

PREFACE TO MY DISSERTATION

I wrote this document for my Ph.D at the NYU Graduate School of Public Administration in 1971-1972. It was not accepted by the Graduate School, and I left in the summer of 1973 with a Masters degree.

In 2008, I wrote about my experience and thinking about social movement organizations like the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) in my memoirs called Portions. I've pasted my 2008 thoughts below as a preface to introduce the context and arguments that shaped my writing at the time.

Dan Leahy
November 2022.

I wrote my dissertation at my desk in our studio apartment in Park Slope. Herman said you could write a dissertation in two ways. You could start out with a thesis and see if you can verify it, or you can do a bunch of research and see if you can come up with a thesis. I opted for the later approach since I could not come up with the former. I had all those files from the NWRO office in Washington, D.C. and a lot of articles about the initial campaigns of the welfare rights movement. I wrote about this history, the NWRO as an organization, and the various campaigns that George Wiley and his organizers conducted. It was purely descriptive.

I never came up with a thesis; I don't know why. There were plenty around for me to see. Maybe all real theoretical questions were outside the field of public administration. Maybe I didn't know how to characterize them or put them into an academic language, consistent with all my reading over four years. Or, maybe I just wanted to get to organizing my neighborhood that was just outside my window.

One of the arguments was about what poor people could do themselves to change their situation. This argument was between George Wiley, the organizer, and movement theorists, Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven. Cloward and Piven argued that poor people could only be heard in disruption, that their power resided in their ability to disrupt normality. This only made sense to me if there was someone in power who, upon seeing the disruption, would act in a positive way to reform the situation. Most of the time, though, I thought simple disruption by the poor themselves would lead to more repression.

Contrary to Cloward and Piven, Wiley was more in the style of Saul Alinsky. He believed poor people's power resided in a formal organization with membership, dues, formal leadership that had both lobbying credibility and the capacity for direct action campaigns. The assumption here was that if you made yourself visible through

organization to a liberal social order you would get a piece of the surplus. This assumption, that there is a surplus available to the organized, is key to all Alinsky styled organizations.

There was another argument about the basis upon which you could mobilize poor people. It had to do with how the organizer defined “we.” Wiley obviously believed you could organize people based on their identity as welfare recipients. He publicly challenged Martin Luther King, Jr. for not supporting this identity. King and others did not believe that this identity was strong enough to mobilize people and was definitely not the right identity to gain allies with. King was, however, shifting from civil rights to economic rights, and he was focused on “poor people” just not welfare moms.

There was another argument that was around when I was doing my dissertation. This was the argument about whether or not you could build a permanent or effective organization of poor people based on a single issue, i.e. welfare. One of Wiley’s most effective critics on this issue came from his Arkansas chapter organized by Wade Rathke. Wade would go on to implement his idea of a multi-issue organization by transforming his Arkansas chapter into a national poor people’s organization called ACORN.

I certainly didn’t use my dissertation to interrogate these arguments, as perhaps I should have. It has certainly become clear that in the absence of a liberal state with disposable social surplus, disruption by poor people or issue-based demands from an Alinsky styled organizations are still borne, but I don’t think I was there yet.

Ralph Abernathy led the Poor People’s Campaign to Washington, D.C. after King was assassinated in Memphis. I was there in D.C. when it arrived and set up its “city” in front of the White House. I still have the old campaign button. The encampment was called Resurrection City. The federal government let that encampment of poor people sink in its own mud, rain, and despair before kicking them out. Poor people are an ideological embarrassment to the liberal order. The War on Poverty did what most Alinsky organizations did, hire staff, but that was it.

Nevertheless, I learned a lot in the process of doing my dissertation. I observed the role that a particular set of foundations play in the formation of social movements in the U.S. The same foundations that funded Wiley’s Poverty Rights Action Center were those involved in organizing the national Citizens Party ten years later. I also met and watched some of the nation’s best young organizers associated with the NWRO and its successor the Movement for Economic Justice (MEJ): people like Wade Rathke, Bert Deleuw, Bruce Thomas, Wretha Wiley Hanson, Tim Sampson and others. I worked directly with Wade, Bert, and Wretha as we tried to construct the Citizens Party.

After producing a 167-page document, I took it to my dissertation advisor. He was a young and progressive faculty member in the Graduate School. I barely knew him and had never taken a class from him. He said he would look at it. I went back a couple of months later to see what he had to say. He had a hard time finding it in his cramped office full of books and papers. He finally did see it on the floor behind his door. He had not read it. I said fuck you and never went back.

Dan Leahy
2008

The Poverty/Rights Action Center:
The Organizational Origins of NWRO

NOT FOR PUBLICATION OR DISTRIBUTION

Dan Leahy
446 14th Street
Brooklyn, New York 11215
(212) 768-1797

The Poverty/Rights Action Center, which was established in Washington, D.C. on May 23, 1966 by Dr. George Wiley, was the main vehicle in pulling together a national welfare rights movement. Although the Center became immediately identified with the growing welfare rights activity on the local level, it was originally conceived to serve a much broader purpose as a private watch dog on the federal government. Nonetheless, as the welfare rights movement grew in strength and demanded the full attention of the Center staff the Center was eventually absorbed by the movement it gave a national focus.

Intellectual Origins of the Poverty Rights Action Center

The idea of the Poverty/Rights Action Center (PRAC) grew out of a proposal to establish a private watchdog agency to keep federal agencies responsible to their statutory obligations and the desire of Dr. Wiley to develop a base for action-oriented groups concerned with the issues of poverty and race.

On December 17, 1965 Mr. Norman G. Kurland of the Citizens Crusade Against Poverty mailed a copy of his proposal for a private watchdog agency to George Wiley, then CORE program director.¹ Mr. Kurland, who had prepared his proposal in June of 1964, had contacted a variety of civil-rights organizations who had expressed support for the idea

1. Personal letter from Norman G. Kurland to Mr. George Wiley. December 17, 1965.

but had taken no action. Mr. Kurland had initially discussed his proposal with Mr. Arnold Aronson of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, but the Conference had taken no action on the suggestion. He had also brought his proposal to the attention of Mr. Randolph Blackwell and Mrs. Marion Wright of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference both of whom agreed that such a program would fill a very critical and fundamental need. The proposal had also been brought to the attention of Attorney General Katzenbach and Secretary Gardner of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare by Rabbi Richard Hirsch. In his letter to Dr. Wiley, Mr. Kurland suggested that the Citizens Crusade Against Poverty (CCAP) could be persuaded to "put the full weight of its organization behind the drive to acquire the necessary funds" for such a program and that an independent board could be made up of representatives of such groups as NAACP Legal Defense Fund, ACLU Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights, CORE Legal Defense Fund, CCAP and other groups.^{2.}

Mr. Kurland's proposal was entitled, "The Quest for a Conscience Within the Federal Government: Proposal To Provide Technical Assistance and Information for Promoting Human Rights Through Federal Agencies and Programs."^{3.} It essentially called for the establishment of a private, non-profit organization centered in Washington, D.C. that would "prod" the federal government and its bureaucracies to implement the victories and values being won by the civil rights and poverty movements.

2. Ibid.,

3. Norman S. Kurland, "The Quest for a Conscience Within the Federal

Mr. Kurland constructed his proposal just as the civil rights movement was winning its legislative fight with the impending passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and saw the need to continue the struggle into the administrative arena. The basic problem was to convert the "paper rights" the movement had won through legislation into "living rights." Although he saw the federal government as the "basic and primary lever for progress in the human rights struggle," the federal establishment had several inherent drawbacks which would prohibit its automatic implementation of the newly won human rights.

First among these drawbacks was that the federal government was "rarely a self-directed force" and that the influence of the federal government is "channeled and released by private groups having diverse interests." Secondly, the implementation of the human rights revolution lies under the auspices of federal programs administered through federal bureaucracies. However, this fourth branch of government, the administrative agencies, often operates as independent and autonomous units within the federal establishment. With little hope of independent initiative for the human rights revolution being developed within these agencies, the only hope was for some type of external safeguards to insure the federal agencies would not fall back into their "old patterns" of ignoring the legislative and legal victories of the civil rights movement.

The external safeguards were inadequate, however. There was no comparable agency such as the Bureau of the Budget or the General Accounting Office to safeguard the goals of the human rights revolution. Neither the Commission on Civil Rights nor the Department of Justice saw themselves as promoters of civil rights. The Federal Bureau of Investigation had come into conflict with local police units in issues involving civil rights. There was no public agency comparable to the Swedish Ombudsman which would protect citizens from the arbitrary decisions, abuses and inactions on the part of governmental officials.

The organization proposed by Mr. Kurland would be "a new and more effective prod.... to keep Federal agencies and their officials responsible and responsive to all Americans." It would operate on a permanent day-to-day basis focusing on existing federal programs. The staff of five would provide technical assistance and information to any interested groups and would rely on the prestige and influence of supporting organizations to increase its effectiveness in dealing with federal agencies.

The objectives of the organization were in line with Mr. Kurland's assumption that the Federal government, despite its shortcomings, was the basic lever for progress in the human rights struggle. The organization by analysing and compiling information and by

4. Ibid., p.6.

making it available to government and private groups would attempt to obtain more effective action from the Federal agencies on civil rights, civil liberties and poverty related issues. Mr. Kurland mentioned a small example to show what could be done by the organization based on the basic good will of the federal government and the power of information: ^{5.}

"Here is an example of what can be done. A reader noticed a small article in a Mississippi newspaper announcing the establishment of segregated classes for teachers of adult civil defense courses. The reader, familiar with certain unique aspects of this program, recognized its leverage potential. When brought to the attention of the Federal agency which administers this program, integration was immediately ordered for this program throughout the country. Without external vigilance, however, this program would still permit segregated classes."

The Kurland proposal provided only one side of what was to become the Poverty/Rights Action Center. The proposal did not contain any emphasis on the development of new action-oriented groups which would take action on the information developed by the Center nor did it include any reference to the emerging welfare rights movement. This second side of the Poverty/Rights Action Center was to be developed by George Wiley.

Shortly after receiving the Kurland proposal, Dr. Wiley left CORE where he had been passed over for the national directorship and joined the Citizens Crusade Against Poverty on a temporary basis. During his four month stay with CCAP he put the action

5. Ibid., p.5.

element into the Poverty/Rights Action Center, but he was unable to obtain the organizational support of the CCAP that Mr. Kurland had suggested would be available.

Dr. Wiley came to the Citizens Crusade Against Poverty as a person who would develop national coalitions around CCAP's legislative priorities, specifically the minimum wage bill then going through Congress. Many of the factors which were to prohibit Wiley's development of an effective national action on this issue provided the incentive to propose his own Center independent of the Citizens Crusade Against Poverty.

In February, 1966 Dr. Wiley estimated that the Minimum Wage Bill was in serious trouble, and that if a substantial push did not take place in the near future, the situation would further deteriorate with a lowering of the minimum wage level. In a memorandum to Richard Boone, Executive Director of CCAP, Wiley proposed "a crash effort toward rallying national support for this legislation" (HR 10518)⁶. The effort would be mounted by a five to ten man staff operating over a two month period within which he would establish a "national ad hoc committee of prestigious people in support of a living wage for all workers."⁷ Dr. Wiley foresaw rallies and meetings in major cities accompanied by demonstrations and the visit of various delegations to Washington D.C. for lobbying activity.

The funding and operation of such an effort would be somewhat detached from the CCAP's normal program activity. Major funding

6. Memorandum from G. Wiley to R. Boone, subject: minimum Wage Bill. February 17, 1966.

for the proposed 100,000 dollar operation would come from Labor, i.e., Walter Reuther, with CCAP providing clerical support. A headquarters separate from CCAP would be set up and the program would have a maximum of administrative autonomy so that it could "operate under no restriction in acting like anything but a political pressure group."^{8.} Even if this crash program were to have little impact on the disposition of the minimum wage bill, Dr. Wiley argued that such an operation would be worthwhile because it would "begin building some of the coalitions around the country and identifying the contacts for such coalitions that are fundamental to putting across any kind of significant legislative program to eliminate poverty."^{9.}

Despite Richard Boone's failure to obtain immediate funding for the proposal, Dr. Wiley began to develop the base which was to become the Poverty/Rights Action Center. Within two weeks time Dr. Wiley had succeeded in attracting a staff of five including Edwin Day, a close associate from CORE and the first Associate Director of the Poverty/Rights Action Center, and a separate headquarters donated by the Industrial Union Department. His task force developed a research design for identifying the impact of the minimum wage bill on the Negro working force, prepared the basic materials for two successive mailings on the minimum wage issue and developed active telephone contact with people in^{10.} approximately twenty cities across the nation.

8. Ibid., p. 2.

9. Ibid., p. 3.

10. Memorandum from G. Wiley to R. Boone, subject: Progress Report & Proposal for Coordinating Operation, February 28, 1966

By April of 1966 Dr. Wiley realized that he could no longer work within the framework of the Citizens Crusade Against Poverty. His reasons were outlined in a series of memoranda to Richard Boone. First, Dr. Wiley placed great importance on a rapid communications system. During his efforts to mount a campaign around the minimum wage bill, his operation was hampered by the inability to obtain adequate reproduction of materials, work space and telephone and mail communications. Second, the amount of full-time staff that CCAP was able to commit to his efforts was too small. Third, the CCAP was unable to secure the funds necessary to support his operation. Fourth, the CCAP's non-profit, tax-exempt status was a handicap to the type of overt political activity Wiley saw as necessary in pressuring for the passage of legislation.

The most important drawback, however, was the nature of the CCAP's constituency and the type of action that such a constituency allowed. CCAP was designed to form broad coalitions of citizen's groups in the War on Poverty and to service these groups by providing training programs and technical assistance for community organization. Dr. Wiley was clearly impatient with this type of long-range strategy and felt the need for the development of immediate, issue-oriented action. "From my years in CORE I had gotten use to being part of a militant, action-oriented organization, which was prepared to move swiftly into situations that developed, with relatively little concern about whose toes got stepped on in the process. I am therefore

more disposed toward being part of an energetic little phalanx pressing for radical change, than always having to tone down statements to keep from offending divergent elements of a tenuous coalition." ^{11.} Dr. Wiley also felt the necessity of knowing exactly who his constituency was and the broad nature of the CCAP coalition prohibited this identification.

Based on these shortcomings of the CCAP and integrating the Kurland proposal with his own action orientation, Dr. Wiley submitted to Richard Boone in early April the "Prospectus For the Establishment of a Poverty/Rights Action Center" dated March 25, 1966. Like Mr. Kurland, Dr. Wiley's starting point was the present situation of the civil rights movement.

Dr. Wiley believed that "activists" had been a major factor in producing social change and that their potential for promoting change was undiminished. Nonetheless, the "ability of activists to mount effective strategies toward common goals has been seriously impaired." This was due to the fact that the civil rights movement which had once provided direction and purpose to activists was now in financial troubles and in conflict over long and short range goals. Furthermore, activists were dispersed in a myriad of local organizations (anti-poverty, civil rights, community organization, etc.) and had no center through which they could develop a national thrust on a common issue. ^{12.}

11. Memorandum from G. Wiley to R. Boone. April 4, 1966.

12. George Wiley. Prospectus for the Establishment of a Poverty/Rights Action Center. March 25, 1966 (mimeograph).

The problem as Dr. Wiley saw it was that the lines of communications that had united these activists had been disrupted and that there was no organization that could provide "direction, organization, or a system of communication" to action groups in the anti-poverty movement. The Poverty/Rights Action Center that he proposed would provide that "communication system among militant, action-oriented groups in order to mobilize nationwide support on major civil rights and poverty issues. It would also provide some services to local groups and do watch-dog work on federal programs related to civil rights and poverty."^{13.} The purposes which he outlined in his March, 1966 prospectus were to remain essentially the same throughout the existence of the Center, only the constituency that it gave direction to was to become more specific. The following purposes show the clear integration of the Kurland proposal and the Wiley action-orientation:^{14.}

- "1. To develop nationwide support for major anti-poverty measure (e.g. pressing for 'maximum feasible participation' of the poor in the anti-poverty program; developing a drive for a guaranteed income.)
- "2. To develop nationwide support for significant local anti-poverty movements; (e.g. national boycotts in support of the Delano Grape Strike).
- "3. To provide surveillance of and pressures on federal agencies with programs designed to help the poor; (e.g. monitor activities and policies of CEO, Department of Agriculture, Department of Labor, HUD, HEW, etc.)
- "4. To be the eyes and ears in Washington for local groups wishing specific information about federal agencies and federal programs; (e.g. respond to local groups requests

13. Ibid., p. 2

14. Ibid.

for information; check on status of applications before federal agencies at request of local action groups.).

- "5. To provide advice and assistance to local groups coming to Washington to lobby or to press for support of their programs by federal agencies; (e.g. act as Washington contact for groups planning to come to Washington on poverty issues. Help with housing, location of appropriate government offices, appointments, public relations, etc. "

The Center would begin with a staff of six full time professionals operating out of a central location in Northwest Washington, D.C. They would begin to develop a rapid system of communication based essentially on the use of the telephone and be prepared to provide "how-to-do-it" guides, sample posters and leaflets to major local action groups. The Center would also be prepared to begin a step toward a comprehensive surveillance of federal programs, but this would depend on the availability of additional staff. Dr. Wiley estimated that \$60,000 to \$75,000 would have to be raised from private sources for the first year of operation. "In summary, the Poverty/Rights Action Center would be in part a Washington service agency for local action groups. But more importantly it would be a cadre prepared to move swiftly when the need arises to mobilize nationwide support on major issues."

The idea of the Poverty/Rights Action Center, then, grew out of the integration of the Kurland proposal with the action-orientation of Dr. Wiley. The only remaining conceptual problem was the identification of a specific, action constituency that the

15. Ibid., p.5.

Center could become attached to and provide national direction or assistance for. With only one important deviation, this constituency was to become the local welfare rights organizations and the Center was to become so intimately tied to this movement that the Center ceased to exist except on paper.

Establishment and Initial Activities

From March to October 1966, Dr. Wiley worked to establish his constituency. In his early proposals for the Poverty/Rights Action Center, he mentioned the Farm Workers Association in California and the Poor People's Conference in Mississippi as examples of local action groups his Center could possibly unite on a national issue. However, one example of Center activity that he mentioned consistently throughout all his proposals from March to October involved the "Cloward Welfare Crisis" strategy. In his proposal dated March 25, 1966, Dr. Wiley suggested that the Center "would be ideally equipped, for example, to coordinate the Cloward Welfare Crisis strategy, spearheading the drive for a guaranteed minimum income."¹⁶ And, if the drive was undertaken, the Center would prepare "action manuals on welfare."¹⁷

Two days prior to opening the Center, Dr. Wiley attended a "Leadership Conference on the Guaranteed Income" in Chicago sponsored by the Ad Hoc Committee For A Guaranteed Income. Appropriately enough, the two main speakers at the Conference who were to outline the "Concept and Strategy" of the Guaranteed

16. Ibid., p. 6.

17. Ibid., p. 5.

Income were Robert Theobald and Richard Cloward. Dr. Wiley used the meeting to conduct his first coordinating session of the national welfare rights movement. Building on that first meeting, Dr. Wiley was to conduct a series of meetings throughout the summer so that by the time he wrote his 100 page Prospectus of the Poverty/Rights Action Center in October of 1966 developing the welfare rights movement was his only topic of concern. [See: National Opportunity]

During this time, the only activity that the Center undertook that did not directly concern the development of the welfare rights movement was the coordination of the Poor People's March on Washington on September 27, 1966. The March was called to protest the cuts in the O.E.O. budget and the Center was asked to coordinate the March from its Washington base.

As early as July, 1966 the Poverty/Rights Action Center was monitoring the progress of the 1966-1967 version of the Poverty Program through Congress. The Office of Economic Opportunity had requested 3 Billion dollars for the next fiscal year and this amount had been cut to 1.7 billion by President Johnson "when he last escalated the war in Vietnam earlier this year." Furthermore, the House Committee on Education and Labor had approved this 1.7 billion dollar appropriation but had drastically cut the money going to the community action programs, demonstrations, research and

18. Bulletin. Poverty/Rights Action Center. July 19, 1966 (mime

training while increasing the funding for Headstart and Neighborhood Youth Corps.

Dr. Wiley saw these cuts as a clear attempt to thwart the organization of the poor. The 25% cut in the funds going to the community action program was due to the politicians' fear of the poor. "This is the way the politicians who fear the development of organization of the poor are hoping to kill the developing organizations. By cutting the money they don't have to go on record as opposing 'maximum feasible participation.'^{20.}" The cut in the demonstration, research and training projects was also due to the fear of the organized poor. "It is under the demonstration and training projects that some of the best community organization work under the poverty program had taken place. For example, the Community Action Training Center in Syracuse was funded under this section until it became too controversial for OEO and had its money cut off."^{21.}

As the authorization was passing through the House of Representative, the Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower and Poverty, and the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, the Poverty/Rights Action Center was advocating a five point program backed up by traditional lobbying activity.

20. Ibid., p.1.

21. Ibid.

The five point program called essentially for a restoration of adequate funding of the community action program and the recognition of independent communities. Point one called for a doubling of the CAP funds which had been reduced "clearly in response from pressures by big city mayors to put the lid on these programs." Point two called for increase of the funds going for demonstration, research and training which the House committee had cut "in a clear effort to kill such experimentations which have led to some of the more 'effective' programs providing 'a voice for the poor'." Point three wanted the maintenance of the 10% local matching funds for OEO grants which the House committee raised to 20% "in an effort to limit the possibility of OEO grants going to non-governmental local groups whose programs tend to be more militant and less controllable by local politicians. Point four wanted 'community' defined as a section of a governmental unit rather than the entire city so that areas like Watts, Harlem and Hough could apply directly for OEO funds without being "under the thumb of city hall." The final point called for reserving 20% of the OEO grants for independent local groups not connected with city and county umbrella agencies. It was pointed out that these last two provisions would be meaningless if there was no restoration of adequate funds to the community action programs.

As the OEO authorization passed through Congress, Dr. Wiley called for increasingly direct forms of lobbying which culminated

22. The five point program is contained in a fact sheet entitled, "Congress Moving to Cripple Community Action Program," Poverty/Rights Action Center, July 29, 1966 (unreproduced)

in the Poor People's March on Washington, an attempt to effect the appropriations process. In late July, 1966 the Poverty/Rights Action Center published bulletins calling for lobbying by telephoning or wiring Congressman, meeting with party officials, church, labor and civil rights organizations. On July 26 and July 29, 1966, the Center published the names of all the appropriate senators and urged "direct contact" if the poor were going to change the content of the bill being written by the Senate subcommittee.

Despite the Center's efforts to prevent the cuts in the Congressional authorization, Congress approved the amendments to the Poverty Program and the Center lapsed into official silence. It was at this time that the Center was preparing and conducting its first national meeting of welfare rights groups in Chicago between August 6th and 7th. Nonetheless, the issue of the poverty program cuts was still very relevant and because of its background work and Washington base the Center was chosen on September 15, 1966 to coordinate the Poor People's March on Washington.

Poor People's March on Washington September 27, 1966

The Center did not call the March; it was chosen to coordinate it. The idea of the March came out of a coalition of local poverty groups in the New York metropolitan area called the Outwide Community Action Groups of New York. Dr. Wiley was

in New York on September 15, 1966 and was clearly interested in obtaining the national coordinator designation for the Poverty/Rights Action Center. "Our position, I think, is really very secure. (Frank) Espada proposed that (Bayard) Rustin be secured to coordinate the march and there was a whole Harlem contingent ... three or four people... that just attacked. They didn't want Rustin at all. Poor people won't come out for Rustin. And the people are down on CCAP. The only real question is SNICK (and CORE-- but they're getting in late and don't have any troops so they will be no problem and Snick we can work with anyway.)." The Poverty/Rights Action Center was to take an official position that "this idea (the March) came out of the community action programs in New York and a number of groups have asked the Poverty/Rights Action Center to coordinate the march and we've accepted." The march was also to take priority immediately over everything, including welfare organizing. ^{23.}

Although the Poverty/Rights Action Center was basically asked to provide the logistics for the March and arrange the schedule in Washington, D.C. and although the basic thrust of the March was determined by the New York based community action groups, The Center five point program dealing with the poverty cuts became the demands of the March. The Center arranged for the mailings publicising the march, scheduled the rallies, dealt with the bus problem, public address system and an alternate "rain plan".

