **Move on to the next issue**

On Monday, the organizer drove by the supermarket and saw the poles going in. He bought a case of beer and went to the block and an impromptu victory party was had. After people had shared their victory stories, the organizer asked if there were any other issues that the group felt they should be working on. Someone suggested that the building on the corner was really looking bad and maybe they should have a meeting to decide what to do about it. A meeting date was set and the group was on to a new issue, the very building

that the organizer had tried, unsuccessfully, to force on the people in the first place.

Often times, issues which seem crucial to the organizer and a few people must be temporarily set aside because of "petty" issues. The shopping cart issue outlined above served as a training vehicle that introduced people to roles of leadership and the process of organizing and winning. Too often, organizers and some leaders try to reach for the stars too soon. Unless an organization is built gradually with steps of progression it may face an early death. In developing an issue group it is important to allow people independence in selecting initial issues so that when larger issues come up they are not totally dependent upon or controlled by the organizers or certain leaders.

## Coalition Organizing

**Coalition** -- A temporary alliance of factions, parties, etc., for some specific purpose.

**Alliance** -- A close association for a common objective.

As the definitions state, it is the commonality of issues which pull various groups together who otherwise might not work together and in some cases may even be antagonistic to each other. Thus, the purpose of coalitions is to amass enough power to win an issue that could not be won by one group or organization alone.

### Protecting Integrity of Coalition Members

Community organizations increasingly find themselves in a position of facing issues which they cannot win by themselves and therefore must coalesce with other groups. This is difficult for an established power organization in that it means they must give up some of their local autonomy. There are several ways to overcome this problem.

First of all, it is necessary for every member of the coalition to be represented on the leadership or steering committee. This way, as strategy is developed, each group is participating in its planning. When the coalition is having a public meeting it is also good policy to have at the front table a representative from each of the member groups. Thus, members of each organization see that they are represented at the leadership table. Hopefully, each of the leaders have a demand to give or a statement to make. As these leaders identify themselves they say, "Mr. Smith, representing Roseland Organization of Citizens Coalition Against Rent Increases."

In addition, many coalitions list their members on the agenda so that every organization sees its name. There are two dangers in this. First, you may reveal to your enemies your weakness, by only listing three groups when the enemy thought you had 20 (Remember, the illusion of power is many times beneficial). Secondly, make sure that you list everyone or you will have some very angry people on your hands because the name of their organization did not appear.

In a coalition, those organizations which have staff should have staff meetings concerning coalition efforts, in addition to leadership meetings so they are clear on the direction the coalition is going and who is responsible for what. Most problems occur in a coalition when leadership and/ or staff is confused as to what the next steps of the coalition are to be. Touching base with each member of the coalition cannot be stressed enough.

## Types of coalitions

*Within an organization.* This is the easiest type of coalition in that people and leaders are probably accustomed to working with each other. Several block clubs may band together and hold a slumlord compliance. Thus, each block club invites one slumlord and brings 15 people from the block. That way, the slumlord finds himself facing 100 people screaming about his bad building. He is not aware that perhaps only 10-15 people live on the block where his building is located. Because of the numbers of people he is more inclined to fix up his building. Thus, by forming a coalition, a block club stands a better chance of getting the slum building on their block fixed up.

*Citywide coalition.* This type of coalition is much harder to develop and maintain in that a variety of groups may be members all of which have varying amounts of experience. Also, in all likelihood, the leaders and the staff have not worked together in the past and thus are suspicious of each other. However, if all the members are concerned enough about the issue, they can overcome historical boundaries, race, geography and economic differences.

The Metropolitan Area Housing Alliance (MAHA) in Chicago had its birth when staff from eight organizations got together and discovered they all were having the same problem with Housing Court--no results. They decided to ask their leaders to come together and see if they wanted to work together on the issue. They sponsored a public meeting and won a monthly citywide day in court for member organizations. This day in court has been quite effective for the local organizations and they have seen real benefit in participation in MAHA. Through this experience leadership got to know each other and MAHA has gone on to win victories on a variety of other issues.

*National coalition.* This is a very new and untested type of coalition for community groups. Fortunately, the first two national coalitions formed by community organizations have resulted in victories. A loose network of organizations around the country, National People's Action, (NPA) has created tremendous impetus. Two pieces of federal legislation have been passed, one requiring HUD to reimburse families who had bought substandard homes, and one requiring all financial institutions to disclose their lending patterns. We see this effort as a creative and necessary step in the development of community organizations. Hopefully, the years ahead will hold many more coalitions of community organizations on a national level giving more input by community groups into national policy.