23. This account of the origins of the Poor People's March and PRAC's involvement is taken from the transcribed telephone conversation between G. Wiley and Ed Day on September 15, 1966.

The basic thrust of the March, provided by the Citywide Community Action Groups of New York City, was that the 89th Congress was close to adjournment and the feeling was that the Congressmen might postpone the decision on the poverty program until after the November elections. The March was to demand action now (before the elections) so that the poor could use their "powerful weapon: millions of votes" to oust Congressmen that voted against the poor and their program.^{24.}

The specific demands of the March, however, were those of the Poverty/Rights Action Center (see above) with three additions: (1) The full \$2.5 billion approved by the Senate and not the \$1.7 suggested by the House. (2) The same salaries for poverty workers as for other public employees. (3) The same political rights for poverty workers as for all citizens (no Hatch Act restrictions).^{25.}

On September 27, 1966 the Poverty/Rights Action Center reported that over "2,000 poor people marched on Washington ... from over 30 poverty communities." Delegations from the poverty communities met with their Congressional delegations and special delegation met with the Speaker of the House and the minority leader of the Senate. Of the thirty delegations from "poverty communities" only eleven were from outside the New York metropolitan area and over half were from New York City proper.^{26.}

24. Ibid. p.2.

25. Poor Peoples March on Washington. Poverty/Rights Action Center. September 27, 1966. pp.1-2. (mimeograph)

26. Poor Peoples March on Washington. Poverty/Rights Action Center. September 27, 1966. pp.1-2. (mimeograph)

In terms of the implementation of the eight points demanded by the poor people, the March could only be termed a failure. The \$1.6 billion appropriated was far below the \$2.5 requested by the marchers. The Community Action Program received \$323 million, not the minimum demand of \$567 million. The marchers called for a minimum of \$130 million for demonstration, research and training but the appropriation allowed for a maximum of \$40 million for demonstration and research while training was made a separate appropriation. The share of the money that has to be raised locally was increased from 10% to 20% and only 5% of the CAP money was reserved for independent groups instead of 20%. There was also a major setback regarding the rights of poverty workers. While the amendment was not as restrictive as Senator Bird's which prohibited 'subversives' from working in the poverty program, the Bird-Broyhill amendment did prohibit employment in poverty programs to those who had been convicted of breaking the law in demonstrations and applied the Hatch Act prohibitions to those whose main employment was a federally financed program. The one "victory" that the marchers won was the definition of a community as an area that could be smaller than a city and therefore could receive federal poverty money directly. This victory could only be meaningful, however, if there was adequate funds in the Community Action Program. ^{27.}

For the Poverty/Rights Action Center, however, the March was a fair success. Although it was not able to coordinate all the

marchers (1500 Newark poor people with CCAP support marched on Washington on September 26, 1966), the Center was able to combine the staff, resources and flexibility to move swiftly (two weeks notice) on an important issue and establish itself among the action organizations, CORE and SNICK. The Center was able to further its contacts with poverty-oriented groups across the country and gain visibility as an important action organization.

Nonetheless, this was the one and only time that the Center engaged in an activity that did not relate directly to the development of the welfare rights movement. After the March, the Center returned to its 16 month organizing campaign which it had begun in May of 1966 and ended with the establishment of the National Welfare Rights Organization on August 27, 1967. From that time on the Center became essentially a paper organization and the Center's staff became the national staff of NWRO.

As has been stated, the Poverty/Rights Action Center (PRAC) was the main vehicle in giving a national focus and national organization to the welfare rights movement. Beginning in May of 1966 the Center conducted a 16 month organizing effort that culminated in the establishment of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) on August 27, 1967. The Center employed national meetings, national demonstrations, the National Welfare Leaders Newsletter, and its own staff and resource persons to give direction, training, commonality and an organizational framework to the welfare rights movement.

National Organizing by the Center: May, 1966-August, 1967.

Soon after Dr. Wiley's disenchantment with the Citizens Crusade Against Poverty, he attended a Leadership Conference on the Guaranteed Income at the University of Chicago on May 21, 1966. The Conference had been called by the Ad Hoc Committee for a Guaranteed Income under the auspices of the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration Student Body. The Ad Hoc Committee felt that "The proper treatment of poverty in the United States today requires that the federal government guarantee to every family and person, as a right, income sufficient to maintain a decent level of living."^{1.} It had called together representatives and members of religious, trade union business, neighborhood, social work and civil rights groups to discuss "the concept of a guaranteed income and strategies for implementing it."^{2.}

1. The Ad Hoc Committee For a Guaranteed Income. "The Guaranteed Income A Leadership Conference," May 21, 1966 (mimeograph).

Although neither Dr. Wiley nor representatives of the various local welfare rights organizations were part of the Conference's formal program, the Conference was an appropriate place to begin the Center's organizing effort. The two main speakers at the Conference were Dr. Robert Theobald and Dr. Richard Cloward who discussed respectively the concept and strategy for a guaranteed income. Dr. Theobald, an English economist, had advocated a guaranteed income as early as 1963 in his book, Free Men and Free Markets.^{3.} Dr. Richard Cloward, a Professor at Columbia University's School of Social Work, had developed a strategy by which the welfare poor could influence the achievement of the guaranteed income. His strategy had appeared in the Nation on May 2, 1966 and he was to become identified as the "theoretician" of the welfare rights movement.^{4.}

At the end of the Conference, the Poverty/Rights Action Center sponsored a "Welfare Action Meeting" at the Chicago YMCA Hotel. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss welfare problems and action strategies. There were 32 people present at the meeting of which 22 were representatives from welfare rights organizations such as the West Side Organization Welfare Union, JOIN (Jobs or Income Now), KOCO (Kenwood Oakland Community Organization) Welfare Union, and the SCLC Chicago League... all from Chicago, New York's East Harlem Tenant Organization and Mobilization for Youth, Detroit's Federation for Aid to Dependent Children, Cleveland's Recipients

3. Robert Theobald, Free Men and Free Markets (New York: Anchor Books, 1965).

4. Richard Cloward and Frances Piven, "A Strategy to End Poverty," The Nation (May 2, 1966).

Committee for Adequate Welfare, Columbus' People's Poverty Board, and Syracuse's Crusade for Opportunity. Others present included Preston Wilcox and Richard Cloward from Columbia University, Robert Theobald from New York and Ed Day from the PRAC staff. Dr. Wiley chaired the meeting.

The meeting began with the representatives of the various welfare rights organizations outlining the activities, successes and failures of their organizations. During this discussion both Edith Doering of Cleveland's Recipients Committee for Adequate Welfare and Joan Woodford of Columbus' People's Poverty Board mentioned a march by Ohio recipients. Subsequently, Mrs. Edith Doering was asked to outline the welfare action program in Ohio. "She told of a 150 mile march that the Ohio Steering Committee for Adequate Welfare is planning from Cleveland to the State capitol at Columbus. It will be a march for welfare rights. It will be joined by welfare recipients and supporters from every major city in Ohio, including Cleveland, Toledo, Dayton, Columbus Akron, Youngstown, Warren and Cincinnati. It will cover the 10 day period from June 20th through 30th, finishing with a major rally at the State Capitol in Columbus on June 30th. She invited support and representation from other groups across the country."^{5.} It was the finale of this march that provided the date for the welfare movement's first national demonstration.

5. "Welfare Action Meeting: Summary Report," Poverty/Rights Action Center (Washington, D.C.: May 27, 1966) p.3. (mimeograph).

Several decisions were made as a result of this meeting. First, in regard to the Ohio march, it was decided that each welfare rights organization would try to send a delegate to the Ohio march. However, since it would be impractical to mobilize out-of-state recipients for the Ohio march, each local welfare rights organization would attempt to mount a demonstration on June 30th emphasizing local welfare problems. The Poverty/Rights Action Center was given the job of disseminating as much information as possible about welfare rights activity and to promote the idea of June 30th welfare demonstrations; it was also to act as a clearing house for all the scheduled demonstrations. There was discussion on the need for a communications system and possibly a national federation to link the welfare rights groups, but it was decided that more national meetings with greater representation of welfare groups was needed first before these things could be decided upon.

At the meeting's end the Poverty/Rights Action Center had secured for itself the position of the coordinator and promoter of the first national demonstrations on June 30th. Two days after the meeting, the Poverty/Rights Action Center was officially opened on May 23, 1966 in Washington, D.C. The Center screened itself from public attention until June 4, 1966 when it announced the June 30th nation-wide demonstrations in conjunction with the Ohio March's finale.^{6.}

6. Joseph A. Loftus, "Guaranteed Income Backers Hope to Provoke Welfare Crisis, The New York Times (June 5, 1966).

Throughout the month of June, the Poverty/Rights Action Center worked to promote and coordinate the national demonstrations by "contacting local welfare rights groups, supporting local organizing and encouraging cooperative action among groups."⁷ By June 28, 1966, the Center was able to announce that groups in 17 cities were prepared to mount demonstrations on June 30th that would support the Ohio march and protest the inadequacies and injustices of their own local welfare system.⁸ On this same date, Dr. Wiley prophetically announced the birth of a new movement.

"I believe we are on the eve of an historic occasion. We are about to witness on June 30th the first concerted action of a new movement. It is a movement of the poorest of the poor in our nation. Welfare recipients from more than twenty-five cities across our nation will raise their voices in unison to cry out against the terrible injustices and shameful inadequacies that uniformly characterize the welfare system in every state of the union."⁹

The June 30th demonstrations began at 12:01 a.m. when recipients in Pittsburgh began their vigil in front of the State Welfare Department.¹⁰ By the day's end an estimated 6,000 recipients and their supporters had demonstrated in approximately twenty-five cities

7. NWRO. About the NWRO (Washington, D.C.: NWRO).

8. "Round-Up of June 30th Welfare Demonstrations." (Washington, D.C.: PRAC) June 28, 1966. (Mimeograph)

9. NWRO. NOW (Washington, D.C.: NWRO) July, 1969.

10. PRAC. Memorandum (Washington, D.C.: PRAC) July 14, 1966.

across the nation including Boston, New Haven, Trenton, Philadelphia, Louisville, Chicago, Monterey, Columbus and New York.

The two largest demonstrations were held in Columbus, Ohio and New York City. The Ohio "Walk for Decent Welfare" was led by the Reverend Harry Dericott, chairman of the Ohio Steering Committee for Adequate Welfare, a broad coalition of professional, religious and civic organizations. On June 20, 1966 forty welfare recipients left Cleveland on the 155-mile walk. As they past through Ohio cities on route to Columbus, they were joined by supporters for short distances. Even though their march was overshadowed by the civil-rights march in Mississippi following the shooting of James Meredith, these forty marchers were joined by over 2,000 supporters on June 30th to walk the last leg of the march from the East High School in Columbus to the capitol's steps. Here the marchers presented their demands and were addressed by Professor Richard Cloward and Dr. Wiley. Dick Gregory, who also spoke at the rally, stated that this "was not a civil-rights movement, but a human rights movement."^{11.} The basic demand of the marchers was for a special session of the state legislature where it would appropriate sufficient funds to raise the average welfare payment

11. Richard Cloward & Frances Piven. "Birth of a Movement," The Nation (May 8, 1967) p. 582.

to the minimum standard of living set in 1959. 12.

In New York City between 1500 and 2000 recipients and their supporters marched on City Hall. The march was organized by the Citywide Coordinating Committee for Welfare Groups led by Frank Espada of the Welfare Recipients League. They demanded that (1) a special grant for fall school clothing, (2) at least a 25% increase in grant levels, and (3) the institution of an affidavit system for determining eligibility. 13. The leaders of the march presented their demands in a meeting with Welfare Commissioner Mitchell Ginsberg and Deputy Mayor Timothy Costello. As a result of these negotiations Commissioner Ginsberg announced a 10% increase in the clothing allowance and his endorsement of the "affidavit system" which is designed to eliminate some of the injustices suffered by welfare recipients and applicants for welfare. 14.

The Poverty/Rights Action Center had been asked to coordinate and promote the June 30th demonstrations. It did not issue a set of national demands or goals for the new movement or for the June 30th demonstrations. Nonetheless, the demands of the demon-

12. Ad Hoc Committee for a Guaranteed Income. Guaranteed Annual Income Newsletter. Vol. 1, No.3. p.3.

13. Ibid., p.4.

14. Homer Bigart, "Welfare Protest Made at City Hall," The New York Times (July 1, 1966) p. 44.

strators revolved around four main issues: the inadequacy of grants, the violation of constitutional liberties, participation and procedural rights, and the need for supplemental services.^{15.}

Chief among the demands were ways of dealing with the inadequacy of grant levels. In Ohio, New Haven and Kansas City the demonstrators demanded that the welfare grant levels be brought up to either the state or federal minimum standard for human health and decency. If this had been implemented in Ohio, for example, the recipients would have received approximately half of the then current federal poverty line of 3150 dollars for a family of four. Along with increases in the basic grant levels, demonstrators demanded more jobs, employment in the welfare department, no deductions for earned income, increased rent allowances and special grants for school clothing, furniture and appliances.

Another theme that ran through the demands of the welfare groups concerned stopping the violations of recipients' constitutional liberties. The demonstrators demanded an end to "constant investigations", illegal searches and midnight raids by investigators, an end to residency requirements, the right to reject work relief and protection from retaliation for joining welfare rights groups and for filing complaints on slum housing.

15. This analysis of the demands of the June 30th Demonstrations is taken from the PRAC's "Round-Up of June 30th Welfare Demonstrations." (Washington, D.C.: PRAC) June 28, 1966. (Mimeo).

A third major theme of the demonstrators' demands dealt with the development of recipient participation and procedural rights within the welfare bureaucracy. The most persistent demand was for the right to see welfare records and for the publication of all rules, regulations, entitlements and policies of the welfare departments so that welfare recipients could see them. The New York demonstrators demanded the right to a hearing before welfare was terminated, and the Syracuse organizations wanted the establishment of an advisory committee of welfare recipients.

Although not a consistent issue throughout all the demonstrations, there was some demand for non-monetary services such as more job training programs and opportunities, day care and child care facilities for those recipients who are able to work, more hospitals, health centers and clinics and improvement in the food stamp programs.

The June 30th demonstrations was the first concerted national effort of the new movement. At the May 21st meeting in Chicago only three cities (Detroit, New York and Syracuse) were optimistic about the ability to mobilize their groups for the June 30th support action.^{16.} Yet, the Center, in a month's time, was able to contact enough groups so that demonstrations occurred in twenty-five cities across the nation. Even though the Center had provided a valuable service to the movement in the sense of its

16. PRAC. "Welfare Action Meeting: Summary Report," (Washington, D.C.: PRAC) May 27, 1966 (mimeograph).

promotion and coordination of the June 30th demonstrations, the Center had essentially been only a "participant" in that national effort and had not provided a national direction for the new movement. Building on the energy exhibited in the June 30th demonstrations, the Center moved swiftly to provide the movement with both direction and an organizational framework.

By July 11, 1966 the Center had developed an "Outline for National Welfare Rights Meeting" for August 6th and 7th in Chicago.¹⁷ Chicago was chosen both for its central location and the availability of free housing provided by the Chicago YMCA. The Center would provide the staff for the meeting, but the draft proposed that a "Conference Committee" be established to decide on policy matters such as "agenda and distribution of travel funds, the waiving of registration fee, and distribution of housing accommodations and meal tickets if funds are obtained for meals."¹⁸ The draft also proposed that the meeting should include a "training component", and discussion of national strategies and goals. The Center would also work up information on "possible national goals for circulation prior to the meeting."¹⁹ In terms of organization of the movement, the draft suggested that two committees should be established at the meeting, a national welfare action committee and a national welfare advisory committee.

17. PRAC. "Outline for National Welfare Rights Meeting: First Draft." (Washington, D.C.:PRAC) July 11, 1966.

18. Ibid., p.2.

19. Ibid., p.2.

The national welfare action committee would be loosely structured and consist of representatives of grassroots welfare rights organizations. "It would use the Center as its staff and communications headquarters. It would meet and hammer out strategy proposals and objectives, and it would seek ratification by as many groups as possible to form a coalition to pursue given strategies and objectives."^{20.} The national welfare advisory committee would also be loosely structured but consist mainly of resource persons and local organizers.

On July 14, in a memorandum to welfare rights organizations, Dr. Wiley termed the demonstrations a "huge success" and announced the Chicago meeting "to discuss mutual problems, to plan next steps for local organizing, as well as to discuss national goals and strategies."^{21.} Sometime between this date and the Chicago meeting the Center selected a "Planning Committee" to perform the functions of the "Conference Committee" suggested in the July 11th draft proposal. The Planning Committee consisted of five representatives of welfare rights organizations and Dr. Wiley. The planning committee members were Mr. William Darden of Chicago, Mrs. Edith Doering of Cleveland, Mrs. Catherine Hines of Richmond, California, Mrs. Johanie Perry of Washington, D.C. and Mrs. Virginia Snipe of New York City.

20. Ibid., p. 3.

21. PRAC. Memorandum. (Washington, D.C.: PRAC) July 14, 1966.

This Planning Committee in conjunction with the Center staff developed a "Tentative Agenda" for the national meeting and an information sheet announcing the national meeting. The information sheet outlined attendance qualifications which stressed that representatives from welfare rights organizations would be given priority, travel tips, housing accommodations, registration procedures and fund-raising tips. The information sheet also outlined the five major objectives of the meeting:

- "- to provide an opportunity for welfare rights groups from all parts of the country to come together to exchange ideas on their programs, problems, and organizing techniques.
- to provide training sessions for the local organizers and workers.
- to discuss and begin the development of national goals for the welfare rights movement.
- to discuss and plan strategy for next steps for cooperative action.
- to discuss the possibility of forming a national coordinating committee for welfare rights groups. "

On August 6th, 1966 the first national meeting of the welfare rights movement was convened in Chicago. In stark contrast to this meeting of the "poorest of the poor", Luci Baines Johnson Nugent was celebrating her wedding in the same city by cutting into a cake eight feet tall and weighing 300 pounds.²³ This was also the day that Martin Luther King led a civil rights march through a white section of Chicago where he was met by "hordes of hostile poor whites." Perhaps as one reporter put it, "While

22. PRAC. "National Welfare Rights Meeting", (Washington, D.C.: PRAC). no date.

23. Susan Brownmiller. "Look, Ma, You're Shaking Up Welfare."

Luci cut her cake, the movement changed direction in Chicago."^{24.}

The meeting was attended by approximately 136 people representing 100 different organizations from 24 cities and 12 states.^{25.} The greatest representation was from Chicago, New York and Washington,

D.C.^{26.} The average family income of the recipients that were present was \$1,758 a year.^{27.}

The two-day meeting consisted of general sessions, panel discussions and three workshops. At the general sessions representatives of welfare rights groups discussed their activities and problems. In the panel discussion the history of the welfare rights movement was debated by Richard Cloward, Frances Fox Piven, Timothy Sampson of California and William Robinson and Robert Strom both of Chicago. In the evening session the three workshops were held.

The first workshop dealing with local organizing was chaired by Edward Sparer backed up by Richard Cloward as the "resource person." The second workshop, chaired by Ed Day of PRAC, discussed the short and long range goals of the movement. The third workshop chaired by Dr. Wiley and Frances Piven focused on the development of national strategy and tactics. At the Sunday morning session, after being addressed by Dick Gregory, the workshops presented their reports

24. Ibid.

25. PRAC. "Summary Report on National Welfare Rights Meeting Held in Chicago, Illinois on August 6th and 7th, 1966," (Washington, D.C.: PRAC) August 11, 1966 (mimeograph).

26. PRAC. "Attendance List," National Welfare Rights Meeting, Chicago, Illinois, Aug, 6-7, 1966. (Washington, D.C.:PRAC) no date.

27. Susan Brownmiller. "Look, Ma, You're Shaking Up Welfare," Village Voice (August 18, 1966).

and the "immediate goals and strategies for the national movement were developed and decided upon."^{28.}

The decisions that came out of this first national meeting concerned the structure, organizing thrust and demands of the movement. The decisions concerning the movement's organizational structure followed the recommendations in the July 11 draft pre-^{29.}

by the Center. A National Coordinating Committee of Welfare Rights Groups was established. This committee (NCC) was composed of eleven representatives from the eleven principal states represented at the meeting. Some of its members were elected by the state groups at the Chicago meeting and others were elected at subsequent state meetings.^{30.} All the NCC members were welfare recipients. It was also agreed that the Poverty/Rights Action Center continue to act as the coordinating body for the new movement,^{31.}

that it begin the publication of a newsletter to welfare leaders,^{32.} and that a national advisory committee to the Center be established.^{33.}

28. PRAC. "Summary Report on National Welfare Rights Meeting Held in Chicago, Illinois on August 6th and 7th, 1966," (Washington, D.C.: PRAC) August 11, 1966 (mimeograph).

29. PRAC. "Outline for National Welfare Rights Meeting: First Draft," (Washington, D.C.: PRAC) July 11, 1966.

30. PRAC. Summary report on Chicago meeting. Op. Cit. August 11, 1966

31. Richard Cloward and Richard Elman. "Welfare Marches," Trans-Action (December, 1966) p.33.

32. NWRO. A Brief History of N.W.R.O. (Washington, DC.: NWRO).

33. Richard Cloward and Richard Elman. "Welfare Marches," Trans-Action (December, 1966) p.33.

The meeting called for a three-month local organizing campaign to begin in September, 1966. The campaign would revolve around the issues of recipient rights to organize and bargain collectively, to represent other recipients before the welfare administration and at hearings and the right to adequate benefits. Direct tactics such as pickets, sit-ins, school boycotts would be backed up by legal procedures at administrative hearing and in the courts. The delegates called for regional and state meetings to develop organizing techniques and strategies and requested another national meeting after the first of the year to evaluate the organizing campaign and to lay plans for a more formal organizational structure.^{34.}

The representatives at the Chicago meeting did not decide upon a platform of national goals^{35.} but Ed Day, of the PRAC staff, who chaired the workshop on national goals at the Chicago meeting prepared a report outlining four broad goals, immediate and long-range goals, discussed at that workshop. The four basic goals^{36.} of a National Welfare Rights Movement were identified as:

- "1. Adequate income: Enough money from either jobs or welfare grants for recipients to live dignified lives as American citizens, above the level of poverty.
2. Dignity: A system which guarantees recipients, in policy and practice, both adequate income and the same full freedoms, respect, and public and private rights as all American citizens.

34. PRAC. Summary report on Chicago meeting. Op. Cit. August 11, 1966.

35. PRAC. National Welfare Leaders Newsletter. Vol. No.1 (October 31, 1966) p. 6.

36. PRAC. "Goals for a National Welfare Rights Movement: The Report of Workshop 2," National Welfare Leaders Newsletter. Vol. 1 No.1. (October 31, 1966). p.1.

- "3. Justice: A constitutionally and humanely just system, which, as a matter of right, completely separate from the acceptance of other social services, guarantees an adequate income to all persons in need, through a fair, open and impartial process, subject to judicial review.
4. Democratic participation: A system which, while providing adequate income to all persons in need, is neither paternalistic or dictatorial, but rather is grounded in principle and in practice on the direct democratic participation of recipients in the policy decisions under which they must live."

The possible immediate and long-range goals listed by Ed Day in his workshop report were a list of grievances and minimal demands for reform within the welfare system. The immediate goals contained nothing more than the demand for the welfare department to live up to their own current regulations as established by the states and federal governments. The eight immediate goals wanted the prohibition of illegal practices by the welfare departments (midnight raids, searches and seizures, etc.) the publication of welfare rules and regulations, and grant levels and fair hearing procedures that conformed with state and federal standards. The other immediate goal was for the recognition of "welfare recipient organizations as representatives of welfare recipients."^{37.}

The eight possible long-range goals for the movement called for structural reforms within the welfare system such as the separation of grants and social services and the ending of categories for assistance and replacing them with only one category for assistance

37. Ibid., p. 3.

- Need. The other long range goals concerned the establishment of federal grant levels at or above the poverty line, the extension of welfare to all people below this level, the right to earn income up to one-fourth above this level, the payment of cash rather than food stamps or vouchers and the elimination of "man-in-the-house" and "suitable homes" laws and regulations, except as they apply to the whole public. ^{38.}

Thus by August of 1966, the Center had provided the movement with the rudiments of a national organization and a platform of possible national goals. The Center, however, did not schedule another national meeting of the welfare rights movement until December 17, 1966 when the NCC met for the first time in Pittsburgh. This delay in national organizing can be attributed to two main factors, (1) the dual role the Poverty/Rights Action Center was playing at this time, and (2) the necessity of local organizing as a priority. During the fall months of September thru November, the Center became involved in the Poor People's March, which took priority over welfare rights activity, and in monitoring the legislative battle over OEO funding and the November congressional elections. ^{39.}

38. Ibid.

39. PRAC. National Welfare Leaders Newsletter Vol. 1 No. 1 (October 31, 1966), Vol. 1 No. 2 (November 14, 1966).

The primary reason for delay in national organizing was apparently the necessity of emphasizing local organizing first. The delegates to the August national meeting had called for a three month local organizing effort beginning in September of 1966. By October 31, 1966 Dr. Wiley was calling for an extension of this effort beyond December because "in our enthusiasm at the meeting (Chicago) we all underestimated the size of this task."^{40.} In this emphasis on local organizing, Dr. Wiley was also responding to one of two possible strategies being advocated within the movement at that time.

In September of 1966, Sam Clark wrote a "Memo on the Welfare Movement" in which he described his impressions of the movement's potential gained from discussions with movement activists in Boston, New York, New Jersey, Washington, D.C., Ann Arbor, Detroit, Cleveland, Columbus, and San Francisco.^{41.} Although all the people he talked with agreed that some type of national action was required for a permanent solution to the problem, there was a division of thinking with regard to the type and timing of the national action. One school of thought held that a national coalition of welfare groups, liberals, unions, reform politicians, and church groups should be formed as soon as possible. "This coalition would lobby and otherwise pressure Washington to in some manner centralize and reform the entire

40. FRAC. National Welfare Leaders Newsletter, Vol. 1 No.1 (October 31, 1966) p. 2.

41. Sam Clark. "Memo on the Welfare Movement," (September, 1966).

welfare apparatus, on the theory that reorganization and centralization of the system would be a major step in eliminating poverty and counteracting the debilitating aspects of the present system." ^{42.} The other school of thought felt this type of strategy would be futile, premature and fruitless. ^{43.} It would be futile because by the time a reform program passed through congress, became law and was administered there would be no real change or reform left in it. It would be premature because the poor are not yet organized and such reform would only perpetuate paternalism. And, it would be fruitless because such an approach ignored the central problem, which is power. The priority for this school of thought was the organization of the urban poor so that they could have "direct political, economic and social power." The formation of an immediate national coalition was for this school "not enough, too soon."

In delaying national organizing and by extending the local organizing effort, Dr. Wiley and the Center were responding to the sentiment that the poor should be organized first before some type of national action or national organization was established. The Center's newsletters in October and November of 1966 carried news of local organizing across the country and passed on organizing methods that had been successfully used by other welfare organizations. The Center also became immediately involved in local organizing in Washington, D.C.

42. Ibid., p.2.

43. Ibid., p.2.

As early as October of 1966 the Center announced plans to hold a District of Columbia meeting on December 10th.^{44.} The "Washington Welfare Recipients Training Conference" was important not only because it showed the Center's commitment to local organizing, but also because the organizing plan for Washington, D.C. showed the Center's approach to local organizing.

Joyce Ware Thomas of the Center staff developed a plan for welfare organizing in Washington, D.C. as part of the Center's effort in local organizing.^{45.} The plan demonstrates the goals, theory and immediate tactics of local organization as perceived by the Center. The goals of local organizing were twofold. Welfare recipients were to be assisted in "developing strong grass-roots organization." This was to be complemented by the creation of a leadership cadre that is knowledgeable "in welfare rules and regulations and can initiate and run programs for the organization to advance the interest of its members."^{46.}

The theory of organization for Washington, D.C. was based on "the most effective techniques developed so far in other communities." Combining the research of Professor Cloward and the experience of the Center the theory rested on five basic assumptions. First, welfare departments routinely deny recipients considerable amounts of cash benefits that they are entitled to under the law.

44. PRAC. National Welfare Leaders Newsletter. Vol. 1 No. 1 (October 31, 1966).

45. Joyce Ware Thomas. "Welfare Organizing Plan for the District of Columbia," (November 14, 1966) mimeograph.

Second, large numbers of people who are eligible to receive benefits do not receive them. Third, strong and effective welfare rights organizations have developed where this benefit deprivation was understood and used as a basis for organizing. Fourth, in order to maintain an organization new benefits must be discovered that recipients can fight for and win, or other valuable services must be provided the membership. Finally, the organization must develop a sufficient independence, especially in a fiscal sense, so that the basic support of the organization can not be swept away by some act of Congress. The basic ^{of} premise the theory was that "welfare recipient organization must be developed as the vehicle for the solution of the problems of individual welfare recipients."^{47.}

To implement this theory the first step was to gain a knowledge of the organization, methods and procedures of the local welfare department. This was followed by the developed of organizing guides and training sessions for welfare recipients. Once a effective organization structure was established, a city-wide alliance of autonomous welfare groups should be organized which would then reach out to mobilize community resources and the support of allied community groups. Only after this organizational framework was completed would the organizations begin "developing long-range goals which strike at the root causes of their problems."^{48.}

47. Ibid., p.2.

48. Ibid., p.1.

After the completion of the Washington Welfare Recipients Training Conference on December 10, 1966, the Center resumed its national organizing effort designed to train a national leadership cadre and to build a national organization of poor people. The organizing effort consisted of a series of national meetings, recipient training conferences and another national demonstration which culminated in the establishment of the National Welfare Rights Organization in August of 1967.

An eleven woman NCC was created at the Chicago national meeting to plan and coordinate the national welfare rights movement. It was not until December 17, 1966 that the Center called for the first meeting of the NCC in Pittsburgh. Out of the eleven welfare mothers that composed the committee eight were able to attend the Pittsburgh meeting. They were joined by Dr. Wiley and Ed Day of the Center's staff. The issues discussed at this first meeting of the NCC revolved around organization, finance and social regulations that are forced upon welfare recipients.^{49.}

After hearing reports on welfare rights activity across the country, which estimated that between 130 and 170 welfare groups were active in 60 cities and 23 states, the NCC voted to extend the period of local organizing from December to July of 1967. Also in response to this growing activity the NCC voted to expand its own membership to 25, which included one representative from each of the 23 states

49. PRAC. "National Coordinating Committee of Welfare Rights Groups, a report of the first meeting," (December 17, 1966) mimeograph.

with two representatives from New York City due to its large number of welfare rights groups (65). Each state was to select its own representatives to the NCC and a Credentials Committee consisting of Johnnie Tillmon and Etta Horn was created to handle any disputes that might arise over a state's representative. Other organizational questions such as the necessity of officers and the relation of the Center to the movement were discussed. It was decided that officers were not as yet necessary, although it was suggested that Dr. Wiley become Chairman, which he declined. The NCC voted to designate the Poverty/Rights Action Center as the national headquarters of the welfare rights movement and Dr. Wiley's role was defined as national director, who would implement the national coordination of welfare rights groups.

Another issue discussed by the NCC concerned, in a sense, the organizational integrity of the newly emerging movement. In August of 1966 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had announced at the SCLC convention in Jackson, Mississippi that he would begin a wave of demonstrations in Chicago to "'dramatize the need' for a guaranteed income law.^{50.} Later in October of 1966 Dr. King again announced that plans were being made for spring demonstrations "to arouse support for a guaranteed income for the poor."^{51.} In response to both of these announcements Dr. Wiley wrote letters to Dr. King urging him to "develop contact with the welfare rights movement.." ^{52.}

50. Gene Roberts. "Rights Unit Asks Wage Guarantee," New York Times (August 12, 1966).

51. Jean White. "King Acts to Mend Disagreement in Civil Rights Ranks," Washington Post (October 15, 1966).

52. PRAC. National Welfare Leaders Newsletter Vol. 1 No. 1 (October 31, 1966) p.6.

Not only was Dr. King infringing on an area of concern for the welfare rights movement (guaranteed annual income) but he was also ignoring the existence of the movement and calling for tactics which the welfare movement was, at least temporarily, de-emphasizing. In his letter to Dr. King on October 15, 1966, Dr. Wiley expressed concern that while Dr. King was announcing his plans for a guaranteed annual income he apparently had taken "no account of the emerging local movements of welfare recipient groups in cities across the country, nor of the strategies or organization these groups have developed for the purpose of pressing for substantial reform in the area of income maintainance."^{53.}

Besides the necessity of recognizing the welfare rights movement, Dr. Wiley suggested that Dr. King's proposed tactics were not only in opposition to those chosen by the welfare movement but also would repeat the mistakes of the civil rights movement. Dr. Wiley stated that the welfare movement both nationally and locally had decided to "concentrate most heavily on building the grass roots welfare organizations for the immediate future and defer major public confrontations of the sort you describe until the local bases of organization are considerably stronger."^{54.} This position was based on the "most striking failure of the civil rights movement" which was its inability to build "effective grass roots organizations which would provide substance and continuity to the political thrust temporarily powered by the dramatic demon-

53. Personal letter from Dr. Wiley to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (October 15, 1966).

54. Ibid.

strations that you have led over the past several years. In addition, for you to use your position of national prominence and influence to initiate strategies which fail to take into account the thinking and wishes of local organizations is to embark on a course that is actually destructive to creating the grass roots base that we so desperately need for producing major social and economic reforms."^{55.}

As a result of the failure of Dr. King to respond to the requests of the Poverty/Rights Action Center to meet with the NCC in Pittsburgh, the NCC voted to "contact Dr. King and ask him to have a give-and-take at the February meeting."^{56.} This was the beginning of an official effort on the part of the welfare rights movement to obtain both the recognition and support of Dr. King. It was not until a year later at the February, 1968 meeting of the NCC in Chicago that this was accomplished when he came asking NWRO support of his Poor People's Campaign.^{57.}

Besides these concerns regarding organizational structure and integrity, the NCC delegates discussed the problems of finance and social regulations. The Center did not, nor would it in the future, provide monies for delegates to attend national meetings or build up their local organizations. To cope with both of these problems delegates had received monies from a variety of

55. Ibid.

56. PRAC. "National Coordinating Committee of Welfare Rights Groups, a report of the first meeting," (December 17, 1966) mimeograph.

57. NWRO. National Welfare Leaders Newsletter, NOW. Vol 2 No. 2. (February 23, 1968).

sources such as the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the local Council of Churches and the local poverty programs. Some groups had already initiated a dues system which was to become the pattern encouraged by both the national leadership of the movement and the Poverty/Rights Action Center. Nonetheless, the delegates still hoped to obtain financial support from organized labor and the poverty program and decided to contact Walter Reuther to finance the February national meeting and to apply to OEO to support state, regional and national meetings to train recipients in welfare issues. Dr. Wiley was also asked to develop information about the federal poverty line and look into the possibilities of some form of groups insurance to counteract the insurance restrictions faced by most recipients.

One of the major grievances that organized welfare recipients had expressed since the beginning of the movement concerned the social regulations instituted by the welfare departments. The issues of illegitimacy, man-in-the-house rules and investigators were discussed by the delegates. Johnnie Tillmon pointed out that "taxpayers" shouldn't be screaming about spending tax money to support illegitimate children because in most cases tax payers are the fathers. "She contended that policemen, social workers, insurance salesman and the like are frequently the parents of illegitimate children of welfare recipients." ^{58.} It was also pointed out that many people who have government pensions (e.g. Jackie Kennedy) do not have their private lives regulated by the government.

The December NCC meeting was an important step in the Center's effort to establish a national organization of the poor. It was the first meeting of a national coordinating body (NCC) which was to remain the formal policy-making instrument of the welfare rights movement. The Center itself was defined in a position of national headquarters and Dr. Wiley was defined as national director. As the organizational apparatus of the welfare movement developed further this formal separation of the Center and the movement was to become more pronounced.

Acting on the decision of the NCC, the Center began to lay plans for a second national meeting of the welfare rights groups in Washington, D.C. The official purpose of the meeting was to "develop our national organization; run training workshops for recipients and organizers; and begin to act politically as a national organization."^{60.} The Center placed major emphasis, however, on training the leadership cadre of recipients and organizers.

At the time of the national meeting there were 34 million impoverished people in the United States, of whom 7.4 million were on welfare.^{61.} Between 300^{62.} and 350^{63.} of the 7 million from 19 states and representing 10,000 organized recipients convened at this second national meeting of the movement. During the three days (February 4-6, 1967) the assembled leaders participated in a variety of training

60. PRAC. National Welfare Leaders Newsletter Vol 1 No. 5. (January, 23, 1967) p.1.

61. The Nation, (Editorial) "Poor Power" The Nation 204 (February 20, 1967) p. 228.

workshops, developed a set of national legislative demands and participated in their first national lobbying effort for the new movement.

The six training workshops emphasized the development of knowledge and skill about welfare departments and maintaining local organizations. They included workshops on welfare laws, welfare handbooks, public relations, fund raising, organizing to get cash benefits and the poverty line. Only the last workshop which included a discussion of the guaranteed minimum income and the negative income tax did not present a set of recommendations to the entire meeting.^{64.}

The demands of the national meeting, its "national legislative program," were formulated by the NCC on February 5th. In line with the previous tenor of the movement, the demands did have a flavor of "Dostoevskian naturalism.... whose highest aim is to achieve reasonable poverty."^{65.} In a telegram to President Johnson asking him to meet with the assembled recipients, the NCC outlined its first national demands:^{66.}

"That the Federal Government require all states to raise all welfare grants at least to the Federal 'low-income line' for that family size.

"That the Federal Government require that all states allow recipients who work to keep all their earnings until their income reaches the 'low-income line.'

64. PRAC. "Poverty Line," Workshop report. (February 6, 1967).

65. The Nation. (Editorial) "Poor Power" The Nation 204 (February 20, 1967) p.228.

66. NCC. Text of wire sent to President Johnson, February 5, 1967.

"That the Unemployed Parent Program of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC-UP) be made a permanent part of the Social Security Act.

That all states be required to participate in the AFDC-UP program.

That the Federal Government set eligibility standards for this program.

"That the Federal Government continue the food program with improvements:

Give cash bonus rather than food stamps

Allow states to have both cash bonus program and surplus food."

As expected President Johnson did not respond to this wire, except to refuse to let any member of the White House staff talk with the recipient leaders.^{67.} Following up on this initial wire the recipient leaders presented their demands directly to the Congress, by lobbying in the Capitol building, and to HEW by meeting personally with a representative of Ellen Winston, the federal welfare commissioner. The response of the federal welfare commissioner, which was basic agreement with all the recommendations, but no action, underscored the sentiment expressed by Dr. Wiley that having liberals on your side was not enough.^{68.} 'If we have learned anything from the civil rights movement, it is that it is a mistake to think the liberals and moderates would grant what we entitled to once the Negro stood up and demanded his rights.'^{69.} To establish an

67. The Nation. (Editorial) "Poor Power," The Nation 204 (February 20, 1967) p.229.

68. Personal letter from Ellen Winston to Dr. Wiley, Department of HEW, Welfare Administration. (February 21, 1967).

69. The Nation. (Editorial) "Poor Power" The Nation 204 (February 20, 1967).

organizational base that would not be dependent on the "liberals", Dr. Wiley told the recipients that 'we are going to have to organize independently of churches, unions, poverty programs,'^{70.} and hold together with dues squeezed out of people who already don't have enough. The potential for a base was most certainly present, as one woman put it, "We've got more po' folks than Johnson's got rich folks."^{71.} The major problem for the Center, however, remained the organization of that base so that lobbying in Washington, D.C. would be more than an empty ritual.

During the month of March the Center developed a strategy for building this organizational base. Although never formally adopted by the National Coordinating Committee, the Center seems to have followed the time table and accepted the premises of the "Rough Plan For Spring and Summer Organizing and Demonstrations,"^{72.} (March 2, 1967). The time table of the "Rough Plan" stretched from March 1, 1967 to the conclusion of a Summer Student Project in early September. Except for a change of dates for the national demonstrations and the national convention, the Center's activity for the next few months followed this time table. It included a planning phase from March to the NCC meeting in April during which the Center would (1) draft plans for a summer student program, (2) prepare organizing information and suggestions for local groups, (3) Encourage state and citywide meetings on the plan (New York and Philadelphia), (4) prepare and circulate training material on

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid.

72. "Rough Plan for Spring and Summer Organizing and Demonstrations," George Wiley. (March 2, 1967) mimeograph.

national and local organizing issues, and (5) develop specific demands. The National Coordinating Committee meeting scheduled for April 7-10, 1967 was to hold "formal negotiating sessions" with HEW and the Department of Agriculture on "key issues" and make plans for the national demonstration and the national convention. The rest of the time table called for local conferences in New York City and Philadelphia during April, National demonstrations in late May followed by local demonstrations throughout the summer culminating in the national convention between July 7th and July 10th.

The premises of the "Rough Plan" outlined the role of nationwide activity and the Center in creating the organizational base of welfare rights movement. The plan saw nationwide activity as performing three functions: (1) stimulating local organizing, (2) creating more awareness of the movement in groups that could offer financial and other support, and (3) increasing the bargaining power of local and national organizations when they deal with governmental agencies. "Visible nationwide activity stimulates people in local communities to work hard on welfare activities and increases awareness of the movement on the part of the people whom we look to for financial and other kinds of support. It also increases the bargaining power of the National and local organizations with the governments with which they have to deal. The trick is to use such activity at the same time to build the local and national organization which these activities do not necessarily do." ^{73.} (emphasis added)

As the strategy unfolded in the spring and summer of 1967, the "trick" of integrating nationwide activity with local organizing had three major components. By early March the Center had developed a Membership Plan which was to be used as a means of active identification with the movement and as a means of financial support. The second component was a National Lobbying effort with HEW and the Department of Agriculture to show national activity and to develop demands for the movement. The final component was the Summer/Action Campaign which included the Basic Needs Campaign beginning in early June, followed by the June 30th national demonstration, the filing of fair hearings on July 15th and the National Convention in August, 1967. The Summer/Action campaign was designed to integrate local organizing activity and demonstrations with building a national membership in the welfare rights movement.

Along with the preparation and distribution of booklets on those issues discussed during the February NCC's workshops,^{74.} the Center developed a National Membership Plan within the first few weeks of March, 1967. Assuming that the welfare rights movement could only be successful if it developed "strong, militant, independent, grass roots organizations of welfare recipients linked together in a national network,"^{75.} there were the twin problems of maintaining a stable membership base and creating a dues system that would give financial independence to each local group. "The

74. PRAC. National Welfare Leaders Newsletter. Vol. 1 No. 8. (March 13, 1967). p.1.

75. PRAC. National Welfare Leaders Newsletter. Vol. 1 No. 9.

growth and vitality of a strong Welfare Rights Movement, both locally and nationally, is dependent upon the active identification and involvement of substantial numbers of welfare recipients and other low income people with the Movement. Concurrently, there must be developed means for major internal financial support, that the Welfare Rights Movement, at all levels, may sustain truly independent leadership and course of action. The development of a nationwide membership plan, including a dues system, is one important method for achieving these twin goals." ^{76.}

The Membership Plan was designed in such a way that membership in the national movement would be group-based, recipient controlled and administered by the Center. ^{77.} In order for a group to become a member of the National Movement it was necessary for a petition to be sent to the Center with the names and addresses of ten (10) current welfare recipients along with 10 dollars. Once this was accomplished, the Center would return to the group a "membership recruiting packet" with materials for twenty-five (25) members. As soon as the group had recruited 15 more members and sent their cards to the Center it would become a full member of the National Welfare Rights Movement. If there was no citywide or statewide recipient organization, the total national membership fee was \$17.50 (70¢ times 25 members). If there was a citywide or statewide organization, the total fee was \$21.25 (\$17.50 plus 15¢ times 25 members).

76. PRAC. "National Welfare Rights Membership Plan (DRAFT)" no date.

77. National Headquarters of the Welfare Rights Movement. "NOW! Membership and Dues Plan". (April, 1967).

According to the plan, the local welfare rights affiliate was to be independent and recipient controlled. Of the 25 members of a local group more than one-half of its members had to be current welfare recipients. Besides welfare recipients that were presently on welfare, other members of a local group could include a person who had been a welfare recipient in the past five years or a low-income person, who was defined as someone earning less than the current poverty line. Persons who did not fit into one of the three above-mentioned categories could be certified as a member of a local group, but the number of this type of person could not exceed 10% of the group's membership. Organizationally, the group had to be an independent welfare rights group or part of another organization ("welfare rights committee") which is "willing and able to make its own decisions as part of the welfare rights movement."^{78.}

The Plan was administered by the Center in order to provide "a single nationwide membership system so that a national organization is built at the same time the locals are developed."^{79.} The major share of the dues, however, remained with the local organizations themselves, and the national share of the dues was to cover only the costs of administering the membership

78. Ibid., National Welfare Rights Leaders Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 7.

79. PRAC. National Welfare Leaders Newsletter, Vol 1, No. 9, (March 27, 1967).

plan. "The share of dues and membership fees designated for the national headquarters is pegged at a level to about break even at the cost of producing and administering the membership system and services connected with it."^{80.}

In return for its formal affiliation with the National Movement, the local group received informational services and voting rights in the National Convention. The Center provided the local affiliate with membership materials (membership cards and "dues stamps") and a system of dues collection. The plan emphasized that this was the most important benefit for the local group. "You get a packaged, simple way to build your group's membership, collect dues and make your group independent and strong."^{81.} The informational services which the Center offered the local groups was a packet of welfare rights materials and a National Welfare Rights Newspaper (4 times/year) for each new member. The leaders of each group received the twice-monthly National Welfare Leaders Newsletter and each formally affiliated group had first call on the Center's informational and research facilities. Each local member organization also received voting rights at the National Convention. An organization's representation at the Convention was based on the size of its membership in the following sequence: 25-49 members = 1 vote, 50-99 members = 2 votes, 100-199 members = 3 votes, and 200 or more members = 4 votes.

80. Ibid.

81. PRAC. National Welfare Leaders Newsletter. Vol. 1. No. 10 (April 17, 1967)

The Membership and Dues Plan developed by the Center was distributed to the movement in the March 27, 1967 edition of the National Welfare Leaders Newsletter (Vol. 1. No. 9). Ex-
cept for two changes regarding membership qualifications, 82.
the plan was approved in toto at the NCC meeting held in Washington, D.C. from April 8-10, 1967. Despite the fact that this membership plan and dues system was emphasized throughout the following summer's organizing efforts and subsequently approved by the National Convention in August, 1967, the response of the local affiliates to the national's call for minimum dues was almost non-existent. The question of membership will be discussed more thoroughly below; here it need only be mentioned that in a memo to all affiliated groups on December 20, 1967 Dr. Wiley reiterated the obligations of the membership plan and pointed out the poor response. "It was agreed by the Convention that all groups would pay dues regularly beginning in September, 1967. As of late December only a small number of groups have paid monthly dues." 83.

As the work on the Membership and Dues Plan neared completion, the Center began to develop the second major component of its spring, 1967 organizing effort, National Lobbying by the welfare recipients' leadership. Washington, D.C. was chosen as the site for the April NCC meeting so that the leadership

82. Ibid.

83. George Wiley. Memorandum on "Membership Dues", NWRO (December 20, 1967).

could pursue "formal negotiating sessions" with HEW and the Department of Agriculture on the demands formulated at the February NCC meeting and the up-coming April NCC meeting. The National Lobbying effort was intended to have the dual purpose of manifesting "visible nationwide activity" and developing national demands for the movement and the national demonstrations scheduled for the summer of 1967.^{84.}

In preparation for the National Lobbying effort by the NCC, Dr. Wiley sent letters to John Gardner, Secretary of HEW, and to Orville Freeman, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture on March 31, 1967.^{85.} Dr. Wiley explained that the NCC, "which represents over 200 welfare recipient organizations across the country," is going to meet in Washington, D.C. and wishes to discuss a number of "policy issues" and "grievances" concerning their respective programs. In his letter to John Gardner, Dr. Wiley not only enclosed the demands of the NCC which had been drawn up at the February meeting and which necessitated changes in the Social Security Act (see above), but also listed the demands that the NCC was to approve at its forthcoming meeting in April:

"... they (NCC) would like clarification of the position of the Department on (1) man-in-the-house or substitute parent rules; (2) recent reduction in work incentives for people employed in poverty programs; (3) the unavailability

84. George Wiley. Letter to NCC members. (March 22, 1967) PRAC.

85. George Wiley. Letter to John Gardner. (March 31, 1967) PRAC.,
George Wiley. Letter to Orville Freeman (March 31, 1967) PRAC.

of information from state welfare departments on the rights of recipients and their entitlements under the laws and regulations; and (4) the inadequacy and inaccessibility of fair hearing procedures as the system is currently administered."