## Building a coalition

There are no set rules in building a coalition. Some happen as MAHA did when several organizations decide out of necessity that they will band together. More often, one organization finds itself facing an issue which a few initial probes reveal to be too complex and that the organization must have more power if it is going to win the issue. Thus, the organization begins to look around for other groups with whom they can coalesce around that issue to win.

An organization in Pontiac, Michigan learned that the local General Hospital was going to move and that there was a move to take it out of the hands of city control and make it a private hospital. Thus, there were two issues: 1) who would control the hospital, and 2) would the hospital move. After one public hearing in which they were not allowed to present their case, they immediately began to seek ways

to expand their power base.

In this drive, they built a very interesting and diverse coalition. A large segment of Spanish were concerned that the hospital had no one in the emergency room who spoke Spanish. Thus, they came into the coalition via the route of demanding a Spanish speaking person in the emergency room. A welfare rights organization joined the coalition because, if the city lost control of the hospital and it became private, they feared that the hospital would no longer accept welfare recipients.

The organization did research and discovered that the plan of moving the hospital called for the city to pay for a large portion of the cost of relocation and construction. Thus, the middle class homeowners came into the fight on the basis that their real estate taxes would go up if the hospital were allowed to move. The people who lived near the hospital did not want it to move because it was close to them and it was unclear what would happen to the vacant building once the hospital moved out. So they came into the fight. The organization's research showed that the proposed new hospital was to have a psychiatric ward. When the people who lived near the proposed new site learned that, they were opposed to the hospital moving into their community. The senior citizens joined the coalition because there was no transportation to the proposed new site.

By this time, the coalition was very strong and had several confrontations with the hospital and city. With this kind of exposure behind them, they approached the United Auto Workers to join and the UAW came into the fight. A politician running for a state office suddenly became very "interested" in the issue and came down on their side of the issue, thus giving the issue more exposure. Result: the victory was won.

The research and the organizer's ability to find the self interest of each group was key to the building of this coalition. Each group came from a different motivation and were able to be focused on the one issue of stopping the hospital from moving.

As one gets into organizing on broad based issues that require coalitions, research becomes a very important part of the organizing drive, first of all, because the issue is probably more complex than a block club issue. Secondly, the more research one has, the easier it is to determine ways that additional groups can be attracted into the coalition.

## Building Power & Victories

The goal of every community organization is to build power, people power, so that the community can determine its needs, articulate them and fight for them. To build power there must be victories, only the masochist will stay on in a losing cause. For involvement in a community organization to make sense, community residents must see results or victories. Victories seem fairly easy to define, the football team with the most points wins, the golfer with the lowest score is victorious. In community organizing it is not quite so easy. Goals are changing, negotiations take place, a victory leads to another goal.

### Definitions

1. **Intermediate Victories:** These are the small victories along the road to the primary victory. They help build the organizing

drive so that when the primary victory is reached the largest possible number of people are involved, feeling the victory is theirs.

2. **Primary Victories:** These are the goals that have been set by the organization that have major meaning for the residents of the community, such as getting a new school built, stopping a rezoning by an outside developer.
3. **No Final Victories:** Just as intermediate victories lead to the primary victory, primary victories lead to a whole new set of organizing drives and a whole new set of intermediate and primary victories.

#### **Illustration of a very local issue:**

An organization may set for itself the goal of cleaning up a slum building. The primary victory is not reached until the building is fixed up. Intermediate victories are usually achieved along the route, as for instance when the absentee owner agrees to a meeting with the residents after a picket line has been at his office.

Intermediate victories are very important because they keep the issue alive, and they are used as organizational tools in building toward the primary victory. The interpretation of these intermediate victories is very important to the people, so that they see that there is some movement in the issue and they are getting closer to the final goal.

An organizer had been working on a slum building and having little results. The owner refused to meet with the group even though they had been to his home and church with a large delegation. The leadership was discouraged and the people were losing interest in the issue because they could see no movement in the issue. The organizer brought ten clergymen from around the community to a leadership meeting. The leaders took the clergymen on a tour of the building so they could see first hand what the conditions of the building were. It was also arranged that when the clergymen walked out of the building there was a reporter from the local neighborhood newspaper. The headline next week in the paper read "Local Clergy Pledge Support to Beleaguered Tenants". The article was duplicated and distributed throughout the neighborhood. People took hope from the fact that a new element was in the fight and there was new support for their fight. The clergymen and members from their churches came to the next public meeting and when the slumlord did not show up the group went again to the slumlord's home, the clergy went with them. With the added power of the clergymen and more people, the leadership was more aggressive and there developed a strong confrontation on the slumlord's front porch which resulted in his agreeing to a time table of fixing the building. The building was fixed up and the primary victory was achieved. Yet it would never have been reached had there not been the intermediate victory of the tour of the clergymen and their joining the fight. This intermediate victory was used to the utmost in building the issue and gaining exposure for the issue.