The letter to Orville Freeman was the first direct approach to the Department of Agriculture bureaucracy by the NCC since the first statement of grievances concerning the food stamp program had been presented to the former Welfare Commissioner, Ellen Winston, after the February meeting of the NCC. In his letter to Freeman, Dr. Wiley did not list the specific demands of the NCC which were to be approved at the April meeting, but only stated that the "Representatives of this group (NCC) would like to meet with you on April 10th to discuss grievances that the food stamp recipients have with the program and to discuss changes in the program that would make it more beneficial to recipients."^{86.}

The NCC met for three days from April 8-10, 1967 in Washington, D.C. They approved the membership and dues plan that had been drawn up by the Center and set the date for the National Convention for July 21-24, 1967 in Washington, D.C. (This was later changed to August 25-28, 1967). They also approved a set of demands for both HEW and the Department of Agriculture in preparation for their meetings with the respective officials of these departments on April 10th.

86. Dr. Wiley. Letter to Orville Freeman, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture. (March 31, 1967) PHAC.

Unlike the demands that the NCC had presented to HEW after its February meeting, the April demands concerned internal procedures of the welfare system which, as the NCC pointed out, "HEW presently could require of all states without changes in the law." ^{87.} The four demands concerned areas with which the recipients had been interested since the first national meeting in Chicago: the elimination of discriminatory social regulations, the right to earn income, the streamlining of welfare grievance procedures and the right to public information about the welfare system:

"On the so-called man-in-the-house rule

- (1) That families be eligible for assistance if a legal parent is absent from the home. (Presently any man may be defined as a parent, and aid then denied the family).
- (2) That only money which a man actually contributes be counted in determining family income.
- (3) That support payments from absent fathers be paid directly to the welfare department so that the family may regularly receive their full monthly grant.

"On Welfare recipients who work in the poverty programs

- (4) That poverty program workers who also get welfare be allowed to keep the first \$85 a month of their earnings and $\frac{1}{2}$ of all additional earnings until they reach the federal low income line, and that this arrangement have no time limit. (A policy closer to that provided by the Economic Opportunity Act than the more restrictive policy OEO and HEW agreed on several months ago.)

"On Fair Hearings

- (5) That a fair hearing (if requested by the recipient) be held before any action to discontinue or reduce aid. (Now people are cut off welfare first and their appeals considered later.)
- (6) That all fair hearings take place and decisions made within two weeks from the date requested. (Now fair hearings may take many months.)

"On the right to access to public information

(7) That HEW (including all its regional offices) and all local welfare departments:

- (a) Allow recipients and their organizations to read and copy all welfare regulations;
- (b) Provide free copies of all federal, state and local welfare regulations, handbooks, manuals and directives to all welfare recipient organizations;
- (c) Be required to print and widely distribute (including a copy to each recipient) complete summaries of welfare regulations, including particularly schedules and information on how budgets and grants are determined.

(Often welfare departments do not allow recipients to see the welfare regulations and will not provide copies of these to groups. Summaries are either not provided or are limited. Budget information is not available.)" 88.

The other set of April demands by the NCC focused on the Department of Agriculture. As mentioned previously, this was the first time that the NCC formally opened "negotiations" with this department; however, the concern over the food stamp program and the plight of its recipients, especially in Mississippi, had been a long time concern of the organized recipients. In response to the concern expressed at the February NCC meeting about the "severe problems welfare recipients in Mississippi face," Dr. Wiley had attended informal hearings to consider the administration of public welfare in Mississippi which had been convened by the Mississippi State Advisory Committee to the United States

88. National Coordinating Committee of Welfare Rights Groups. "DEMANDS", (Meeting with U.S. Department of HEW) April 10, 1967. PRAC.

89. PRAC. National Welfare Leaders Newsletter. Vol 1 No. 8

90.
Commission on Civil Rights. On the first day of the hearings formal testimony was taken from recipients who spilled out their grievances about illegal payment levels, (The average payment level was \$36 a month; the legal maximum was \$50.), arbitrarily denied benefits to those who are eligible, intimidation and harassment by welfare officials and the "work-experience" program. The second day of the hearings the recipients wished to protest the policy changes in the food-distribution program which was shifting emphasis from the surplus commodities program to the food-stamp program. Since they could not get a formal hearing, they held an *improntu* session during the lunch hour of the second day. Dr. Wiley seized the mike and turned it over to the recipients to tell their stories. After Dr. Wiley stated that "nothing would change unless people organized"^{91.} the hearings ended.

After returning from his trip to Mississippi, Dr. Wiley continued to raise the issue of the food-stamp program. In his newsletter to the NCC he stated that the food stamp program was a major problem for Mississippi people simply because most recipients do not have the money to buy food stamps from their low grant monies.^{92.} On March 15, 1967 Dr. Wiley, accompanied by Etta Horn of the NCC and Carl Bachlin, general council to the Center, testified before the

90. R. Cloward and Frances Piven, "Starving by the Rule Book," The Nation 204 (April 3, 1967) 429-431.

91. Ibid., p.431.

92. PRAC. National Welfare Leaders Newsletter. Vol 1 No 8 (March 20, 1967)

House Committee on Agriculture. In a lengthy testimony, Dr. Wiley stated that the Food Stamp Act of 1964, which was enacted to strengthen the agriculture economy and improve the nutrition level of low-income households, was "insensitive to the needs and interests of the low-income families that it is also supposed to serve."^{93.} Dr. Wiley reiterated that the "most fundamental and universal complaint of food stamp recipients is that they are forced to commit a major portion of already inadequate budgets to the purchase of food stamps."^{94.} The recommendations that Dr. Wiley offered in order to make the program more beneficial to the recipients formed the basis of the April demands presented to the Department of Agriculture by the NCC. The NCC's April demands were the following:^{95.}

- "(1) That cash bonuses replace the food stamp method of helping the poor people consume more food.
- (2) That, if the food stamp arrangement continues, poor people should receive free food stamps rather than having to buy stamps in order to get bonus stamps.
- (3) That, if the present system continues, people be allowed to buy a flexible, self-determined amount of stamps -- at least a range instead of a fixed amount each month.
- (4) That people be allowed to trade in stamps for money to meet emergency needs and be allowed to apply unused stamps against next month's stamp purchase.
- (5) That there be no minimum amount of stamps to buy.
(People with no money income should receive free stamps -- people with almost no money income should be able to buy very small amounts of stamps.)

-
93. Dr. George Wiley. "Testimony on the Food Stamp Act" (House Committee on Agriculture) March 15, 1967 PRAC.
 94. Ibid.
 95. National Coordinating Committee of Welfare Rights Groups. "DEMANDS" (Meeting with the U.S. Department of Agriculture) April 10, 1967.

- "(6) Stamps should be sold at more frequent intervals (At least weekly) and recipients should set their own buying patterns (Weekly, monthly, etc.)
- (7) That a fair hearing process be established for recipients to appeal decisions of the local administering agency -- procedures that are at least equal to the procedures now in force for stores which participate in the program.
- (8) That Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman publically apologize to recipients for the remark he made (in testifying on the food stamp program before a House Committee) that food stamps were needed because "if you give them cash they would spend it on Bingo."
- (9) That recipients' concerns and interests be given consideration equal to that given farmers in the regulation and administration of this program."

Although the National Welfare Rights Movement did not receive any written reply regarding their demands from either John Gardner or Orville Freeman, recipient leaders and Dr. Wiley did meet with staff members of the respective departments on April 10, 1967. The response of the respective departments to the demands presented at this meeting was characterized by welfare leaders as "do-nothing", "^{96.} "wholly inadequate" and "unsatisfactory."^{97.} During their meeting with Howard Davis of the Department of Agriculture, the recipient leaders asked for a written statement within two weeks that would show the steps the Department of Agriculture plans "to take to make the food stamp program more responsive to the needs of the recipients of the program."^{98.} Three and a half months later on

96. PRAC. National Welfare Leaders Newsletter. Vol. 1 No. 13 (May, 1967)

97. Johnnie Tillmon. Letter to Orville Freeman. (August 4, 1967) PRAC.

98. George Wiley. Letter to Orville Freeman. (April 29, 1967) PRAC.

July 26, 1967, the Center and Dr. Wiley finally received the requested written confirmation of their April 10th discussion with Howard Davis, Deputy Administrator of the Consumer and Marketing Service.⁹⁹ The four-page statement, presumably written by Mr. Davis, answered several of the demands proposed by the NCC, notably excluding any reference to the NCC's request for an apology by the Secretary. While the statement included minor concessions such as, "We will explore the 'fair hearing' procedures," it only reemphasized the fundamental area of disagreement between the Department's policies and the demands of the NCC, i.e. who would decide how the poor's meagre resources are utilized, the poor or the department. The NCC's demand for cash bonuses or free stamps would place the decision-making with the individual families. Mr. Davis countered that this would not maintain the nutritional objectives of the program.^{100.}

"Both of these alternatives would, of course, mean that each recipient family would then be in a position to individually decide whether it would: (a) Use the cash or coupon payment to buy more food; or (b) use some or all of the cash or coupon payment as a substitute for that portion of its income it had been spending on food, thus increasing the money available to the family to meet its nonfood needs. We do not believe it would be proper for the Department of Agriculture to propose that either of the alternatives suggested would maintain the nutritional objectives of the Food Stamp Program."

99. Howard Davis, Deputy Administrator of the Consumer and Marketing Service, US Department of Agriculture. "Confirmation of Areas of Discussion on the Food Stamp Program with Representatives of the Poverty/Rights Action Center," in a letter to George Wiley from Rodney Leonard, Deputy Assistant Secretary, US Department of Agriculture, July 26, 1967

100. Ibid., p. 1

Not unexpectedly, the NCC's response to Mr. Davis' statement was negative. In a letter to Orville Freeman, Johnnie Tillmon, Chairman of the NCC, stated that "The answers to our inquiries and requests for policy changes as provided by Mr. Davis and others of the food stamp staff are wholly inadequate and unsatisfactory to us. We fail to understand why basic changes to make this program more useful and desirable to the poor people who wish to avail themselves of these programs cannot be instituted." ^{101.} Mrs. Tillmon requested that Mr. Freeman meet with the NCC at the up-coming August Convention "to discuss the questions previously raised with Mr. Davis." ^{102.} The Secretary, however, was "not in the city" on August 25th and Dr. Wiley refused to accept his ^{103.} Administrative Assistant, Mr. William Seabron, as a substitute, thus ending for the time being the National Lobbying effort with the Department of Agriculture.

The immediate response on the part of the HEW officials to the April demands is not known. ^{104.} However, perhaps because the welfare rights movement was more directly effecting HEW and especially the Bureau of Family Services, the Bureau held a series of informal meetings in late June, 1967 one of which concerned "the development of methods for maintaining positive relationships ^{105.} with (recipient) groups which are sometimes militant." The guide-

101. Johnnie Tillmon. Letter to Orville Freeman. (August 4, 1967) PRAC.

102. Ibid.

103. Telegram from Rodney Leonard (US Dept. of Agriculture) to George Wiley. (August 25, 1967).

104. The PRAC documents that would show this haven't been dis-

lines which were developed out of this meeting indicate the concerns of the welfare administrators and the response they felt appropriate to the growing welfare rights movement.

On June 28, 1967, two days before the June 30th demonstrations, Fred H. Steininger, Director, Bureau of Family Services, conducted a meeting attended by 6 members of his Central Office Personnel and 7 local and state welfare administrators from Washington, D.C., New York, New Jersey, Ohio and California. Interestingly enough, the major concerns of the administrators were not with the movement's ultimate objectives, but with its "methods" and "successful methods of averting disturbances." That the administrators would be concerned with averting disturbances rather than promoting change within the welfare system was at least partially due to their conception of the welfare rights movement. Apparently they did not see the movement originating out of the injustices of the welfare system, but as a "facet of general social unrest, an outgrowth of the Civil Rights Movement, which had potentially great political power and is increasing rapidly in numbers and size." Regardless of their conception of the movement, the guidelines they promoted ("suggestions for avoiding turmoil") showed they were basically interested in stabilizing their departments with a

105. Fred H. Steininger. "Relationships with Representatives of Organized Public Welfare Employees and Recipients", State letter No. 985. US/HEW, Bureau of Family Services (July 31, 1967)

106. US/HEW, Bureau of Family Services. "Summary of Meeting with State and Local Administrators on Relations with Welfare Rights Groups", (July 31, 1967)

liberal dose of "repressive tolerance."

The guidelines showed that the administrators had a psychological interpretation of welfare demonstrators, felt that recipient ignorance was their barrier to understanding the real problem which was "agency limitations" and thought their energies had to be channeled in the proper direction. The administrators called for "open channels" with recipient groups and the tolerance of large groups because "what each wants is a catharsis of feeling, and opportunity to tell of his individual, personal frustrations in trying to manage on the welfare allowance."¹⁰⁷ Administrators should work closely with the poor's attorneys since "the poor have faith in them and will accept their interpretations of agency limitations" and hire "minority group members" as staff and "use them to help to interpret agency limitations." Administrators were urged to work with welfare rights groups and channel the efforts of "welfare rights members by placing them on special committees and by suggesting how they can help individual recipients."¹⁰⁸ Regular staff was also encouraged to work with welfare recipient groups, but administrators should "raise a question of ethics with them¹⁰⁹ if they are attempting to undermine the agency."

107. Ibid., p. 3

108. Ibid., p. 3

109. Ibid., p. 5

The final component of the Center's strategy to build a national organization was the Summer/Action Campaign from June through August, 1967. The Campaign, which was formally approved by the NCC at its April, 1967, meeting in Washington, D.C., had four elements, which, taken all together, were designed to establish a nation-wide membership for the welfare rights movement: the basic needs campaign, the June 30th demonstrations, the Fair Hearings campaign, and the National Convention in August.

During the month of June local organizations were to recruit new members by having them fill out the "basic needs form"^{110.} supplied by the Center. The form stated simply that contrary to federal and state laws, which "require that families be provided with welfare benefits adequate to insure a minimum standard of health and decency", the recipient was not receiving enough money to meet the basic needs of the family. In order to meet these needs the recipient requested a "special grant of money" to buy the clothing and household items listed on the reverse side of the basic needs form. The form also supplied space for a rent increase request so that adequate housing could be obtained. After the forms had been filled out during the month of June, they were to be submitted to the local welfare department on June 30th as part of the national demonstrations

110. FRAC. "Basic Needs Form", (May, 1967)

which demanded "more money now." Two weeks after the forms were submitted, fair hearing appeals were to be filed on July 15th to contest the denial of special grants. The basic needs campaign, followed up by the national demonstrations and fair hearings appeals, was to recruit the identifiable membership that would attend the founding convention in August to establish the national organization.

The campaign was announced to the public via the June 30th first "anniversary" demonstrations. The Center announced on June 29th that "the first nationally organized day of protest would be 'only the beginning' of a summer-long campaign of marches, picketing, and demands for action by thousands of poor people who have never participated in protest movements." 111.

Dr. Wiley in his newsletter to welfare leaders to "join with welfare recipients in more than 40 cities across the nation protesting the injustice of welfare and demanding more money now." He stated that the movements numbers had doubled and that the summer action campaign and the local struggles would help build the nationwide organization that "we all need. We look forward to seeing your group represented at the first national welfare rights convention in Washinston this August." 112.

As was mentioned above, the June 30th demonstrations of 1966 had no national focus or set of demands, and the Center was essentially a participant in the nationwide demonstrations that

111. New York Times. "Poor Will Stage a Protest Today", June 30, 1967. p. 17

112. George Wiley. "June 30th Telegram to Local Welfare Rights

highlighted the Ohio "walk for decent welfare" and local grievances. This time, however, the Center was in charge and the demonstrations were nationally directed and integrated into a summer long campaign. The goals of the demonstrators were essentially uniform in that they all demanded increases in their budgets, minimum incomes or a guaranteed income.¹¹³ The slogan of "more money now" and the tool of the basic needs form was also prevalent. "In nearly all the protests, demonstrators carried 'basic need forms' prepared by the National Welfare Rights Movement. The forms included blank space for listing basic minimum requirements for rent, food, clothing and furniture."¹¹⁴ The turnout, however, despite the national direction was lower according to the Center's own estimation. The previous demonstration had attracted an estimated 6,000 protesters as compared to 1967's 5,000. Nonetheless, Edwin Day, Associate Director of the Center, was pleased with the turnout stating that this demonstration was composed of more recipients and not just supporters.¹¹⁵

With the June 30th demonstration, the basic needs/fair hearing strategy, which was also nationally conceived and nationally executed by the Center, had begun. While the campaign did help local welfare organizations recruit new members as intended,

113. NWRO. "June 30th Action Report" PRAC. Press release.

114. Robert Sample, Jr. "The Poor Protest Across the Country", New York Times July 1, 1967

115. Ibid.

the overall strategy, especially the use of fair hearings, was not attuned to the needs and capabilities of local welfare rights organizations.^{116.} For example, in many states there existed no provision for special grants. In Ohio, where a strong organization had been formed in June of 1966, special needs monies came out of "home relief" funds which had been previously exhausted and carried no requirement for fair hearings. As a result, although 183 requests for special needs were filed in Columbus and 176 in Cleveland, the campaign received no money. In Mississippi, even though the campaign did establish some form of recipient organization in 21 out of the 82 counties, and approximately 183 fair hearings were filed, Mississippi has no provision for special grants even "if the client is burnt out." There were some hearings, however, and a few increases of not more than \$10 dollars resulted. In Philadelphia, Pa. the special needs campaign was not followed because there was no provision for special needs in the Pennsylvania welfare system, and in Detroit, the Center's basic needs forms were not utilized because the forms "reminded them too much of the welfare administration."

The major criticism of the campaign, however, centered around the use of fair hearings and the accompanying administrative burden that it placed on the local welfare rights organizations.

116. George T. Fuller. Notes on the Conference on Minimum Standards Campaign- January 12-13, 1968 at Metropolitan Urban Service Training Center (MUST) New York City. January 22, 1968.

In some places where there was inadequate recipient organization they were unable to counter the response of the welfare department to the campaign. In Mississippi, all the fair hearings that were held were scheduled after the out-of-state staff had left and in a variety of places so as to make it impossible for the appellants to appear. In Ohio, only 14 of the 600 fair hearing appeals were held because after a few of the appellants did not appear for their hearings, the state stopped honoring the requests and sent workers out to make the people refile. Even where the local organization was quite strong enough to handle the administrative details of the campaign, there were problems with legal backup and conflicts between the lawyers and the recipients. In Ohio, for example, the legal services program would not become involved in fair hearings or welfare cases. In Washington, D.C. where the welfare department did permit fair hearings to be grouped around common issues and expert testimony was made possible, the department did not recognize the attorney's right to bargain for the client or withdraw from the hearing. In Chicago where the organization was strong enough to handle over 1000 grievances, the idea of collective bargaining was more popular than the Center's idea of fair hearings. "It was felt that the national form was too complex, and people, by using it, would be prevented from speaking for themselves at the hearing."^{117.} Conflicts between the recipient and the lawyers was also evident in

117. Ibid.

Detroit where the group representatives at the hearing "would not hesitate to correct the lawyers in the middle of the hearing if they do not like the way he's handling the case."^{118.}

In New York State and in particular New York City, where the basic needs/fair hearings strategy was most applicable due to the very liberal rules regarding the supplying of grants over and above the recurring semi-monthly grant, there was still a great deal of dissatisfaction with the campaign, especially the fair hearings section.^{119.}

The campaign in New York city was based on the experience of welfare groups active in the city since October of 1965. But for the first time, this campaign was a concerted citywide effort coordinated by the Citywide Coordinating Committee of Welfare Groups. The campaign had a variety of goals: (1) to overload the procedural system of local welfare centers and the welfare department; (2) to get large sums of money for welfare rights members; (3) to build local and national membership in the welfare rights movement; (4) to force state recognition of recipient groups; (5) to establish the "political muscle" of Citywide in city and state politics; (6) to create large numbers of test cases; and (7) to allow local welfare rights groups to establish their

118. Ibid.

119. David Gilman and Ezra Birnbaum. "New York Minimum Standards-Fair Hearings Campaigns -- June to December 1967. (January, 1968).

"organizational validity" with their constituency.

Contrary to the procedures outlined by the Center, Citywide did not submit the fair hearing forms on July 15th but waited until the middle of September. By that time Citywide was in the midst of a campaign to reinstate the automatic grant for school-clothing which had been eliminated in the middle of the summer. As a result, 1400 fair hearing appeals were filed during the month of September, 600 of which were submitted directly by Citywide and the remainder by local groups within the city. In response to its campaign, State and city welfare officials initiated contact with Citywide for the first time in the city's welfare organizing history. At the subsequent negotiations the City stated that it would honor all hearing requests and begin on September 18, 1967 to schedule hearings for each client. The state recognized Citywide and would deal with it directly as well as provide translators for Spanish-speaking recipients and cover babysitting and carfare expenses. It was also agreed that where a working mother had requested a hearing a night hearing would be arranged.

The State began to schedule hearings on September 18th at the rate of approximately 40 per day, five days a week. This

continued until mid-January when the campaign began to slow down. The results of the hearings themselves was extremely favorable for the appellants in monetary terms. Ninety percent of the people who had their hearings scheduled did not show up because they had been contacted prior to the hearing by the local welfare center which dispersed most of the requested monies. Of the ten percent that did show up for the hearing at least half received their requested grant on the date of the hearing; the other half received at least a partial settlement. It was estimated that the recipients 'recovered' several million dollars (approximately 5 million) through the hearing process and \$500,000 of this was actually tabulated by Citywide.

In terms of the goals mentioned above, the summer campaign was quite successful.^{115.} Even though the school-clothing allowance was not reinstated and a great number of test cases was not generated by the hearings, the procedural system was overloaded and Citywide did produce organizationally, monetarily, and politically for its constituency. Despite the successes, however, the fair hearing tactic which generated so much dissatisfaction across the nation was also disliked in New York city. The shortage of attorneys, the enormous administrative burden for the recipient organization, the tying of the fair hearing tactic to the basic needs campaign, and the disillusionment of the recipients because they were unable to

115. Sidney E. Zion. "Welfare Clients Press to Collect Thousands 'Owed' Them by City", New York Times October 3, 1967

complain as they wanted to in the fair hearing process all combined to question the efficacy of the tactic.

It is obvious from the above to anyone who has been associated with welfare organizing that the requirements of a well-conceived and well-executed Fair Hearing campaign as a political tactic requires a massive input of staff, of time, and of energy to the exclusion of virtually all other activities by the Welfare groups. The Welfare groups, therefore, have a choice. If a F.H. campaign is to be replicated on any level in a large scale way, the groups must be prepared to withdraw at least temporarily from other activities they have been engaged in. This, to our thinking, is neither desirable nor possible and is the major factor which has led to the frustration on the part of welfare groups leaders with the present campaign. There are too many commitments at the local level, in terms of providing other kinds of services and benefits to neighborhood people who are members of local groups, for the groups to suddenly withdraw from these activities. However, it must be clear that the recommendation to withdraw from other activities, should another F.H. campaign be decided upon, is an absolute necessity. The obvious conclusion, of course, is that the future of the use of Fair Hearings as a political and organizing strategy is of very limited use in the absence of large scale staff. 116.