#### **Illustration of a broad based issue:**

A Chicago based organization, Metropolitan Area Housing Alliance, set for itself the primary goal of getting all savings and loans regulated by the Federal Home Loan Bank to disclose their loans and deposits by zip code in the Chicago metropolitan area. A series of local meetings were held around the city and in neighboring

suburbs. Each local group went to its local savings and loan association to request disclosure. The story was the same at each S&L. "We can't do it without authorization from the Federal Home Loan Bank." The question was then asked, "Would you be willing if the FHLB said to do it?" The answer was invariably "Yes".

The leaders of the local groups were pulled together and after reporting their experiences the decision was made to hold a meeting with the president of the Chicago Federal Home Loan Bank. He was invited to a meeting and refused to come. A large delegation went to his home and passed out flyers to his neighbors. The president agreed to a meeting. The first intermediate victory had been won. Word spread through the communities that their efforts were having results, because the president of the Federal Home Loan Bank had agreed to meet to discuss disclosure.

At the meeting the president said that if all the local institutions had said what the people were reporting, (i.e., that they would be willing to disclose if asked by the Federal Home Loan Bank), then he could see no problems with disclosure. But he wanted to check with his superiors in Washington. It was agreed that the following week officials from Washington would be at the meeting. Another intermediate victory! Washington was responding to the demands.

At the next meeting the officials from Washington said they felt a pilot disclosure study would be of no value and that they could not authorize anything of the kind. After much shouting back and forth, it was decided that there would be another meeting with officers of local savings and loans and officials from the Chicago and Washington Federal Home Loan Banks. Another intermediate victory--"Washington officials are so frightened they are coming back to meet with us again."

Prior to the next meeting the local groups went back to their local savings and loans and reconfirmed that if asked by the Federal Home Loan Bank they would be willing to disclose. Some of them even went so far as to say they thought it would be good. So several local groups again scored intermediate victories.

When the meeting occurred, local officials of savings and loans faced with community residents were forced to say publicly what they had been saying in private to the community residents. The ranks of the bankers were hopelessly broken and the leadership of MAHA stepped into the breach demanding a pilot program of disclosure. Since representatives of several larger local institutions had said they would not oppose such a pilot program, the officials of the Federal Home Loan Bank agreed that there would be such a study. The primary victory had been won! But in no way did that mean that the issue was over. MAHA leaders immediately demanded a meeting to work out the type of questionnaire to be used and the timetable for disclosure.

From that came a flurry of activity around local institutions who were not making loans, and, on the basis of the pilot data, a city ordinance was enacted to require disclosure by any financial institution desiring to hold city funds. From there to a State and Federal Disclosure Law.

The important aspect is that as soon as the primary victory had been reached, the organization set new goals for itself and the primary victories developed into new issues and new organizing drives and eventually new victories. This means that there are no final victories.

The human animal is continually searching for the Holy Grail--that

which when achieved will solve all problems and be the end of the struggle. People tend to view issues in that manner. "If we get a new school, then the kids will get a good education." "if we get disclosure, then redlining will stop." Yet, the seasoned leader and organizer know that every victory leads to another organizing drive. So that when MAHA won a pilot disclosure program, that primary victory turned into an intermediate victory on the road to Federal Disclosure. Now that Federal Disclosure has been won, that victory has turned into an intermediate victory along the road to reinvestment which now has become the primary victory being sought. Thus it may appear to some that there is no end to organizing and that is true, not only about organizing but life itself. The football team that wins on Saturday is planning for the next game by Monday.

## Conclusion

Since victories lead to new battles, that means that victories carry with them the responsibility to go on to new and perhaps uncharted areas. Thus victory scares some people. If you lose, then not much is expected of you and you don't have to take the next step. The organization that wins knows that victory will lead to new organizing lines and new fights, that with each new victory, come new responsibilities.

## The Myth of the Organizer\*

Historically man has had myths by which he lived. These myths were the sign posts of his existence. They were his attempts to make sense out of non-sense and to give meaning to his life. Myths assisted him in dealing with a world that confused him, frightened him, and over which he had no control. Myths also fulfilled the role of calling upon members of the cult or community to extend themselves beyond their own estimation of themselves or their energies. Thus, initiation rites of pain, suffering or sacrifice and dedication.