The final leg of the Center's Summer/Action membership campaign was the first National Convention. The purposes of the convention were the establishment of a National Welfare Rights Organization, which was to be "first membership based, nationwide organization of poor people in the country;"^{117.} the

116. David Gilman and Ezra Birnbaum. Op.Cit., p. 6

117. PRAC. National Welfare Leaders Newsletter. Vol 1 #17. (August 15, 1967)

adoption of a Constitution and the election of national officers for the new organization. The convention was also to have workshops and end with lobbying at federal agencies and in Congress.^{118.} The convention was to be formally run by the NCC who "will convene the convention and prepare recommendations on the agenda, procedures and organization, but the delegates will then make all the convention decisions."^{119.}

Delegates were selected by the local affiliates of the National Welfare Rights Movement who had paid up membership. The number of delegates for each group was determined by the formula that had been adopted by the NCC as part of the Membership Plan. Other participants in the convention were alternates (one was allowed for each delegate) and "observers" who could attend by special invitation of the NCC, but had no voting privileges.^{120.}

The convention was held at Trinity College in Washington, D.C., August 25-28, 1967. It was attended by three hundred people from 26 states. Of this 300 people there were 110 official delegates which represented 4,000 dues paying members of their local organizations. "This means that more than 15,000 recipients in the families of those members are represented by the National Welfare Rights Organization."^{121.}

118. PRAC. National Welfare Leaders Newsletter. Vol 1 No. 15.

119. Ibid.

120. Ibid.

121. PRAC. National Welfare Leaders Newsletter. Vol 1 No. 18. September 8, 1967 p. 1

The NCC met during the first part of the convention. They approved an agenda and established three committees (Constitution, Goals and Platforms and Nominations for Officers) which delegates were asked to sign up for. Each committee was composed of welfare mothers (constitution- 20 mothers, goals, platforms- 19 mothers and nominations- 12 mothers), and submitted their reports and recommendations to the general assembly of the delegates for a vote.

The recommendations of the goals committee were approved without revision. The immediate goals were essentially the same as those developed by the goals workshop at the first national meeting of welfare rights groups in Chicago, August 6-8, 1966. The national goals for NWRO were also essentially the same, except for a more efficient wording:

Our goals are: Jobs or Income Now! Decent Jobs with adequate wages for those who can work and adequate income for those who can not work.

1. ADEQUATE INCOME: A system which guarantees enough money for all Americans to live dignified lives above the level of poverty.
2. DIGNITY: A system which guarantees recipients the same full freedoms, rights and respect as all American citizens.
3. JUSTICE: A fair and open system which guarantees recipients the full protections of the Constitution
4. DEMOCRACY: A system which guarantees recipients direct participation in the decisions under which they must live.

122. See pp. 35-37 above.

123. Report of the Goals Committee. "Goals for the National Organization For Welfare Rights", August 25, 1967
Washington D.C. PRAC

The nominating committee recommended a slate of five offices and five candidates all of whom had served on the NCC since its inception. * Three other elective positions were created by the convention and one appointive position. Each officer was to serve for a two year period from the date of the Convention and any unexpired term could be filled by the Chairman from the NCC. The elected officers were:

Chairman: *
Mrs. Johnnie Tillmon
Los Angeles, California

Treasurer: *
Mrs. Marion Kidd
Newark, New Jersey

First Vice Chairman: *
Mrs. Etta Horn
Washington, D.C.

Financial Secretary
Mrs. Dovie Coleman
Chicago, Illinois

Second Vice Chairman *
Mrs. Beulah Sanders
New York City

Recording Secretary *
Mrs. Edith Doering
Akron, Ohio

Third Vice Chairman
Mrs. Carmen Olivio
New York City

Corresponding Secretary
Mrs. Dorothy Dimascio
Rochester, New York

Seargent-at-Arms
Mrs. Alice Nixon
Pittsburgh, Pa.

The constitutions committee's report was adopted without any essential revisions. Most of the "articles" had already been established in the Membership Plan approved by the NCC in April, 1967.

National Welfare Rights Organization
Constitution

Adopted at First National Welfare Rights Convention,
August 27, 1967

ARTICLE I

The name of this organization shall be the National Welfare Rights Organization.

124. Report of the Nominations Committee. "Nominating Committee Report", August 26, 1967. Washington, D.C.

ARTICLE II
Membership

Members of the local welfare rights organization must be one of the following:

1. welfare recipient now;
2. welfare recipient within the past 5 years
3. low income person - someone with an income below the low income poverty line (\$4,000 for a family of four);
4. A person who is none of the above, but has been certified by the membership of a local welfare rights organization - no group is allowed more than 10% of such members.

ARTICLE III
Affiliation

For a local group to be a participating member in the National Organization for Welfare Rights it must:

1. have at least 25 members;
2. have more than one-half of its members be welfare recipients now;
3. be an independent welfare rights group- or part of another organization(welfare rights committee) which is willing and able to make its own decisions as a part of the welfare rights organization. (The national organization would count the number of members in the Committee, rather than in the parent group).

ARTICLE IV

Recognition of City or Statewide Organizations

To get its membership rebate, a city or statewide organization must write the national headquarters, certifying that it represents at least two-thirds of the local groups in its area. All of the groups in the area are then notified of the request. Unless more than one-third of the groups (recognized members of the National Organization) dispute the request, the city or statewide organization is recognized. Only one city or statewide group in an area may be recognized to receive membership funds.

ARTICLE V

National Convention

Each local member organization has voting rights at the National Convention. An organization's representation is based on the size of its membership: 25-49 members=1vote; 50-99=2votes; 100-199=3votes; 200 or more members = 4 votes. The Organization shall have a National Convention once a year.

ARTICLE VI
Dues

Each individual new member shall pay a \$1.00 fee when he initially joins the organization. Monthly dues are recommended at \$1.00 per month per member.

<u>Distribution of joining fee:</u>	Local 50%		Nat. 50%
<u>If citywide or statewide:</u>	Local 40%	City/state 20%	Nat. 40%
<u>Distribution of dues:</u>	Local up to 80%*	wide	Nat. 20%
<u>If citywide or statewide:</u>	Local up to 75%	City/state 10%	Nat. 15%

*Would only be lower if less than \$1.00 per month dues are being charged.

ARTICLE VII

National Coordinating Committee

Between annual conventions the N.C.C. will carry out the policies of the convention and conduct the organization's affairs. The N.C.C. will be made up of the organization's officers and one representative from each state with affiliated local welfare rights groups. A separate representative is provided for New York City. States or cities may petition the N.C.C. for additional representatives where there are large concentrations of organized recipients not directly represented. The Chairman can appoint a member from the N.C.C. to fill a vacant office until the N.C.C. meets and approves her choice or elects another person. The NCC shall meet every four months.

ARTICLE VIII

Officers

The officers of the National Organization shall be: Chairman; First Vice-Chairman; Second Vice-Chairman; Third Vice-Chairman; Treasurer; Financial Secretary; Secretary; Recording Secretary and Sergeant-at-Arms. The Terms of the officers shall be one year. An officer can serve two terms in the same office if reelected but can not run for a third term. The officer can run for a different office. 125.

Thus, the National Convention served to formalize and legitimate the goals, leadership and organization that the Center had established over the past 16 months. The three committee reports essentially ratified the national goals drawn up by the

125. NWRO. Constitution. Adopted at First National Welfare Rights Convention, August 27, 1967. PRAC.

Center, the structure of a national organization that was contained in the Center-created NCC and Membership and Dues Plan, and the national leadership that the Center-created NCC provided. Furthermore, the National Convention coincided with the Center sponsored "Mother's March on Washington, D.C." (August 28, 1967) which initiated NWRO's first national campaign, an attack on the "anti-welfare bill", HR. 12080, which had passed the House of Representatives and was moving to the Senate.

In early August Dr. Wiley and the Center began laying the groundwork for the Movement's attack on the public assistance sections of HR. 12080, which had been reported out of the House Ways and Means Committee on August 3, 1967.^{126.} On August 2, 1967 the Center issued a press release in which Dr. Wiley accused the House Ways and Means Committee of drafting 'anti-ghetto welfare measures' that was certain to 'escalate the warfare in American cities.'^{127.} Dr. Wiley condemned the legislation for rejecting the administration's proposals for federal minimum standards, for failing to adopt the AFDC-UP program in all the states, for establishing work and training requirements, and he called for a national demonstration on August 28, 1967 "to bring poor people from the ghettos and barrios across the country to the nation's capitol to demand jobs for those people who can work and

126. PRAC. National Welfare Leaders Newsletter. Vol 1 No. 17 August 15, 1967.

127. PRAC. "Wiley Accuses House Ways and Means Committee; Announces National Demonstration in Washington for August 28", PRAC press release, August 2, 1967.

128.
income for those who can not."

In his newsletters to welfare leaders during the month of August (Vol 1. Nos. 16, 17), Dr. Wiley discussed the relevant provisions of HR. 12080 and outlined the "action" strategy for the movement. Dr. Wiley termed the following public assistance provisions of HR. 12080 Congress' response to "the cries of anguish of America's poor" (the urban rebellions of 1967):

1. Freezes federal aid for AFDC "absent parents" families, at the January 1, 1967 level for each state.
2. Changes the basic aim of the AFDC program from protecting the welfare of dependent children to forcing "employability". The bill a) forces mothers to leave their dependent children to accept work or training, and b) forces all recipients 16 or over and not in school to accept work or training, with no provision for adequate job or training standards.
3. Provides a limited work incentive plan which would prevent welfare families from rising above the poverty line in most states.
4. Denies assistance to unemployed parents found eligible for any state unemployment compensation within the past year, or receiving such compensation regardless of amount.
5. Denies aid to unemployed parents who cannot show a "substantial connection" to the labor force (long-term unemployed).
6. Requires all recipients over 16 to register and re-register for employment as frequently as the state dictates..

128. Ibid.

129. PRAC. National Welfare Leaders Newsletter. Vol. 1 No. 17 August 15, 1967.

The strategy that Dr. Wiley suggested for attacking the "anti-welfare" legislation was a traditional lobbying effort backed up by the August 28th demonstration in Washington, D.C. Welfare groups were urged to contact their Senators and Representatives by wire or letter expressing their opposition to the bill. They were also urged to come to Washington for the demonstration and join the convention delegates in direct lobbying. On August 21, 1967 Dr. Wiley sent letters to Congressman and Senators asking them to make an appointment on August 28th to visit with recipient lobbyists. During the national convention the newly formed organization passed an official resolution which read, "We, declare and condemn this action of Congress as a betrayal of the poor, a declaration of war upon our families, and a fraud on the future of our nation."^{130.} The resolution further declared that Congress should replace HR. 12080 with the original bill proposed by the administration, HR 5710, which required AFDC-UP in all states and required each state to provide welfare grants equal to its own definition of need.

On August 28th the 300 convention participants were joined by 700 others who conducted one day of intensive lobbying which included a morning "hearing" in the Senate Caucus

130. PRAC. "Official Resolution of the National Organization for Welfare Rights", August 27, 1967. First National Convention: Washington, D.C.

Room, followed by a rally at Union Square in front of the Capitol and a demonstration at HEW headquarters.^{131.} The Senate Caucus had been obtained for the movement by Senator Jacob Javits (R-NY). The room had been obtained because, according to Wiley, the "Senate Finance Committee refused to schedule testimony by welfare recipients" on August 28th.^{132.} At the morning hearing, Dr. Wiley stated that "We are here not for the Senators to talk to us, but for us to talk to the Senators."^{133.} Nonetheless, none of the 16 senators invited by the movement to attend the "hearing" showed up and only Senators Kennedy and Javits sent staff aides to speak to the recipients. After the session in the Senate Caucus Room the lobbyists held a rally at Union Square and from there marched to HEW headquarters where they unsuccessfully sought an audience with HEW Secretary, John Gardner. By 5:30 pm the demonstrators had boarded their buses and were returning home. Recipient leaders were to return, however, for two days of protest and hearings before the Senate Finance Committee (September 19-20, 1967)^{134.} to continue their fight against the "anti-welfare" legislation. And, as stated by one of NWRO's publications (Brief History of NWRO), this was not the "end" but the "beginning" of NWRO and the national movement.

131. Betty James. "Welfare Rally Threatens Riots", The Evening Star Washington, D.C. August 29, 1967.

132. Carol Honsa. "Welfare Bill Called 'Betrayal of Poor'" The Washington Post August 29, 1967.

133. Joseph A. Loftus. "1,000 On Welfare Lobby At Capitol", The New York Times August 29, 1967.

134. The Evening Star. "Welfare Mothers to Be Heard", September 20, 1967.

Although the first National Convention marked the beginning of the National Welfare Rights Organization, it was, for all practical purposes, the end of the Poverty/Rights Action Center. Instead of expanding its communications network and service facilities to other civil rights and anti-poverty action groups, the Center became absorbed by the first movement to which it gave a national focus. By August, 1967, the Director of the Center had become the Executive Director of NWRO, and the Center, itself, had become the headquarters of NWRO. During its 16 months of existence the Center was the main vehicle for the establishment of the nationally coordinated welfare rights movement.

The Center's major contribution to the welfare rights movement was at the national level. Prior to the Center's establishment in May, 1966, the welfare rights movement consisted mainly of numerous local action groups across the country that were protesting the policies of their respective local and state welfare departments. Being predisposed to action-oriented groups and realizing the potential of the Cloward and Piven's welfare crisis strategy, the Center combined these two elements with its own bias for organization to establish the national movement.

Using national meetings, demonstrations and its newsletter, the Center first demonstrated the commonality of interests among the various local welfare groups and the need for a communications network between the groups. Once this had been established, the Center moved to create the beginnings of an organizational structure. The NCC began as an advisory body of recipient leaders to the Center, but over the 16 month period developed into the formal policy-making body of the movement. To complement this organizational framework, the Center formulated national goals for the movement along with sets of legislative demands and administrative demands (HEW and the Department of Agriculture.). Having accomplished all this by the spring of 1967, the Center developed its summer/action campaign to identify its membership and establish a formal recipient organization at the national level, NWRO.

At this point in the paper it is only possible to outline the role that the Center played in building the national welfare rights movement. Later on it will be possible to evaluate the Center's impact on the national movement in terms of its emphasis on national organization, benefit-needs campaigns and its use of the media to stimulate local organization of welfare groups.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION OR DISTRIBUTION

Dan Leahy
446 14th Street
Brooklyn, New York 11215
(212) 768-1797

THE ORGANIZATION IN ACTION

The Credit Campaign

"If, however, welfare rights organizations are to continue to grow, they will have to find a substitute possessing the essential attribute of the special grant; they will have to find a substitute that provides a clearly private benefit to the membership."

- William Johnson, RAND Corporation

BACKGROUND OF THE CREDIT CAMPAIGN

After its formal establishment, the National Welfare Rights Organization conducted several national campaigns in pursuit of its goals. The first two of these campaigns, the Anti-Welfare Bill Campaign and the Poor Peoples Campaign, were essentially national lobbying efforts focused on the federal bureaucracy and Congress in Washington, D.C. Neither of these national campaigns sparked the type of local activity that had become characteristic of the national welfare rights movement. However, by the fall of 1968, a new campaign began developing which was to sustain intense nation-wide activity for nearly a full year, until President Nixon's Family Assistance Program (FAP) took over as the major concern of the national organization. This campaign was the Private Credit campaign which was a major effort on the part of the welfare rights movement to obtain consumer credit on a group basis from major retailers in the United States and included a nation-wide boycott of Sears, Roebuck and Company.

There were several factors which combined to explain the commitment of the national organization to this campaign and the intensity with which it was carried out at the local level.

First, by the winter of 1968 a governmental "reform" movement that was to subsequently spread across the country was eliminating one of the most effective organizing tools of the national welfare rights movement. The spectacular growth and impact of the welfare

rights movement in 1966 and 1967 had much to do with its utilization of the "special grants" category in the welfare system. Basically, welfare recipients were eligible for two kinds of payments, their basic subsistence allowance and a "special grant" which was allotted on an 'as needed' basis. Prior to welfare rights organizing this special grant payment was hardly ever utilized by either the welfare department or the welfare recipient. However, once welfare rights organizers became aware of this category they used it to gain both immediate benefits for welfare recipients and organizational membership in the welfare rights movement. The tactic was especially effective in New York city. "Under impact of successive campaigns, the aggregate costs of special grants zoomed from about \$20 million in 1965 to an estimated \$90 million in the present fiscal year (1968)."¹ In other words, welfare rights activity had increased "the level of special grants from an average of \$40 per person in 1965 to an estimated average of \$100 in 1968."²

The governmental "reform" which began in New York and spread across the nation froze the special grant at the current level and distributed automatically throughout the fiscal year. The "flat grant" reform was an obvious economy move on the part of welfare officials all across the nation. Whether in fact it was a deliberate attempt to "deal a lethal blow to the most extensive organization

1. Richard Cloward and Frances Piven. "Finessing the Poor," The Nation (October 7, 1968) pp. 332-333.

2. Ibid., p. 332.

of New York's poor in recent memory - the welfare rights movement" is a mute question for the purposes of this study. Regardless of intent, the flat grant reform effectively eliminated a potent organizing tool of the movement and by the fall and winter of 1968 the leadership of the welfare rights movement was anxiously searching for a substitute tactic.

The manner in which the credit campaign was conceived included such a substitute tactic. Retail credit, which was normally denied to welfare recipients, was to be given out by the large retail department stores on a "group basis." The group, of course, was the local welfare rights organization and its membership. The local welfare rights group would establish an agreement with a retailer in their area who would grant credit to recipients screen and monitored by the local group. This credit plan therefore had the essential characteristics of the "special grant." It provided immediate economic gain for the welfare recipient and was controlled by the local welfare rights group thus providing an incentive for organizational membership.

Besides providing an alternative to the "flat grant" reform movement and creating a potentially effective organizing tool, the idea of distributing retail credit to welfare recipients made considerable "economic sense" in the eyes of Dr. Wiley and some major economic analysts. Dr. Wiley estimated that the untapped recipient market was worth \$10 billion dollars and its exploita-

tion would benefit both the poor and the retail companies. Besides untapped consumers, the welfare recipient market had other characteristics which would serve the purposes of the large retailers given the present economic outlook. According to Eliot Janeway, a consulting economist and syndicated reporter, welfare people have two appealing characteristics for big city retailers, "steady incomes" and "they stay put." Besides these operational advantages, retailers, who are fearful of a business downturn and rise in unemployment, might decide to develop a low-priced, stable market to insure themselves against recession and to increase their sales volume in order to stay even with their rising costs.

The Credit Campaign was launched during a time when the newly elected President Nixon was calling upon the private sector of the economy to devise ways of dealing with the problem of poverty in the United States. This "atmosphere" created by Presidential rhetoric was another factor encouraging the credit campaign, and Dr. Wiley and the welfare rights leadership used the presidential statements as they approached the major retailers to participate in their group credit plan.

In summary, the credit campaign was conceived as method of building organizational membership in the welfare rights movement. The campaign's internal logic had great potential because not only did it offer a new organizing principle, but it also contained an economic logic that was appealing to both the poor, the retailers and the new administration.

3. George Wiley, Letters.

4. Eliot Janeway, "Credit Cards For Welfare Clients," Social Service

EVOLUTION OF THE CAMPAIGN WITHIN NWRO

The two previous NWRO "national" campaigns, the Anti-Welfare Bill Campaign and the Poor People's Campaign, developed out of NWRO headquarters and consisted in lobbying efforts aimed at the federal government in Washington, D.C. These campaigns were essentially responses to forces outside the control of the national organization. For example, the Anti-Welfare Bill Campaign was an effort to rescind the repressive provisions of the 1967 Amendments to the Social Security Act and NWRO's participation in SCLC's and Martin Luther King's Poor People's Campaign was an effort to assert NWRO's leadership and organizational integrity in the national movement of the poor.

The national Credit Campaign, on the other hand, emerged out of the internal needs and experiences of the welfare rights movement on both the national and local level. Three major factors led to the decision on the part of NWRO's formal policy making body, the NCC, to embark on a national NWRO Credit Campaign during the spring and summer of 1969. First, there was the attempt by the National leadership to formulate some type of program to involve national corporations in the "problem of poverty." Second, there was the experiences of the Winter-Action Campaign, a series of experiments to establish a substitute for the organizing tool of the "special grant." And, finally, there was the successes and failures of local welfare rights groups in their attempts to gain retail credit for their membership.

National efforts: The Private Sector/Family Allowance Program

Prior to the formal decision of the NCC to begin the national Credit Campaign, NWRO's national leadership was experimenting with ways of using the national corporations' resources for benefiting the poor and at the same time building NWRO membership. By early December, 1968, they had developed a "Private Sector/Family Allowance Program" and were testing out the response of appropriate corporations.^{5.}

The Private Sector/Family Allowance Plan was aimed at companies "which manufacture and distribute consumer products" and the purpose of the plan was to get these companies to distribute free coupons to poor people who would then redeem the coupons for the products of the participating companies.

NWRO, describing itself as a "network of welfare rights organizations with a membership of 30,000 welfare recipients and other poor people... located in more than 100 cities and 45 states," offered its network as the "distribution system for these coupons." It was suggested that each participating company should provide \$5.00 dollars worth of coupons in small denominations for each NWRO member family and that when the member family signed the coupon it could be used at local stores toward the purchase of the participating company's products. If a number of companies participated in the Plan, it was suggested that it would be a "significant direct subsidy of poor people without

5. NWRO. "NWRO Private Sector/Family Allowance Plan", Washington, D.C. (no date)

any intervention or involvement of government agencies."

The national consumer corporations were not expected to participate in the plan for reasons of altruism or responsibility for poverty in the first place. NWRO's plan would benefit the company and its products through "high visibility in a market frequently missed by conventional advertising techniques."^{6.} It was also estimated by the NWRO's leadership that the "buying power of the 9 million welfare recipients alone to be in the neighborhood of \$10 billion annually."^{7.} Furthermore, the "cost of the program would be largely born by the federal government through tax write offs."^{8.}

The Private Sector/Family Assistance Plan was launched in mid-December with a series of letters from Johnnie Tillmon, NWRO National Chairman, to corporations such as the Procter and Gamble Company and General Mills, Inc. The letter began by utilizing the rhetoric of the newly elected United States President. "President-Elect Richard M. Nixon has called for voluntary efforts from the private sector to assault the problem of poverty. The National Welfare Rights Organization is offering your company an opportunity to play a direct and vital role in this effort."^{9.} The letter went on to list the above-mentioned benefits to the participating corporations and a special benefit to an NWRO family member. "Furthermore, distributing your contribution in this way would especially

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Letter to WJ Morris, President, Procter and Gamble Co. from

reward these people (read: recipients who join NWRO) who had the initiative to develop their own independent organization in the democratic spirit of our country."^{10.}

The response on the part of the consumer corporations was apparently nil, with General Mills expressing "confusion" and Procter and Gamble not even responding in written form. The Plan itself was never mentioned in any of the NWRO newspapers, (NOW! or Welfare Fighter). The idea, however, of utilizing the crumbs of the corporate state to act as an incentive to NWRO membership remained. It is certainly questionable whether enticing the corporations into the welfare consumer market has any thing to do with eliminating the "problem of poverty", but it certainly had merit as a tactic to build organizational membership. If NWRO had succeeded in cornering the consumer corporations' market in free coupons through the use of the NWRO "distribution system", poor people certainly would have been "rewarded" by joining NWRO's local affiliates. Despite their failure, NWRO leadership retained many of the basic components of their Private Sector/Family Assistance Plan and instead of seeking out free coupons they aimed at retail credit.

The Winter-Action Campaign: Experiments with alternatives

The Winter-Action Campaign was designed to be a series of "direct actions" on several different issues that took place

10. Ibid.

between Thanksgiving and Christmas and began with a "National Get it Week," November 25-December 2, 1968. The components of the Winter-Action Campaign were announced in the December, 1968 edition of NOW!^{11.} Some were traditional such as demands for winter clothing and basic needs and others were new tactics to get "more money now" such as special xmas grants, partial withholding of utility payments, department store credit and spending the rent. This last tactic was given special emphasis in announcing the national month-long campaign and originated from the attempt to find an alternative to governmental "flat grant" reform that was cutting off the movement's organizing ability. "Recipient leaders also understand that the flat-grant reform could cripple their movement. They know that it is their success in producing money that has built and emboldened their constituencies, and so the search is under way to find new means for prying loose substantial sums for substantial numbers of the welfare poor."^{12.}

The "Spend the Rent" campaign was to "circumvent the flat grant" and was to be conducted in such a way that would avoid the past mistakes of rent strikes. In an effort to avoid the bureaucratic jungle that had absorbed the past rent strikes, this "spend the rent" campaign would encourage recipients to spend the rent instead of placing it in legal escrow accounts and then meet legal retaliation on the "stoop, not in the court-room" where organized recipients would be strong enough to prevent evictions.^{13.}

11. NWRO, NOW! (December, 1968) Washington, D.C.

12. Richard Cloward and Frances Piven. "Finessing the Poor," The Nation (October 7, 1968) pp. 333.

Prior to the initiation of the Winter-Action Campaign, the "spend the rent" tactic was emphasized at both the national and local level by the NWRO leadership. In early November, Dr. Wiley announced the campaign in which "welfare recipients would keep their rent money to spend on basic needs not covered in their relief check."^{14.} Dr. Wiley and Mrs. Etta Horn, Chairman of the Washington, D.C. Citywide Welfare Alliance stated that "local welfare rights groups would take steps to protect members from eviction if they take part in the 'spend the rent' campaign."^{15.} In New York City where the welfare rights movement had mobilized some of its more militant campaigns, a "rent revolt" was emphasized. Hubert James, then the director of the Citywide Coordinating Committee of Welfare Groups, stated that beginning December 1, 1968 "1,000 families will participate in a 'rent revolt' and spend their rent money on food, clothing and furniture."^{16.} The rent revolt was "to protest the establishment of flat grants of \$100 a year per person for clothing and furnishings that replaced the special grants under which the welfare rights groups secured more than \$13 million a year."^{17.}

The "spend the rent" campaign, however, as a temporary tactic to prepare for winter expenses or as an organizing tool for the move-

14. The Washington Post. "Welfare Militants Plan 'Spend-the-Rent' Campaign," (November 13, 1968).

15. Ibid.

16. Joe Walker. "Facts Behind New York's Bitter Welfare Struggle," Muhammad Speaks (December 6, 1968).

17. Ibid.

ment did not materialize. Among the 21 cities reporting "direct action" during the Winter-Action Campaign, there was not one reported incident of a "spend the rent" tactic.^{18.} Even in New York city where the leadership had apparently deemed the movement strong enough to actually protect its participants, no 'rent revolt' took place.

The reasons for the failure of the "spend the rent" alternative to the special grant are not hard to suggest. The risks involved in such a tactic are extremely high; the welfare recipient is putting on the line nothing more than her home. The only guarantee against eviction that was offered as part of the campaign was direct actions by fellow recipients in the streets and on the stoops. Even if the recipient had faith in such action, it would take a high degree of political and organization skill on the part of the movement to actually afford the protection. Furthermore, it seemed that local groups across the country were into other actions which were absorbing their time and energies. Demands for "winter clothing grants" appeared with the greatest frequencies among the participants in the Winter Action Campaign.^{19.} The other demand of the Winter-Action Campaign that appeared with any regularity at the local level was the demand for "special xmas grants" and only in New York city was this demand successful. Also, and perhaps most importantly, the "spend the rent" tactic was in no way connected to the building up of NWRO membership. In other

18. NWRO. NOW! (December, 1968) Washington, D.C.

19. Ibid.

words, the money that the recipient would get from participation in the "spend the rent" campaign did not flow from any connection with NWRO, but merely his or her willingness to spend the rent. NWRO had grown from getting money for its membership not from getting money for any welfare recipient.

Retail Credit: Local successes

While neither the idea of withholding rent or utility payments sparked any action during the one month direct action effort and most local groups were still fighting for special grants for winter clothing, one of the new alternatives to the special grant weapon did find some success. This was the demand for retail credit at department stores, and unlike the spend the rent alternative, the success of the retail credit actions could be linked with increased organizational membership.

The demand for retail credit sparked action and some success among four local welfare rights groups prior to the establishment of a nation-wide credit campaign. New York city, Kansas City, Philadelphia and Detroit locals took part in the action.

In New York city the local affiliate had success but wanted more. The three day campaign had begun in Brooklyn on November 21 and the local group was successful in getting E.J. Korvettes to offer \$25 dollars worth of credit. ^{20.} However, the local group felt this amount was insufficient and they also wanted to be recognized by

20. NWRO. NOW! (December, 1968) Washington, D.C.

Korvettes as the official representatives of welfare recipients.

Perhaps the most extensive campaign for retail credit ~~DURING THE WINTER~~
Action Campaign took place in Kansas City, Kansas. On November 22, 1968 Mrs. Ruth Lee Williams, Chairman of the Wyandotte County Welfare Rights Organization representing over "200 families", mailed a letter to the local outlets of J.C. Penneys, Montgomery Ward, W.T. Grant and Sears, Roebuck and Co. Her letter stated that:

21.

One of the main problems we have had in helping ourselves is that reputable stores such as yours refuse to allow credit to welfare recipients, no matter how good we may be in paying our bills. This forces us to have to deal with less reputable stores who often charge excessive interest rates.

Sir, we want you to grant members of our group the same right all other citizens have. That is, we should not be discriminated against by you just because we are on welfare.

We are asking that you allow any person who is a member of our group to obtain a charge account at your store. We in turn recognize that you cannot allow someone who does not pay his bills to have credit. We are asking only that you give us a chance and that you discontinue your discriminatory practices.

Despite statements by the stores that welfare recipients were not discriminated against, the welfare rights group began applying pressure. Their first target store was Montgomery Ward's and they apparently won an easy victory. On November 29, 80 persons showed up at Wards and of the 50 members of the local organization that were processed that day 40 received credit. A week later in December,

22.

21. Letter from Ruth Lee Williams/Vera Walker to Penny's, Ward's Grant's and Sear's Kansas City. (November 22, 1968).

22. Bob Agard. "Welfare Rights Group seeks Charge Accounts," Community News (December 6, 1968) Kansas City, Missouri. New Life Communications

1968, the Kansas City group turned its attention to Sears. After two days of picketing by approximately 30 people 16 of the original 33 applicants for credit received credit and the picketing was called off.^{23.}

The Philadelphia Welfare Rights Organization had been successful in getting retail credit for their members since the summer of 1968. After a two hour demonstration at the Sears, Roebuck and Co. store, members of this local affiliate were granted \$50 dollars worth of credit. The other major stores in the area (Lerners, Wanamakers, Grants and Gimbels) soon followed suit and they began granting credit to welfare recipient members.^{24.} The success of the Philadelphia drive for retail credit was also apparently one of the main reasons for the spectacular growth of the local organization. "Philadelphia WRO began 1969 with a bang! They have signed up 1000 NWRO members!"^{25.}

The Michigan Welfare Rights Organization was the other local affiliate that engaged in retail credit action prior to the national campaign. Mothers who belonged to this affiliate began their campaign by barging into the Michigan Welfare League's conference and presenting their demands to the conference's guest speaker, Mr. Joseph L.

23. New York Times. "Pickets at Sears End a 2-day walk," (December 9, 1968)

24. Roxanne Jones. Letter. (March 8, 1971). Philadelphia, Pa.

25. NWRO. NOW! (February, 1969) Washington, D.C.

Hudson, Jr., chairman of Hudson's department store in Detroit, Michigan. Their statement "called upon Hudson's and department stores to extend credit to welfare clients."^{26.} Mr. Hudson replied that "his store does grant credit accounts to persons on welfare, but not on a group basis. 'We will be happy to meet individually with anyone to discuss credit.'^{27.}"

The experience of the local actions around retail credit indicated a potential for a national organizing effort. The idea of approaching the private sector was in line with the NWRO leadership's search for a way of involving the corporate sector in the "problem of poverty." More importantly, the demand for retail credit was based on a real need of the welfare recipient and the local actions showed that this need could be met with a minimum of protest and picketing. Also, the ability to get retail credit appeared to have a high correlation with organizational membership, a high priority of the movement. Perhaps the major failure of the local actions was their inability to get retail credit on a "group basis", meaning that the local welfare rights organization would determine a person's ability to receive credit rather than the credit division of the retail department stores. Nevertheless, the idea of the credit campaign made enough sense on the basis of immediate pay-off and organizing potential to become a national campaign of the movement.

26. Jerome Aumente. "Boycott Backers Quit Welfare Talks," The Detroit News (November 27, 1968) p. 3-D.

27. Ibid.

THE NATIONAL CREDIT CAMPAIGN

The campaign itself was carried out on two fronts simultaneously. The boycott against Sears, Roebuck and Co. was initiated not only to bring pressure on Sears to negotiate a national credit agreement, but also to pressure other national retailers such as J.C. Penny's and Montgomery Ward and Co. to enter into credit agreements with NWRO. Thus although the major focus of activity at the local level was Sears, Roebuck and Co., negotiation with other major retailers at the national level was also part and parcel of the national credit campaign.

Formal Decision-Making : The NCC

The formal decision to launch the Sears Boycott was made at the National Coordinating Committee's (NCC) meeting in Jackson, Mississippi February 21-24, 1969. "NWRO voted to begin a nationwide boycott of SEARS stores during the Easter Season if the chain did not extend credit to welfare recipients." ^{28.} A new committee, the Ways and Means Committee, was established under the chairmanship of Mrs. Etta Horn to negotiate all credit agreements between NWRO and national retailers. According to Dr. Wiley, Sears was chosen as the target of a possible boycott because of the experiences of local affiliates during the Winter-Action Campaign. "We have chosen Sears from among the many chain and department stores that discriminate against recipients because during our Winter-Action Campaign NWRO affiliates sent report after report saying that Sears was the toughest company to deal with." ^{29.}

28. NWRO. WRO'S IN ACTION Vol. I No. I (April, 1969) Washington, D.C.

29. Ibid.

Preparing for the Campaign: NWRO Headquarters

Having obtained formal authority for the boycott from the NCC, the national headquarters of NWRO began preparing the groundwork for the Sears boycott itself and the national credit campaign. This preparation included the contacting of the Sears management announcing the impending boycott, the formulation of a national credit plan and its corresponding demands, the education of local affiliates about goals and tactics for the campaign and the opening of negotiations with other major retailers.

During the first three weeks of March, 1969 Dr. Wiley attempted to arrange a meeting with Mr. Arthur M. Woods, President of Sears, Roebuck and Company. This effort was supported by at least one major church organization, the Women's Division of the United Methodist Church.^{30.}

Receiving no reply from Mr. Woods, Dr. Wiley mailed him a letter on March 21, 1969 announcing the launching of a "nationwide boycott against all Sears stores and operations to begin March 27, 1971" and listing four "minimum" demands that Sears should meet in order to "show evidence of its commitment to end discrimination against welfare recipients."^{31.} The threat of a boycott apparently bothered Sears enough so that on March 25, 1969 Dr. Wiley received a telegram from Mr. Linden Wheeler, Vice President and General Credit Manager of Sears offering to meet in Washington, D.C. The meeting, which took place the next day, was completely unsatisfactory according to Dr. Wiley. He stated that "The Sears people were totally unresponsive to NWRO's request for an affirmative program

30. Letter from Mrs. Wayne W. Harrington, President of Women's Division, to Arthur M. Woods, President of Sears. (March 18, 1969).

31. Letter from Dr. Wiley to Mr. Arthur Woods (March 21, 1969).

program to assure welfare recipients that they would not be discriminated against in the future. Sears tried to tell us that they evaluated credit applications on an individual basis. In light of the general prejudice against welfare recipients, their saying that local credit managers are free to extend credit is ridiculous." ^{32.}

The threat of a boycott had proven inadequate and on March 26, 1969 Dr. Wiley held a press conference and announced the nationwide action.

The National Credit Plan

The announcement of the nationwide boycott against Sears signaled the beginning of the NWRO national credit campaign. As mentioned previously, the campaign was aimed at more than Sears; it was an attempt to get credit for welfare recipients from a variety of national retailers. The formal goals of the campaign were contained in the "NWRO Credit Plan", which was announced on April 1, 1969. ^{33.}

The NWRO Credit Plan had six major "elements" or demands:

- "1. That major stores enter into formal credit agreements with NWRO to assure credit for NWRO members;
- "2. That this agreement assures each NWRO member family of at least \$150 worth of revolving credit;
- "3. That the only certification that a poor person is a good credit risk be a letter of reference from NWRO or one of its affiliated groups;
- "4. That the agreement between the company and NWRO be binding on all affiliates in the company's chain;
- "5. That there be no special interest charges beyond the 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ % normally charged on unpaid balances; and

32. NWRO. WRO'S IN ACTION Vol. I No. I (April, 1969) Washington, D.C.

33. NWRO. NOW! NEWS (Press Release) "NWRO Credit Plan" (April 1, 1969)

"6. That the repayment schedule be at the rate of \$8 per month."

The unique feature of the plan, as pointed out by NWRO, was that it was a group plan and not an individual one. In other words, once the agreement was entered into, credit would be given to members of NWRO whom NWRO or its affiliates had certified as good credit risks. The power to extend credit would lie in the hands of NWRO and not the individual credit stores themselves. The capture of this power to extend credit based on organizational membership and organizationally determined criteria was the key to NWRO's efforts and the actual goal of the campaign itself. With this power there would be a strong incentive on the part of welfare recipients to join NWRO and increase its formal organizational membership.

Besides being of benefit to the organization itself, the NWRO Credit Plan was to be advantageous to poor people. It would assure welfare recipients of non-discriminatory treatment by "narrow-minded local credit personnel." It would also allow poor people to deal with reputable firms thus avoiding the exploitation of ghetto merchants and allowing access to stores with better merchandise, lower prices and better credit terms. Finally, such credit would allow poor people to purchase special emergency items thus acting as an alternative to the special grant.

NWRO recognized that their group credit plan "was a significant change from normal credit policies of retail stores" but could only list two advantages to the stores themselves if they entered the agreement:

both of the advantages, however, were within the power of the stores regardless of the existence of NWRO. NWRO offered the stores "creative access to a sales market not significantly tapped by many large stores" and "an opportunity ... to contribute to the solution of urban problems while, at the same time, building their sales." The Plan assured the stores that they would be paid because the plan was "designed by welfare recipients" on terms they believe they can manage; also internal organizational pressure and a 3-month organizational membership prerequisite will assure responsibility and commitment to the credit agreements.

The trade-off, however, as outlined in the NWRO Credit Plan was weak. The national retail firms could have both advantages listed in the plan without necessarily giving to NWRO the right to extend credit to its membership. The capture of such a right would depend on the exercise of power and the ability of NWRO to make its power felt by at least one of the retail firms.

The Sears Credit Campaign and Organizational Membership: strategy & tactics

In a very definite way the Sears Credit campaign was not after credit but after organizational membership. In literature that went from national NWRO to local affiliates prior to the announcement of the boycott on March 26, 1969 this point was stressed over and over. For example, in a mailing entitled, "Nationwide Sears Credit Campaign", the National headquarters pointed out the necessity of tying the extension of credit to the organization. "It is of

special importance that you push for Sears to extend credit through a letter of reference from your organization. This is a way to encourage recipients to join your organization after an agreement is reached." ^{34.} ".... it is important that you get the membership requirement tied in, since it is an important way to build membership in your organization." "The credit is a strong incentive. In Philadelphia, they doubled their membership after gaining credit from the downtown department stores. They used a policy such as this." ^{35.}

Local affiliates were encouraged to "use group credit to strengthen your WRO" and an organizational format was suggested for this purpose. "Providing credit benefits to active WRO members can be an important tool in building your WRO. Getting benefits must be related to membership. If only WRO members can get credit other recipients will want to (and have to) join your WRO to get these benefits." ^{36.} Organizationally, it was suggested that a credit committee be established which would be responsible for negotiating credit agreements and for certifying members for credit. This committee would survey the membership of the affiliate that want credit and meet the requirements then spread the word that "WRO members get credit" and hold a meeting where the \$1.00 membership fee would be collected, the three month eligibility requirement explained, and a group action against a local store held the same day or in the near future.

The literature that came out of the national headquarters also stressed the importance of withholding any final agreement with the local Sears store until a national agreement has been negotiated. "It is important to withhold making a final agreement with your local Sears store until

until you know what national settlement is to be made. It may be possible to get more from your local store by the combined power of WRO's linked up across the country in the national drive." 37.

The strategy of the campaign, then, was to use credit as an incentive to build organizational membership and the power of local groups to force a national agreement between NWRO and Sears, Roebuck. The tactics of the campaign involved a boycott of Sears brought to the public's attention through dramatic and disruptive actions. Daily picketing of stores was suggested. Shop-ins where protesters would choose any items they want, present them to the store's cashier and tell him to charge it on the "Everything Card" (Welfare ID) were suggested. Welfare rights activists were encouraged to "occupy" shoe, hat and clothing departments and try on everything for long periods of time, to organize a "telephone campaign" to call the catalogue and sales office asking if an agreement with NWRO had been reached and to attempt to negotiate with credit manager and other top officials of their stores.

The local affiliates were also encouraged to "line up middle class support" by contacting churches, unions, civil rights organizations and "FRIENDS" groups. These groups could write letters to local and national executives of Sears expressing their support for NWRO's 6 demands and stating their intention of boycotting Sears. They could be helpful on the picket line and by turning in their Sears credit cards.

37. NWRO. "Nationwide Sears Credit Campaign" (mimeo) no date. p.2.

The Sears Credit Campaign: Local Action

"We're going to disrupt every damn Sears store there is until we get our demand of \$150 in revolving credit for every WRO member who has a letter of reference from the organization. We're going to sit-in, march-in, rally-in, sleep-in until the economic oppression of recipients by Sears is ended."

- Mrs. Etta Horn, Ch. NWRO Ways and Means Committe
(April, 1969)

The local action by NWRO affiliates officially began on March 27, 1969, although many of the local groups had initiated negotiations with their local Sears stores prior to this date. Dr. Wiley, in his March 26th news conference, announced that "militant activity against Sears' would start in 30 cities this week"^{38.} and by April 9, 1969^{39.} 62 NWRO locals had reported some type of activity against Sears.

This local activity continued in periodic spurts throughout the months of April, May, June and July and by October 23rd, NWRO's "Nationwide Sears Action Day," it had all but disappeared.

Some of the local action was creative and highly disruptive. In Olympic, California 35 people entered the local Sears and by using pesos and refusing to speak English tied up cash registers and sales personnel.^{40.} In Chicago, the local WRO interrupted a Sears fashion show to show the audience 300 some welfare fashions that could be purchased by poor people at Sears stores.^{41.} The Essex County, New Jersey, welfare mothers occupied the local Sears credit office for over eight hours

38. "Welfare Recipients will Boycott Sears to Demand Credit", New York Times March 27, 1969

39. NWRO. "Sears Boycott Action List" (April 9, 1969). Washington, D.C.

40. Ibid., p. 2.

41. Chicago Welfare Rights Organization. Press Release. (April 7, 1969)

42.

after receiving no response to their six demands. Perhaps, the most militant Sears action took place in Boston under the leadership of veteran NWRO organizer, Bill Pasterich. On April 3, 1969 between 250 and 300 members of Massachusetts Welfare Rights Organization descended on the Sears branch in Cambridge. While Mrs. Roberta Grant, chairwoman of the NWRO, met with the store's credit manager, her followers conducted a "shop-in" where members disrupted Easter candy displays, tried on shoes endlessly, and gathered up bundles of clothing which they brought to the cashiers and demanded credit from the store.

43.

Less disruptive protests, however, characterized most of the local Sears action during the spring and summer of 1969. The most common pattern of local action seemed to be one in which the local affiliate would conduct picketing outside the Sears store while its leadership presented the 6 demands to the credit manager and waited for the manager to pass judgement on credit applications filed by the local membership. Invariably, some proportion of the local membership's credit applications would be accepted and the protesters would go home.

All during the Sears campaign the local Sears' credit managers continued to insist that credit is given fairly on an individual basis but credit is neither approved nor disapproved automatically. While steadfastly holding to this line, both locally and nationally,

42. "Welfare Mothers Plan Protest", The Evening News (April 9, 1969) p. 21 Newark, N.J.

43. "Boston Welfare Mothers Storm Cambridge Store", Boston Herald Traveler (April 4, 1969) p. 7. F.B. Taylor. "Welfare Mothers Stage 'Shop-In'", The Boston Globe (April 4, 1969) p. 7. "Sears Blitzed by 300", Record American (April 4, 1969).

some agreements were reached between local WRO affiliates and local Sears stores. For example, the Pontiac Michigan WRO reached an agreement "where the credit manager would accept a letter of reference from NWRO and use it as the prime source of his credit investigation." This same arrangement was reached in St. Louis by the local WRO. In Washington, D.C. the Citywide Welfare Alliance managed to get the regional Sears representative to agree that an NWRO reference 'would be a factor in our decision'. In Cincinnati, Ohio a "working arrangement" was established where the store would grant credit to recipients on the basis of need (one received \$600 dollars worth for furniture) and the store would contact the WRO local if anyone defaulted on the credit arrangement.

The recognition by several Sears stores of the NWRO letter of reference as a factor in the credit application of the recipient was as close as any local WRO group came to implementing the demand for a group credit arrangement. None of the WRO locals which participated in the spring and summer actions were able to obtain credit from their Sears stores simply on the basis of NWRO's membership criteria. Although Sears stores did grant credit to many of the leaders and local WRO members they always did this on an individual basis. The success stories of Erie and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where \$50 revolving credit was given by Sears on a group basis was never duplicated

44. NWRO. "Sears Boycott Action List" (4/9/69) p.6 Wash., D.C.

45. Ibid., p. 7.

46. "Welfare Recipients Picket Sears Store for Second Day" Washington Post (March 29, 1969)

47. NWRO. "Sears Boycott Action List" (4/9/69) p.9. Washington, D.C.

during the Sears credit campaign.

Even though there were two more national days designated for local action against Sears, July 3rd ("Sock It to Sears Day) and October 23rd (Nationwide Sears Action Day) the peak of such activity seems to have been reached by late May, 1969. The national negotiating with Sears was even more difficult and the effort just as fruitless.

The Sears Credit Campaign: National Action

The five-person national Ways and Means Committee that was chaired by Etta Horn and set up to negotiate a national agreement with Sears saw little action. After the unsuccessful meeting with Linden Wheeler, Sears Vice President for Credit, on March 26, 1969 in Washington, D.C., NWRO's national committee was unable to open negotiations despite the disruptive activity at the local level. In announcing NWRO's plans to step up their boycott action against Sears on April 9, 1969, Mrs. Horn called for a meeting with Gordon Metcalf, Sears Chairman of the Board. "Sears has not responded to our demands for a meeting with their top management.... The first step must be that Sears' Chairman of the Board Gordon Metcalf meet with NWRO's Ways and Means Committee."^{48.}

Since Mr. Metcalf did not come to NWRO, NWRO went to Mr. Metcalf. Using the Alinsky tactic of accumulating proxy votes from Sears stockholders, Dr. Wiley entered the May 19 Sears stockholders meeting in Chicago. Dr. Wiley charged that Sears discriminatory

48. NWRO. "Sears Boycott Action To BE Stepped Up By NWRO" (April 9, 1969) press release. Washington, D.C.

credit policies contributed directly to the perpetuation of the cycle of poverty and the exploitation of poor people by unscrupulous ghetto merchants. Dr. Wiley's pitch, however, was designed to touch the economic side of the stockholders and not their moral sensitivity. "In today's world of instant communication and dynamic social change, those in the forefront of industry and government, employment and investment have realized the responsibility for affirmative action to integrate poor people into the economic mainstream of the nation. This often means modifying or even eliminating old standards and procedures. NWRO has given Sears a unique opportunity to lead the retail merchandising field into new credit policies from which everyone will benefit."^{49.}

Probably due more to his threat to disrupt the meeting than his intellectual argumentation, Dr. Wiley was able to extract a commitment from the Sears leadership to meet with NWRO and to set up a committee to begin negotiations.^{50.} Dr. Wiley termed this action on Sears part a "substantial victory" but the two hour meeting between the Sears negotiating committee and NWRO, which took place that same afternoon, "produced no agreement, but the door has been opened for further negotiations."^{51.} Mr. Metcalf, however, in a statement after the stockholders' meeting indicated that the door was closed on the most critical element of NWRO's plan. "... Mr. Metcalf indicated Sears would be reluctant to enter into any such (credit) agreement. 'I don't think Sears should be in the position of making people join

49. NWRO. "Statement to Sears Stockholders" mimeo. no date.

50. "Sears Unit Forms A Mutual Fund Tied to Insurer", Wall Street Journal (May 19, 1969).

an organization to get credit.'"^{52.}

The Sears Credit Campaign: An Evaluation

Both in terms of the six elements of the National Credit Plan and the two organizational needs of NWRO the Sears Credit Campaign was a complete failure. No formal agreements were obtained with Sears either on the national or local level which guaranteed \$150 dollars worth of revolving credit based on NWRO membership and a letter of reference. The failure of the Sears action, in these terms, could be explained on several bases. The fact that Sears is essentially a rural based enterprise made it difficult for ghetto residents to reach the Sears outlets in order to apply pressure on the stores themselves, whether in terms of disruption or in terms of a boycott by sympathetic ghetto residents. Also, the campaign was never able to muster the middle class support that was so important to the success of the grape boycott led by Caesar Chavez.