Religion has fulfilled that need in man. Thus, the demands of most faiths for total commitment. Patriotism has met that need in others; thus, the right of the country to demand and receive the lives of its people in time of war. Movements have served that role for some. The early union organizers, under threat of death, faced each new day with the myth of the "one big strike" in which the balance of power would be shifted. The Freedom Movement of the 50's and 60's demanded and received full commitment from many for the myth of equal rights for all men.

All these and many more were and, in some cases, remain man's attempt to give meaning to his existence and drive him beyond his limitations. Participation in the myth will make me a better person, will make the world a better place to live, will make me part of a power structure which can bring about the changes that I want to see happen.

We find ourselves in a time in history when myths are hard to come by. Religion does not have appeal for us today that it had for our parents. In the wake of Watergate, few, if any, look upon politicians with anything other than distrust; patriotism has little meaning, particularly when it is called for by an elected official. The shaky economy and increasing shortages have destroyed the myth of a totally prosperous world that would be without want and need.

Myths, to give life meaning, have for a large segment of the population become the annual two or three week vacation, college

education for the children, the mortgage paid off, a good pension plan. If these myths give meaning to an individual's life, all well and good, albeit rather boring myths to keep a person going.

A rather unromantic, but very pragmatic individual has stated, "Life is a shit sandwich, without bread, and every day we take another bite." Is there a myth which can make any sense out of the shit sandwich?

The professional organizer is one who looks at the world the way it really is and deals with it. He sees the oppressed and the oppressor, those with power and those without power, and works toward the day when the roles shall be equalized or reversed--full well knowing from history that when the powerless become powerful the process will have to begin again. He sees not only the viciousness of the oppressor, although cloaked in white collar and wrapped in a \$500 suit. He sees also the smallness and pettiness of the oppressed. He sees the ruthlessness of the power and the submission of the powerless. He knows that if he is lucky or history is kind to him he will have, at best, two organizing campaigns in his life that will have social impact of any magnitude. What are some of the ingredients of the myth that keep the organizer going?

Life is to be exciting. The organizer's stock in trade is change. Change of the existing power structure of a precinct, ward, city, state. Change of the financial community. Change of the existing roles of oppressor and oppressed. Change of things as they are. Such change does not happen without excitement. Excitement for the organizer--excitement for the people he works for and the people he works against. In the movie "A Thousand Clowns", Jason Robards, in talking about his adopted nephew, says, "I want him to give the world a goosing before he dies". A goosing is a very exciting experience, either negatively or positively for all involved. Thus, he is committed to the excitement of change in his own life and all the lives and structures with which he comes into contact.

This excitement can be at the level of organizing a group of welfare recipients to the point where they change roles with the welfare office and make demands that are honored. Or at the level of organizing a community so that it has enough power to say to the city planner, "Screw your plan. Here is our plan," and win. Or the excitement of seeing a person's image of himself change because of his involvement with the issue and organization.

An organizer who developed a senior citizens' coalition worked very hard with his leadership before the confrontation, in which they were demanding a special dial-a-bus program from the city. In the midst of the negotiation, it was obvious that his leaders were not going to win the fight. Just at the moment when it looked like the mayor had them so confused and bickering among themselves, to the extent that the issue would be lost, a woman who had not previously been a strong leader stood up and shouted, "Mayor, you have a mother and father. Do you want them to have to walk six blocks with a bag of groceries, or not go to the doctor because they don't want to spend the cab fare? You know this program is for your parents too, and some day it will be for you". This was the unifying battle cry which sparked the seniors and pulled them together, destroying all of the mayor's reasoned logic on why the program wouldn't be instituted. Fifteen minutes later the seniors walked out with a victory and today the bus program is working in that community. The people elected the woman their permanent spokesperson. When she shows up with her constituents at a city office, they are immediately ushered in and their demands, more times than not, are met. When a new state or

federal issue on aging comes up, the press calls her for a statement of the opinion of the senior coalition on the new proposal. She confided to the organizer, "You know, no one ever used to care what I thought or listen to my opinions, and now they do. This has been the most exciting two years of my life." It might be added that life was also not dull for those whom the senior coalition confronted during those two years. As he told the story, the organizer relived the excitement of that organizing campaign. A big portion of the organizer's myth is that life is to be exciting.