Actions by local groups also undercut the bargaining position of NWRO at the national level and eliminated their own incentive to continue their action against Sears. One of the requests that the national NWRO made to its local affiliates was to withhold making any credit agreement with Sears until a national agreement was negotiated. As we have seen, this was not done by numerous groups. Also, the acceptance of credit on a personal basis by many of the local protesters and WRO leadership probably undercut their incentive

52. "Sears Unit Forms A Mutual Fund Tied to Insurer", Wall Street Journal (May 19, 1969). See Also: "Sears Lifts Quarter Earnings; Tally Wins General Time Bid", New York Times (May 19, 1969).

to continue to fight for a group credit arrangement with the local Sears outlet.

The brevity of the Sears action, however, seems to have been its major impediment to success and this can be tied to the priorities of the national NWRO. The action against Sears lasted for an extremely short time period. Despite an open letter to President Nixon, which appeared in the July, 1969 edition of NOW!, calling upon him to prove his seriousness to private sector involvement in poverty by "moving Sears to agree to NWRO's private sector plan",^{53.} the national push for local action against Sears had all but subsided by early July, 1969. This means that local Sears action was pushed by the national organization for a period of three months; hardly enough time to bring an organization such as Sears to its knees or even to the bargaining table.

The Sears campaign became lost in NWRO's push for a guaranteed annual income which began in July of 1969 with the announcement of their own plan and has continued up to the present time as the major priority of NWRO.^{54.}

However, the Sears campaign and boycott, as explained earlier, was only one part of a two part strategy to obtain credit for NWRO's constituency. By demonstrating NWRO's power against Sears it was hoped that other retail chains would be more amenable to negotiating agreements with NWRO. It was in this phase of the credit campaign that NWRO obtained

53. NWRO. "An Open Letter To President Nixon", NOW! (July, 1969) Washington, D.C.

54. NWRO. "NWRO Proposals For a Guaranteed Adequate Income", NOW! (July, 1969) Washington, D.C.

its greatest successes.

Montgomery Ward: A National Agreement

In early April, 1969, while the Sears boycott action was being initiated across the country, NWRO began contacting other major retailers and introducing their national credit plan to them. NWRO's first targets were J.C. Penney Company, Inc., Lerner Stores Corporation, Lane Bryant, Inc. and Montgomery Ward. It was only with this last retail chain that NWRO met with any success.

NWRO's (George Wiley and Etta Horn) approach to these retail firms was to send a letter to their board chairman announcing the Sears' boycott action and asking for a meeting to discuss the enclosed national credit plan. The response on the part of the three firms other than Montgomery Ward was fairly uniform. For example, the general credit manager for J.C. Penney, Mr. Wallis G. Hocker, replied by stating the credit policy of his firm. "It is the Company's policy to consider each application on its merits, we do not automatically authorize or reject a person's application based on source of income, or based on membership in any group." ^{55.} Mr. Hocker also mentioned in his letter to Dr. Wiley that Penney's was engaged in number of "related consumer education courses" which were "directed toward the disadvantaged." NWRO was not satisfied with this response and in early September wrote another letter to Cecil Wright, Chairman of the Penney Board inviting him to a meeting to be held later that

55. Letter to G. Wiley from Wallis G. Hocker, General Credit Manager, J.C. Penney Co., Inc. (April 21, 1969).

month in New York City.^{56.} This time Mr. Wright did reply to NWRO but only to inform Dr. Wiley that Mr. Hocker was available for a visit if "you should have any further questions about the Company's credit policy."^{57.} The matter was apparently dropped at this time by NWRO, and no formal agreement was reached between NWRO and J.C. Penney.

Mr. Raphael Malsin, President of Lane Bryant, Inc., was even more reluctant to do business with NWRO than J. C. Penney. NWRO had received no word from this firm in response to the April 3rd letter, so another letter was sent to Mr. Malsin asking him to attend the meeting in New York city in late September, 1969.^{58.} This letter was quickly responded to by L. A. Wollan, head of the Lane Bryant Retail Stores Division. Mr. Wollan, like Mr. Hocker, stated the credit policy of his firm. "We cannot extend credit only to those persons who are members of your organization nor can we vary our credit policy to coincide with your request."^{59.} Mr. Wollan pointed out that Lane Bryant stores in New York, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh had met with welfare rights committees and that they "seemed satisfied with our policy of extending limited credit to welfare recipients."^{60.} He saw no further need for meetings because "our policy is liberal and we are extending credit to welfare recipients." No national agreement was reached between NWRO and Lane Bryant and the matter was apparently dropped by NWRO at this stage.

56. Letter to C. Wright, Ch. of Board of JC Penney from G. Wiley and E. Horn. (September 12, 1969).

57. Letter to G. Wiley from C. Wright. (September 16, 1969).

58. Letter to R. Malsin from E. Horn and G. Wiley (September 12, 1969).

59. Letter to R. Malsin from L. A. Wollan (September 15, 1969).

The one chairman of the board that was willing to meet with NWRO representatives did not do so because NWRO forgot the appointment. In response to Dr. Wiley's initial letter, Mr. Stanley Kunsberg, Chairman of the Board of Lerner Stores Corporation asked his assistant to set up a meeting in New York City where he and other Lerner representatives would meet with NWRO.^{61.} The meeting, which had been scheduled for late May, 1969, conflicted with the NWRO disruption of the National Conference on Social Welfare held in New York City, May 25-27, 1969. As Dr. Wiley explained to a Lerner representative, "It was not until some time later that we even realized we had missed the appointment."^{62.} Although some type of "National Welfare Rights Organization accounts" were established at individual Lerner stores,^{63.} no national agreement was arrived at.

The national agreement reached between NWRO and Montgomery Ward seemed to be more a result of Montgomery Ward's eagerness to pursue such a policy than NWRO's organizational strength or its boycott against Sears, Roebuck. In fact, prior to NWRO's announcement of its national credit plan and its boycott against Sears, representatives of Montgomery Ward's had visited Dr. Wiley "to discuss ways in which Montgomery Ward could work with the National Welfare Rights Organization to promote credit sales among poor people."^{64.} As a result of this predisposition, when NWRO approached Montgomery Ward in April of 1969 concerning the national credit plan they at least found a willing listener.

61. Letter to G. Wiley from R.L. Buquet (April 16, 1969).

62. Letter to R.L. Buquet from G. Wiley (September 12, 1969).

63. Letter to D. Leahy from J.S. Merolla, Lerner Shops (March 10, 1971).

64. Letter to R. Brooker, Chairman of MW Board from G. Wiley (April 3, 1969).

It is difficult to know the exact reasons why Montgomery Ward approached NWRO and eventually entered into a national agreement. Perhaps, as noted by Senator Percy during a Senate hearing in which Dr. Wiley and Etta Horn were participants, "Maybe it is because they are 'No. 2' and they try harder."⁶⁵ Actually, Montgomery Ward's is third behind its two major retail rivals, Sears and J.C. Penney, respectively. However, in the first months of 1969 Montgomery Ward's was seen as experiencing a revival, a 'now generation' image, that was utilizing all the sophisticated marketing technology to change Ward's image from an outdated rural-based enterprise to an urban oriented threat to its two top competitors.⁶⁶ One area that still needed rebuilding in the eyes of Board Chairman, R. Brooker, was credit sales. "One area where he thinks corrections should have been made earlier is financial planning. Ward's had not actively promoted credit sales, and charge accounts were kept at the local store level."⁶⁷ Perhaps combining this need to promote credit sales with the economic logic of capturing a low-priced but stable and urban welfare market and the desire to embarrass Sears Montgomery Ward saw NWRO as the proper vehicle for this purpose.⁶⁸

Regardless of Montgomery Ward's motivation their response to Wiley and Horn's letter of early April was very encouraging. In fact, unlike all the other stores, Montgomery Ward did not unequivocally oppose the idea of a group credit plan. "It has been our experience

65. United States Senate, Committee on Banking and Currency, Hearing on S.2146 & S.2259, Subcommittee on Financial Institutions, "Transcript of Proceedings". (January 14, 1970) Washington, D.C. p. 94.

66. "Ward's Joins the 'Now Generation'", Business Week (March 22, 1969) p. 84.

67. Ibid., p. 90.

that it is not possible to make a credit decision based upon only one or two customer characteristics such as income, source of income, family size, ownership of home, etc. Membership in any organization alone probably (my emphasis) could not qualify a person for consumer credit." ^{69.} Ashley D. DeShazor, Vice President for Credit, was also interested in meeting with NWRO "to discuss what we have done up to this point in extensions of credit to the poor at Montgomery Ward and what we hope to be able to accomplish in the future." ^{70.}

The negotiations between NWRO and Montgomery Ward began in May of 1969 and continued sporadically throughout the following summer, fall and early winter. By August Montgomery Ward offered a one year pilot program of \$100 monthly credit at normal carrying charges (1½%) to 2000 NWRO members in 5 geographical areas and one catalogue house. NWRO would apportion the number of participants in each geographical area and select the participants in the program. Montgomery Ward, however, reserved the right to make a credit check on the participants in order to eliminate individuals with outstandingly poor credit references. "Montgomery Ward indicated that this was not designed to neutralize the group feature of the plan but rather just a precautionary check", and it would inform NWRO of the credit bureau used in the check. ^{71.}

NWRO responded to this offer by upping the number of participants to 3000 and the number of geographical areas to 8. NWRO also wanted

69. Letter to G. Wiley from Ashely D. Deshazor, Vice President-Credit (April 16, 1969).

70. Ibid.

71. NWRO Memorandum: To Ways and Means Committee from Etta Horn and G. Wiley. "Recent Meeting with Montgomery Ward Officials" (August 8, 1969).

Montgomery Ward to assist NWRO in its consumer education program as well as providing NWRO affiliates and representatives with 500 catalogues.^{72.} The Ways and Means Committee was especially worried that the typical credit bureau could not treat fairly a welfare recipients' credit situation so they also wanted Montgomery Ward and/or its credit bureau to share "with the applicant and NWRO or its designated local affiliate negative credit information on which it bases rejection of any recipient."^{73.} Finally, NWRO wanted profit to be the criterion of success of the pilot program.

Montgomery Ward's next written response was in late November, 1969 but neither the provision of "negative credit information" nor the profit criterion of success were part of the bargain.^{74.} Montgomery Ward offered a one year pilot program which would provide credit for 3000 NWRO members in 9 geographical areas. The applicants for participation would be selected and introduced by NWRO to Wards and NWRO would apportion participants within the geographical areas. Each applicant would go through Ward's normal credit check and it would inform NWRO of the applicant's name and credit bureau used in the event of rejection. Ward's would also inform NWRO of any account that that was delinquent by two or more payments. The credit would be 100 dollars in the form of Wards limited credit card accounts, and Wards would help with consumer education and keep detailed of program progress. Program success would be based on the "delin-

72. Memorandum of Agreement between the National Welfare Rights Organization and the Montgomery Ward company for a pilot program extending credit to welfare recipients." (September 10, 1969) NWRO, Wash., D.C.

73. NWRO Memorandum To Ways and Means Committee from Etta Horn and G. Wiley, "Recent Meeting with Montgomery Ward Officials" (Aug., 8, 1969)

74. Letter to Dr. Wiley from Ashley D. DeShazor (November 25, 1969).

quency performance of participants as related to all other Wards credit customers.

On December 3, 1969, after ratification by the Ways and Means Committee, NWRO accepted Ward's response and a joint statement by NWRO and Montgomery Ward was issued on December 8, 1969. Edward S. Donnell, president of Montgomery Ward, called the pilot program "a worthwhile step to make Ward's services uniformly available to all financially responsible consumers", and George Wiley complemented Wards for the "vision, the foresight and the concern about urban problems to pioneer in this important area."^{75.} William Henry from Pittsburgh, Pa., and a member of the Ways and Means Committee termed the pilot program 'a big crack in the whole situation' but pointed out that NWRO did not get all that it wanted from Wards. "The NWRO's agreement with Montgomery Ward falls short of a group credit plan, he said, since the company will reserve the right to reject individual credit applications."^{76.}

Despite falling short on the concept of group credit and on the amount of credit involved (\$100 instead of \$150), the NWRO/Montgomery Ward agreement came fairly close to establishing the national credit plan proposed by NWRO in April of 1969. It is ironic that the very success of the agreement from NWRO's point of view, i.e. the right to select participants, led to the inability of the programs^{Full} implementation. Fifteen months after the announcement of the agreement only 829 credit

75. Montgomery Ward News Service. Public Relations Department, Chicago, Illinois. (December 8, 1969) Hugh Tassey.

76. Fred Johnson. "Welfare Activist Applauds Wards", Minneapolis Tribune (December 9, 1969). See also: "Wards to Give Credit to Some on Welfare". New York Times (December 9, 1969), Etta Horn. "Credit

applications had been processed through the pilot program. Although 690 of these applications had been approved, which is a very favorable approval ration of 83%, the absolute number of applications in the program fell far short of the potential of 3,000⁷⁷. The main road-block to the program's implementation seems to have been due to the elaborate screening processes by NWRO at the local and national levels.

The screening process established by NWRO's Ways and Means Committee was centralized and time-consuming and placed the organizational burden upon the local WRO's. Each WRO that was geographically eligible for participation in the pilot program had to establish a three person credit committee (one chairwoman and two members) which would screen WRO members and determine eligibility. This credit committee had to send a "Local WRO Credit Committee Membership Report", which listed names, addresses, telephone numbers and authorized signatures of the members, to NWRO Headquarters. Then the credit committee, which had to be the only one in any given city, had to certify a minimum 25 members for group credit based on four criteria: an active member for three months prior to application, an active member of citywide, countywide or statewide WRO where they exist, a member who agreed to abide by terms of agreement and had participated in at least one credit action or campaign. Once these 25 members were found and certified by the local credit committee, the committee sent a "Request For Group Credit" to NWRO. This form listed the committee people and a list of the members applying for group credit along with their addresses and date they joined the local WRO.

77. Letter to Dan Leahy from Ashley D. Deshazor, Vice President-Credit. Montgomery Ward. (March 8, 1971)

Ultimate determination of a local WRO member's eligibility for the pilot program, however, rested with national NWRO, presumably, Mrs. Etta Horn, chairwoman of the Ways and Means Committee. Once the Credit Committee Membership Report and the Request for Group Credit was received by NWRO national headquarters from the local WRO, its geographical location and NWRO affiliation were checked and each applicant's national membership card reviewed to see if they were a member in good standing. After this national screening process was completed NWRO sent a "Certificate of Eligibility for Credit with Montgomery Ward" form for each applicant back to the local WRO credit committee.

After completing the national NWRO's screening process, the local credit committee still had to go through the traditional Montgomery Ward credit application process. This entailed the contacting of the local credit manager, the picking up and completing of the application forms, the completing of the "Supplemental Agreement" which authorized Wards to disclose to NWRO or its affiliate the fact of rejection, the name of the credit bureau used and account delinquency by two or more payments, and the final picking-up of the credit cards themselves once the credit check was done.^{78.}

The Montgomery Ward/NWRO agreement was a "national" agreement in the sense that it was initiated and negotiated by the NWRO national headquarters with little assistance from local WROs. As a result perhaps of this fact, the elaborate screening process attempted to institutionalize the prejudices of the national headquarters, i.e. pro forma national

78. NWRO. "How To Get Into The Program" Eleven guidelines to be followed in order to participate in the NWRO/Montgomery Ward pilot program. (no date)

membership. There was nothing in the Montgomery Ward/NWRO agreement that necessitated such an elaborate screening process with the ultimate certification of eligibility resting with the national headquarters. It would have been organizationally feasible and probably preferable to have allowed the local credit committee of the WRO to make the final decision on eligibility and issue the certificate. What seems to have happened is that the National NWRO in its desire to build up formal membership in NWRO succeeded in stifling both credit applicants and the local membership that a credit program would have attracted, a classic example of goal displacement.

Retail Credit: Local Agreements

The ability of local WRO affiliates to negotiate and administer group credit plans, similar to those won by the Philadelphia WRO, was again demonstrated during the credit campaign. Two of NWRO's strongest affiliates, the Massachusetts WRO and the NYC WRO, succeeded in establishing credit arrangements that included the concept of group credit.

The Massachusetts Wage Supplement Organization (MWRO) centered in Cambridge, Massachusetts worked out their credit arrangements with local stores through the Retail Trade Board. Using this procedure the MWRO was able to \$50 credit for its members at Jordon Marsh, Filenes,^{79.} Gilchrets, and later, Zayre department stores.^{80.} As bills were paid off and credit became "established", the amount of credit was doubled to \$100.

79. Letter to G. Wiley from Elsie Harper, Corresponding Secretary-MWRO. (November 4, 1969).

80. Jo Ann Levine. "Poor-Good Credit Risks?", Christian Science Monitor

In New York City two of NWRO's largest affiliates, the Citywide Coordinating Committee of Welfare Rights Groups and the Brooklyn Social Welfare Action Committee, also established group credit plans with local retail stores. The method and the amount of credit varied among the stores but "In each case, however, the credit will be granted to the applicants without the store's going through the normal process of checking their credit record or financial condition, other than the fact that the welfare-rights group will have preliminarily screened the customers."^{81.} The Gimbel's agreement provided credit up to \$150 for as many as 200 welfare recipients.^{82.} Abraham and Strauss' agreement with the Brooklyn Social Welfare Action Committee distributed credit by issuing "coupon books" of up to \$50 to welfare recipients, and E. J. Korvette, Inc. "reached an agreement to give credit to 150 people screened by a welfare rights group more than seven months ago, but hasn't heard anything from the organization since."^{83.} This statement by E.J. Korvette made in July, 1969 apparently refers to their offer in November, 1968 to grant \$25 worth of credit to welfare members. However, this offer was rejected at that time because it was felt to be an insufficient amount.^{84.}

81. Isadore Farmash. "3 Big Stores Agree On Extending Credit to Relief Recipients", New York Times (July 23, 1969).

82. Ibid.

83. Wall Street Journal. (July 24, 1969) "Retailers, under pressure, gingerly extend credit to some on welfare."

NOT FOR PUBLICATION OR DISTRIBUTION

Den Leahy
446 14th Street
Brooklyn, New York 11215
(212) 768-1797

THE ORGANIZATION IN ACTION

"OPERATION NEVADA"

"From my years in CORE I had gotten used to being part of a militant, action-oriented organization, which was prepared to move swiftly into situations that developed, with relatively little concern about whose toes got stepped on in the process. I am therefore more disposed toward being part of an energetic plalanx pressing for radical change, than always having to tone down statements to keep from offending divergent elements of a tenuous coalition."

- George Wiley, 1966.

BACKGROUND TO "OPERATION NEVADA"

During the end of 1970 the State of Nevada conducted a "door to door" check on its welfare cases. As a result of this investigation, Nevada State Welfare Director, George Miller, announced on January 8, 1971 that 22% of the state's welfare recipients or 3,000 people had been stricken from the welfare rolls. Dr. Miller reported that these recipients "had been cheating taxpayers out of a million dollars a year through failure to report income from other sources, including unemployment insurance."^{1.} In addition to these 3,000 people who were cut from the welfare rolls, another 4,000 welfare recipients had their budgets cut.^{2.} All toll, the Nevada State Welfare Department claimed that 50% of its welfare population had been obtaining their benefits fraudulently.^{3.} "Operation Nevada" was national NWRO's response to these actions by Dr. Miller.

"Operation Nevada" was an intense but relatively short-term which NWRO conducted in Nevada during the first three months of 1971. The campaign, which was conceived and led by the national staff and officers of NWRO, had as its immediate purpose the restoration of the welfare budget cuts in Nevada and the reinstatement of those recipients who had been eliminated from the public assistance rolls. During those three months, national NWRO mobilized a concerted legal attack with the help of the Columbia Center on Social Welfare and Law and committed a great deal of its own resources in terms of staff, money and organiza-

1. U.S. News & World Report. (February 8, 1971) p.32.

2. NWRO. "Operation Nevada". (January 27, 1971) mimeo.

3. Ibid.

tional energy to mounting a nationally publicized street-level protest in Las Vegas and Reno, Nevada. In order to understand this organizational commitment by the national NWRO to the cut-backs in Nevada it is necessary to look at the state of NWRO's larger campaign for a guaranteed annual income, the reality of the nation-wide "repression" of welfare recipients by state welfare departments and the need of NWRO make a visible response to this repression.

G.A.I. Campaign

Just one month prior to President Nixon's announcement to Congress that he would seek a national welfare reform program, 300 emmbers of NWRO converged on Washington, D.C. to outline their own plans for a Guaranteed Annual Income campaign which was to begin on July 1, 1969 as a part of four days of national protest.^{4.} Since that June in 1969 the NWRO developed its GAI campaign until by February, 1970, during Operation Nevada, it had become the top priority of the National Welfare Rights Organization.

During the intervening months, the NWRO leadership worked to insert their demands for a \$5500 guaranteed annual income in a variety of national forums. They had "taken over" the December, 1969, President's Conference on Food, Nutrition and Health and succeeded in getting a resolution passed favoring the \$5500 guaranteed annual income.^{5.} They achieved a similar "take over" of the June, 1970, National Conference

4. NWRO. Welfare Fighter (July, 1969) Vol. I No. I

5. NWRO. Welfare Fighter (January, 1970) Vol. I No. 5.

6.
on Social Welfare in Chicago, Illinois. NWRO also became linked up with the national anti-war movement, and NWRO's leadership and \$5500 guaranteed annual income demand were a prominent part of the April, 1970 Moritorium activities throughout the nation.
7.

The main national forum utilized by the NWRO leadership during these months was the United States Congress. The national NWRO office kept a close watch on the progress of HR 16311, President Nixon's Family Assistance Program, as it began its trek through the Congressional committees. Whenever they were permitted to take part in the traditional lobbying process they did so, and when they were stopped, the NWRO leadership, with the help of friendly Senators, created innovative supplements to that process. They presented testimony in October, 1969, before the House Ways and Means Committee, lobbied extensively in the spring just prior to the bill's passage by the House, attended the hearings of the Senate Finance Committee shortly thereafter and had Senator Eugene McCarthy introduce their bill, S. 3780, the Adequate Income Act of 1970, during those hearings.

During the summer and fall of 1970 the Nixon Administration twice re-wrote their bill; and when it was presented to the Senate Finance Committee in October of 1970 the NWRO leadership was there but could not get scheduled for testimony. After the election recess was over and the bill was to be considered again by the Committee, NWRO still could not get a hearing so, with the help of Senator Eugene McCarthy, they scheduled their own on November 18-19, 1970. During those hearings,

6. NWRO. Welfare Fighter (June, 1970) Vol. I No. 10.

7. NWRO. Welfare Fighter (April, 1970).

which were attended by over 300 welfare rights members, 23 members of NWRO testified against HR 16311 and for their own Senate bill, S. 3780.

On the day after the hearings ended, November 20, 1970, the Senate Finance Committee voted not to send the bill to the Senate floor and thus effectively killed consideration of the bill during the 91st congressional session. This action, along with President Nixon's own request that his bill not be implemented until 1973, gave the NWRO leadership enough breathing space from their lobbying activity to consider other matters. The main issue that was foremost in their minds, or, at least, in the headlines of their house organ, Welfare Fighter, was the threat of repression at the state level in terms of budget cuts and administrative "audits" that would adversely effect welfare recipients.

The Threat of Repression

The United States has never been generous in distributing public benefits to poor people, especially those on public assistance. In the last half of the 1960's there was an enormous growth of the welfare rolls causing a national "welfare crisis." This growth was a result of several factors. The federal government's own poverty program had done much to educate the poor as to the availability and the right to welfare. The "poverty lawyers" played an important role in this educational process but they also successfully challenged restrictive rules such as the "man-in-the-house rule" and the residency requirement rule which had prohibited many people from getting on public assistance. The National Welfare Rights Organization had also played an important role in the growth of welfare rolls. Nationwide unemployment and inflation during this time period were also contributing factors to the rise in welfare rolls.

At the national level there were two major government responses to this "welfare crisis." In 1967, in the aftermath of the summer rebellions, Congress passed a restrictive "freeze" on welfare payments and a Work Incentive Program as part of their 1967 Amendments to the Social Security Act. In 1969, acting on the demand that something be done about the "welfare crisis", President Nixon introduced his Family Assistance Program (FAP) in Congress. However, as we have seen, the bill was stalled in the Senate Finance Committee and the state governments could not hope for any immediate fiscal relief of their welfare burden.