A second major tenet in the myth of the organizer is his belief in and respect for people. This belief and respect is expressed in many ways. It is first exhibited when he enters the arena in which he is organizing. He samples as many opinions and ideas as possible from every economic, educational and ethnic strata of his arena. He does not judge the person who presents him with a concept contrary to his own, but accepts it as part of the mosaic that he is called upon to build. It is further exhibited in the selection of the issues to be worked on by the people. When a staff charges into the office saying, "I've got a great new issue," the lead organizer's immediate response is, "Did you check it out with people?" Once it has been determined by the people what issues will be worked on, then the organizer's job is to express his belief in and respect for people by allowing them to set the timetable, the tactics and the goals. He may lay out alternatives, *but in the end it is the people who make the decision on what course of action is to be taken.*

A white organizer working in a black community was continually told by his leadership, "We have to do something about the prostitutes in the community". He felt quite uneasy about the whole issue, but, finally, a meeting was organized with the police and a series of demands were made. The police promised to pick up all the prostitutes; however, they warned the people that the prostitutes would be back out on the street in three hours. The crowd decided to see what would happen and pushed the police to do their job, setting up a steering committee to meet in two weeks to see if they had gained any results. It didn't take two weeks for leadership to see that, indeed, the police were picking up the women; but that they were back from booking the same night in most cases, the next night in all cases. The organizer, desperate to come up with a solution of the issue, went to the police and talked with them about the problem. He was told by the police that over ninety per-cent of the patrons of the black prostitutes were whites from a nearby suburb. Since these people were from outside his arena, the organizer had his strategy: station people on the corners and, whenever you see a white male pick up one of the women, copy down the license number, trace the license number to registration and send a letter to that residence addressed to Mrs. Smith asking if she knew where her husband was on such and such a night. Coupling this with a news release that this was going to happen would cut the trade and thereby get rid of the prostitutes.

Gleefully, he went to the leadership meeting with this strategy. For a variety of reasons, some of which were not too hard to see through, the strategy was turned down. The people decided instead to picket the prostitutes. As distasteful as this was to him personally, the organizer had chosen his arena and now was called upon to respect the people above his own feelings.

At this point, all kinds of rhetorical questions are thrown out. "How far do you let people go? Would you organize for segregation? Doesn't the organizer have a moral right to take a personal stand on issues?"

On and on. Once the organizer has analyzed the arena in which he intends to organize, and, if he accepts that arena, then the myth by which he lives dictates that he is bound to respect the decisions of those people within the arena. For from his experience he has seen that when people are given the opportunity in a democratic arena to wrestle with their lives and the life of the community, the way in which people look at themselves and others changes, horizons broaden, self-interest expands beyond myself to my community and my city. He has seen homeowners fight for the right of the tenant; he has seen tenants fight for an issue that only benefits homeowners. He has seen people lose a day of work to fight for issues that will not directly affect them.

A third basic ingredient in the organizer's myth is that no institution is to be trusted. This is easy for the novice to accept as he organizes an attack on city hall, or the bank, or the board of education. The professional knows that this applies also to the power base that he is organizing. Thus, he is constantly on the prowl for new ideas, new people, new segments of the community to bring into his organizing campaign. An institution that is not challenged with fresh people seeking leadership, with new issues to replace the old, soon becomes senile. Once senility starts, death is not far behind. Thus, the organizer knows that he cannot trust institutions; they must be challenged on every front, not only those that are attempting to oppress his arena, but his own arena as well.

An organizer was hired to direct an organization which was working in a multi ethnic community. As he looked over the make-up of his executive board, he discovered that the ethnic group which made up 60% of the community only had 2 members on the twenty-five member board. Knowing that a reaction would result from the existing power structure, he used the constitution which said, if a board member missed three board meetings without excuse, he/she could be replaced. In six months nine new board members had been added to the board, all from the disenfranchised ethnic group. As a result, several other board members resigned because there were too many of "those people" on the board. Yet, the organizer knew he had to change or kill the arena in which he was working if he was to be true to his myth.

The myth of the organizer, that which pulls him up out of bed in the morning to face another shit sandwich, is his belief in the excitement of life--that which he wants to create and that of which he wants to be a part. His belief in and respect for peoples' ability to make decisions about their lives and their ability to be cognizant of more than their limited self-interest in making those decisions. His distrust of all institutions and, thus, his drive to bring new ideas and new people to all institutions, thereby bringing excitement to those institutions.

*\* "A myth is a way of pulling together the raw and contradictory evidence of life as it is known in any age. It lets people make patterns in their own lives, within the larger patterns"*

*-- Theodore H. White, Breach of Faith, 1975*

###

---