During the fall and winter of 1970 state and city political leaders were very outspoken about the fiscal crisis faced by their local units of government, and the NWRO leadership, quite reasonably, assumed that any budget cuts on the local level would be at the expense of the politically weak welfare recipients. In New York State Governor Nelson Rockefeller was preparing a 8.4 billion dollar budget with a \$800 million revenue^{8.} gap. In New York City John Lindsay was facing a \$300 million dollar deficit in his operating budget and had refused the proposed budget of the Human Resources Administration saying that the city lacked funds^{9.} to cover the cost of the increased welfare rolls. Governor Ronald Reagan had announced cuts in Medi-Cal payments, and in his 1971 budget message had called welfare "a cancer eating at our vitals" and called for the complete overhaul of the state's welfare system to eliminate waste and "the impropriety of subsidizing those whose greed is greater^{10.} than their need." The Louisiana state government announced that

8. US News and World Report. "Welfare Out of Control," (February 8, 1971) p.30.

4, 500 AFDC recipients were to be cut from the rolls and another 17,000 recipients would have their welfare budgets cut.^{11.} The state of Washington was threatening across the board reductions in welfare benefits, and the Massachusetts legislature had approved only half of the needed appropriation to cover welfare costs.^{12.} Finally, the state of Maine was attempting to "bring back man-in-the-house" rules by devising a step-parent law aimed at welfare families.^{13.}

NWRO was extremely conscious of these state actions and in their December-January, 1971 edition of the Welfare Fighter ran a lead article entitled, "REPRESSION COMING!", which stated that "waves of repression" were flooding over welfare recipients as state and local officials in response to "screaming headlines about soaring welfare rolls" were planning cutbacks, eligibility restrictions, stiffer application procedures and crackdowns on "welfare chiselers." George Wiley, in his editorial of the same edition, warned that "the attack on poor people represented by FAP was 'benign' compared to what the establishment has in store for us in 1971", i.e. cuts in local welfare programs.

How to Respond to the Repression

The actuality and threat of repression was real enough; the question was how to respond. In his January, 1971 editorial Dr. Wiley urged a two level strategy to "defend against these attacks." Dr. Wiley felt that local WRO affiliates should be as active as never before "to see to it that eligible people are not prevented from getting on

11. NWRO. Welfare Fighter. (December-January, 1971).

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

welfare" by conducting "right to welfare campaigns." Meanwhile, the national NWRO would continue its lobbying. "... we MUST," Dr. Wiley emphasized, "fight and lobby for real welfare reform at the federal level and an Adequate Income for all people."

There was a great deal of difficulty, however, in asking local WRO affiliates to engage in strong "right to welfare campaigns." A right to welfare campaign was a tactic that had never been emphasized throughout the growth of NWRO's local organizations. Local organizations had obtained their membership not by recruiting people onto the welfare rolls but by conducting benefit-need campaigns for those already on welfare. A right to welfare campaign, in many ways, could pose a threat to local organizations. First, Dr. Wiley was asking local members to organize for somebody else when the whole basis of welfare rights organizing had been immediate personal gain for the organization's membership. Second, because of this, local organizations might lose the interest of their membership. Furthermore, the leadership of local affiliates might feel their position threatened if a right to welfare campaign did bring in a lot of new members. It has been suggested by a person close to the welfare rights movement that this was the main reason why Mrs. Beulah Saunders did not want national staff to come into New York City despite the threatened cut-backs in welfare budgets.

The dubious ability of local WRO affiliates to conduct vigorous recruitment efforts in a right to welfare campaign was, most certainly,

one of the important factors in Wiley's decision to by-pass the local network of organizations that he had spent four years building. He still felt that the best defense against this type of repression was a strong offense; he only changed who would conduct that offense and this was the national organization and its staff working at the local level.

The actions of Dr. George Miller, then, happened at the right time and in the right place. Due to the stalling of the FAP bill in the Senate, national NWRO had some breathing space from what it considered its most important activity, lobbying at the federal level "for real welfare reform." It would be several months before there would be a need for another House lobbying effort like the one conducted in April, 1970. There was a growing need for NWRO to make some sort of visible stand against what they perceived as another "wave of repression", and Dr. Miller's actions in Nevada, which he himself felt could be a model for all the other states faced with a fiscal squeeze, were a shining example of what NWRO was worried about. Furthermore, based on preliminary investigations during early January by a group of welfare lawyers, it seemed quite possible that a victory could be won. Finally, national NWRO would not be stepping on the toes of any strong WRO affiliate. Nevada did in fact have a local welfare rights organization but it was small and, furthermore, its leadership had requested help from the national organization in dealing with the budget terminations and reductions. These factors, then, provide the background and some of the reasons for the large scale national commitment to a local campaign, "Operation Nevada."

THE NEVADA CRISIS: Dr. Miller's Administrative Audit

People who were living on public assistance in Nevada where they were concentrated mainly in Las Vegas and Reno existed in a state of crisis. The State of Nevada, in 1970, has the third highest personal income in the United States (\$2,037 million); in Las Vegas, the cost of living was 12% above the national average and the state wide cost of living at an "intermediate level" for a family of four was pegged at \$888 dollars per month. The State of Nevada also ranked high among the states as a recipient of federal grants, some 76 million dollars. Also, 60% of the money that was appropriated by the state legislature for welfare costs came from the federal government.

In contrast to this, the state appropriations for poor people living in the state was minimal. Nationally, the State of Nevada ranked 40th in average grant amount (\$32.00) per child on ADC. Even according to its own standards, the State of Nevada was deficient in its monetary commitment to poor people. The state had determined that a "minimum standard of health and decency" on a poverty level demanded a per monthly income of \$312 for a family of four. However, the state legislature had set the level of expenditures so that the maximum assistance allowed for a family of four was \$144 per month. Thus, recipients were given enough money to meet only 42% of his or her needs by the state's own standards. In response to this crisis, the Executive Budget of the State, which was submitted to the legislature in 1971, the governor was requesting that 1/4 of 1% of Nevada's personal income be spent on grants to poor people. ^{14.} Guaranteed

14. The figures for the above two paragraphs were taken from two sources: Stephen Bjorklund, "Operation Nevada," WIN (April 15, 1971) p. 7. League of Women Voters of Nevada. "Can Nevada Afford It?" (March, 1971)

poverty seemed assured for the next few years at least.

The welfare crisis, however, as perceived by Dr. Goerge Miller, Jr., Administrator of Nevada State Welfare Department, was the "cheating" being done by ADC welfare recipients as a result of the new declaration system. In 1969 the US Department of Health, Education and Welfare had conducted a comprehensive study that showed only 0.4 per cent of all welfare cases were fraudulent ^{15.} and subsequently, federal regulations were issued requiring the installation of declarations systems at the state level. To meet these federal requirements, the Nevada State Welfare Division adopted the declaration system on a statewide, all category basis on June 1, 1969. ^{16.}

The Administrative Audit

In February, 1970, the Internal Audit Staff of the State Welfare Administration began checking selected ADC cases "to determine if clients were reporting earned income correctly." ^{17.} This preliminary audit was accomplished by comparing the reported income on the declaration statement with the records of the Employment Security Department of the State which showed reported income for the quarter and unemployment insurance payments. "Through this process it became apparent many clients were not reporting income or were under-reporting earned income." In light of these preliminary findings, Dr. Miller ordered a "complete eligibility review of every active ADC case in the state." ^{18.}

15. Sylvia A. Law. "Crisis in Welfare", Civil Liberties #279 (July, 1971).

16. Nevada State Welfare Division. "Final Report-ADC Review" no date.

17. Ibid., p. 1

The complete eligibility review was conducted beginning in the last months of 1970. Utilizing 85% of the Welfare Division's total staff, the review was to include home visits, collateral checks and a complete verification of the following 21 items:

19.

Items Included For Full Verification

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Age of Children | 11. Job Corps allotment |
| 2. School Attendance | 12. Rentals or roomers and boarders |
| 3. Pregnancy | 13. Indian resources |
| 4. Deprivation | 14. Relative Contribution |
| 5. Earnings | 15. Other Income |
| 6. Unemployment Insurance Benefits. | 16. Assistance from another state |
| 7. Child Support | 17. Real Property |
| 8. Social Security benefits | 18. Personal Property |
| 9. Other benefits | 19. Number of persons in household |
| 10. Military allotment | 20. Placement for convience only |
| | 21. Budget review and re-computation |

When this review had been accomplished, a reported 4,438 cases had been checked. Of this number, 2,209 cases or 49.77% were determined to be "non-defective." However, numerous "areas of error" were discovered:

"A. Misreporting or non-reporting of earnings	-869 cases
B. Misreporting or non-reporting of unemployment benefits	-159 cases
C. Unreported man living in home	-126 cases
D. Failure to report changes in child care costs, rent, etc.	-155 cases
E. Cases with overpayment due to incorrect reporting of information	-925 cases
F. Underpayments to clients	-151 cases
"G. Other areas affecting payment	-372 cases

The report of the audit, which up to that time had been done in secret, was released on Janaury 8, 1971. 889 cases or 3,000 people were dropped from the roles due to the areas of error listed

19. Ibid., p.2.

20. Ibid., p.2-3.

above. The average grant per case dropped was \$87.50 and the total monthly payment of the 889 cases was \$77,521. It was determined that 658 of the cases dropped had come onto assistance after the start of the Declaration system. It was also announced that 4,000 other welfare recipients would have their welfare budgets cut.^{21.} 51% of AFDC cases were either terminated (22%) or reduced (29%).

The Nevada State Division of Welfare attributed the "cheating" to the federal declaration system. W.J. LaBadie, Deputy Administrator under Dr. Miller and author of the Final Report on the ADC Review, concluded that "It is obvious the present system as required by federal regulation is not a workable method for eligibility determination."^{22.} Dr. Miller agreed. He not only felt that Nevada was the

"first state to make such a check"^{23.} but decided that on the basis of his crash audit of every welfare recipient in the state "proved that federal regulations should be changed."^{24.} Believing that "The other states are in much worse boats; they just haven't found out about it yet",^{25.} he decided to remedy this situation by dispatching

a letter to every other welfare state administrator and to many members of Congress in which he enclosed his final report of the Nevada audit and stated, "Forget about the legal structure in which these programs are administered; all states should be conducting their own investigations."^{26.}

21. NWRO. "Operation Nevada". (January 27, 1971) mimeo.

22. Nevada State Welfare Division. "Final Report-ADC Review" (no date).

23. New York Times. "Nevada Welfare Cuts", (January 12, 1971) p.20.

24. US District Judge, Roger Foley. "Order on Plaintiff's Motion To Enforce Temporary Restraining Order", (Mar. 19, 1971) p. 8.

25. New York Times. "Nevada Welfare Cuts", (January 12, 1971) p. 20.

NWRO Decision-Making

Dr. Miller announced the results of his administrative audit on January 8, 1971. Exactly two and a half weeks later, on January 27, 1971, the national NWRO announced "Operation Nevada." The alacrity of the decision to make a major organizational commitment in Nevada can only be understood by remembering that NWRO was already predisposed to making some form of visible response to the nationwide "repression" which would not cut into its central concern with lobbying at the federal level. Given this predisposition on the part of the national organization, three major factors seem to have led to the decision to go into Nevada. First, there was the magnitude and type of terminations and reductions occurring in a state which was ill prepared to handle the crisis. Second, the fact that Dr. Miller hoped his administrative audit would be used as a model by other states. Finally, the influence of Edward Sparer, who conducted a preliminary investigation into the Nevada crisis.

The decision-making began when Ruby Duncan, chairwoman of the small WRO affiliate in Las Vegas, called Mrs. Johnnie Tillmon for help. Although Mrs. Duncan was aware that some terminations were going on and that many recipients simply did not receive their checks on January 1, 1971, she did not realize the magnitude of the crisis until Dr. Miller announced the results of his, until that time, secret audit. She also discovered that many of the mothers had their checks terminated prior to any hearing, and, from her personal experience, she realized that this procedure was illegal. When she called Mrs. Tillmon and asked for help, Mrs. Tillmon

arranged an immediate visit to Las Vegas, accompanied by two lawyers, in order to make a preliminary investigation of the crisis.

The preliminary investigation was conducted by Edward Sparer, a law professor from the University of Pennsylvania, and Steve Cole, a lawyer from the Columbia Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law, in conjunction with the Clark County Legal Services in Las Vegas. The investigation revealed numerous procedural and substantive violations of the rights of the recipients who could be quickly interviewed by the team. It was also during the time of this investigation that the existence of Dr. Miller's letter to state welfare administrators was discovered, and this letter was certainly an important factor in the Nevada decision. In the February, 1971, edition of the Welfare Fighter, which carried several articles on "Operation Nevada", the letter was frequently mentioned as an important factor. The articles stated that "Operation Nevada" seemed "especially necessary when it was revealed that the State Welfare Administrator had written triumphant 'how-to-do-it' letters" and "largely because of the infamous letter written to all state welfare administrators with copies to U.S. Senators and Congressmen by George Miller of Nevada...."^{28.}

An equally important factor in the Nevada decision seems to have been the influence of Ed Sparer on Johnnie Tillmon and Dr. Wiley. Mr.

27. NWRO. "Why the Cuts," Welfare Fighter (February, 1971) p. 6.

28. NWRO. "NWRO Declares War on Repression", "Why the Massive Effort In Nevada", Welfare Fighter (February, 1971) p. 6-7.

Sparcer had been a close associate of the welfare rights movement and NWRO from its inception. As a founder and initial Director of the Columbia University Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law, he had been a major strategist of the legal aspect of the welfare rights movement and his articles had pointed out almost daily impact of administrative law on the lives of the poor.^{29.} Mr. Sparcer felt that the situation in Nevada warranted special attention because of the type of action that had been taken by the state.^{30.} Instead of the rather traditional budget cuts by a state legislature, Nevada had employed an administrative audit, and Mr. Sparcer felt this might be a method that other states might employ in the future. He also felt that the welfare rights movement needed to be rejuvenated and a major effort in Nevada could assist this process. In terms of the local situation, Mr. Sparcer felt that "Operation Nevada" could not only reverse the action of the state but leave behind a strong WRO and Legal Services that could resist state repression in the future. After the preliminary investigation had been concluded, Mrs. Tillmon conferred with members of her Executive Committee and the leadership of the National Staff by phone and it was decided to make an all out effort in Nevada.

NWRO Campaign Strategy

29. Edward Sparcer. "The New Public Law: The Relation of Indigents to State Administration," in B. Frieden and R. Morris (eds) Urban Planning and Social Policy Basic Books, Inc. (1968) p. 360-376.

30. Mr. Sparcer's ideas on Operation Nevada came from an interview with Mr. Ron Pollack of the Columbia Center. (March 31, 1972).

The Operation Nevada strategy was not developed merely to meet the crisis in Nevada, although that was one of its major purposes. Rather, Operation Nevada was to be the first step in a major new campaign, the Right to Welfare Campaign, which was intended to increase pressure at the local level and, subsequently, the federal level, for the passage of an adequate welfare reform law.

Dr. Wiley felt that welfare rights was at a crucial juncture on the national political scene.^{31.} For the past four and a half years the NWRO had emphasized the building of an organization through the use of benefit need campaigns for those on welfare. The impact of this had been that the right to welfare had been publicized, the policies and practices of welfare departments had been changed and welfare had been made more accessible. These changes have led to skyrocketing welfare rolls and enormous pressures on the financial solvency of local governments. These state and local governments in turn were insisting that the ensuring welfare crisis be handled by the federal government, and the Family Assistance Program was the federal government's response to the financial crisis of the states. However, NWRO's strategy of blocking FAP, mainly because of its inadequate income level, was increasing the burden of the local governments and repression, such as that in Nevada, was the result.

In response to this nationwide repression, Dr. Wiley felt that the best defense was a strong offense.^{32.} He outlined a new strategy with

31. Dan Leahy. Minutes of the NWRO Staff Retreat. University of Maryland. (January 29-30-31, 1971).

32. Ibid.

two interconnecting thrusts. First, at the federal level, there must be another all out effort to block FAP again. This would mean the development of a "minority coalition" with other groups that would be capable of holding up the passage of FAP until its income level had been adjusted upwards. Such a strategy of blocking FAP at the federal level, however, would ensure the intensification of repression, budget cuts, administrative audits, restricted eligibility, etc., at the local level. In order to protect against this repression, the second phase of the new strategy would be a right to welfare campaign at the local level which would emphasize the recruitment of people onto the welfare rolls as a counter-attack.

As mentioned earlier, the strategy of a right to welfare campaign, recruitment of new people onto the welfare rolls, was a major reversal for NWRO in terms of organizing tactics. In order to counter this, Dr. Wiley felt that the right to welfare would utilize a "media approach" rather than utilizing the NWRO organizational network. The media approach, which he argued would not destroy the organization but would provide an "environment to organize in", would stress the right to welfare by getting HEW to give "equal time" for AFDC advertising, through the use of NWRO "Right to Welfare" booklets and eligibility training, through the establishment of phone numbers - WELFARE - for eligibility information, etc.

Operation Nevada, then, was to be the first step in the NWRO counter-attack and the first step in the new Right to Welfare Campaign. It was to be a national media event announcing to the rest of the country that "repressive moves will meet with massive resistance." ^{33.} In order

33. NWRO. "Operation Nevada". (January 27, 1971) mimeo letter.

to ensure both the national coverage and the personnel needed to win in Nevada, the NCC meeting, which had been scheduled for New Jersey was switched to Las Vegas, the Western Regional Conference was also scheduled for Las Vegas, left-liberal celebrities were recruited for the effort and the national staff was shipped wholesale into Nevada. The mobilization of legal staff was accomplished through the efforts of Ed Sparer and the Columbia Center who recruited some 40 lawyers and 70 law students for the campaign. An all out effort was being made to make an example out of Nevada for the rest of the nation.

OPERATION NEVADA

Operation Nevada was in many ways a "classic" NWRO campaign. Although it was initiated and conducted by the national headquarters and did not involve a "benefit-need" issue, the campaign did utilize the tactics of combining disruptive, street-level political action with legal action in the administrative and judicial system, which had become a standard NWRO strategy.

The political action was centered in the streets. It was intense, short-term and disruptive. Within a short period of 7 weeks, Operation Nevada mobilized 2 major street marches and 10 other demonstrations involving some 2,500 protesters and resulting in close to 100 arrests. The initial focus of the street action was the local welfare office in Las Vegas, but it soon spread to the administrator's private home, the Las Vegas streets and its casinos and hotels. The street action succeeded in closing down the local welfare office, major highway arterials in Las Vegas and in "liberating" a major gambling casino.

The legal effort, which went on simultaneously with the street-level political action, focused on the administrative mechanism of the fair hearing within the Nevada State Welfare Division's system and on the judicial system at the federal district court level. Because of the limited size of the local WRO affiliate, this legal effort began with an all-out "hunt" for welfare recipients effected by the terminations and budget reductions so that they could be informed of their legal rights to a fair hearing and ended with the enforcement of an October, 1970 restraining order which reinstated many of those terminated by the administrative audit. The legal strategy was to get the terminated recipients back onto the welfare rolls and invalidate the budget reductions through procedural legal action and then to protect these gains through substantive legal action.

Political Action

"It is our experience that when peoples' economic interests are threatened, they respond to our legitimate demands."

- George Wiley, March, 1971 ^{34.}

The above statement by Dr. Wiley made at the height of the Operation Nevada campaign is, of course, a truism. The real question is HOW will "they" respond. Will they respond to the "legitimate demands" of the welfare recipients with measures adversely or beneficially effecting the position of the welfare recipients. The use of disruptive street tactics by NWRO during Operation Nevada implied that the NWRO leadership assumed that these tactics would have a beneficial effect on their struggle in Nevada to restore the terminations and budget cuts.

34. Patty Lee Parmalee. "Welfare protests open spring offensive in Nevada", Guardian (March 27, 1971) p. 7 & 14.

The mere presence of the Operation Nevada campaign with its attendant local press coverage, which was considerable, demonstrations and street marches can easily be seen as potentially disruptive and threatening to "economic interests" who rely mainly on tourist trade for their lucrative income. Las Vegas and Reno, Nevada, therefore, provided a rich environment within which a small amount of street-level action could have a highly disruptive effect.

Political action began at the local offices of the Nevada State Welfare Division in Las Vegas, and they were kept under consistent pressure for the entire 7 week period. Following the weekend meeting of the NCC and the Western Regional Conference, 300 to 400 persons picketed the offices of Vincent Fallon, District Office Manager, on February 8, 1971 and demanded complete reinstatement of those terminated and the removal of Dr. Miller from office.^{35.} According to Mr. Fallon's affidavit the local offices were "forcibly" occupied and the "offices and equipment thereof were physically disrupted and confidential records of the Defendants were removed."^{36.} There were no arrests and the demonstrators gave the Welfare Division one week to act on their demands.^{37.}

The initial reaction of the welfare administration to the launching of Operation Nevada was an attack on NWRO at the state level and a restriction of access to welfare recipients' records on the local level. Dr. Miller charged that NWRO was a "master of distortion of facts" which had been "nailed" by his administrative audit and now were "sending in rabble rousers to distort the facts and twist them" and lawyers who

35. Stephen Bjorklund. "Operation Nevada", WIN (April 7, 1971) p. 8.

36. Vincent Fallon. "Affadavit in Support of Temporary Restraining Order", US District Ct. (March 24, 1971). p. 2.

were trying to force their attentions on clients" and "coerce(d) some welfare mothers to take legal counsel."^{38.} On February 10, 1971 when 11 welfare mothers and their 5 legal representatives appeared at Mr. Fallon's office to review their case records, Mr. Fallon refused to meet with them because "I would not meet with 30 or 40 persons whose emotions were running high" and because the recipients did not have "notarized authorizations". The new requirement of a notarized authorization, Mr. Fallon explained, was "essential to protect the welfare clients' privacy."^{39.} Later that night, a joint press release was issued by Dr. Miller and Keith McDonald, State Welfare Board Chairman, directed at the release of client information to "out of state people." The statement said that "We do not intend to reply to requests made by out of state people that we are not obligated to. We do not intend to respond to their threats and demands."^{40.}

True to their pledge, one week later, 250 to 300 people returned to Mr. Fallon's office where they "totally occupied the waiting room area"^{41.} and again stated their demands. When there were no concessions forthcoming, the NWRO leadership announced that "the case would be taken up in the streets, by the people, on the Las Vegas Strip."^{42.}

38. Bobbe Dabling. "National Welfare Group Sending Task Force Here", Las Vegas Sun. (February, 1971) p. 4.

39. _____ . "Welfare Squabble Stalemate", Las Vegas Sun (Feb. 11, 1971). p. 4

40. Ibid., p. 1.

41. Vincent Fallon. Affidavit. Op. Cit.

42. Stephen Bjorklund. "Operation Nevada", Op. Cit.

Buoyed up by the presence of national leadership from the student (NSA), peace (PCPJ) and civil rights (SCLC) movements, NWRO brought the case to the "streets" and attacked the "economic interests" directly. Following a Friday night rally at the University of Nevada, 1000 marchers - half of them Black women - marched the two miles down the "strip" on Saturday, March 6th.^{43.} Although civil disobedience had been planned outside the Caesar's Palace, several hundred people "spontaneously" entered Caesar's Palace "causing the first closing of the gambling tables since Martin Luther King's assassination three years before."^{44.} After Dr. Wiley announced that "We have taken Caesar's Palace!" and Dr. Ralph Abernathy delivered a speech inside the casino, the protesters left peacefully with no arrests and no police confrontation.

One week later, on Saturday, March 13th, the target was Howard Hughes' Sands Hotel and the response to the "legitimate demands" was stiffer. This time several hundred demonstrators marched down the "strip" and tried to enter the hotel. Hotel security guards piled furniture against the doors, glass doors were broken and the demonstrators retreated to the streets where they conducted a sit-in that closed that section of the Strip to traffic and resulted in 86 arrests for "failure to disperse."^{45.}

NWRO and the People's Coalition (PCPJ) issued a nationwide call for a massive march on March 27th in Las Vegas, but until that time the focus of disruption shifted back to the welfare department and the administrators in charge. The confrontation was growing, however, and

43. Ibid.

44. Patty Lee Parmalee. Op. Cit. p.7.

45. Ibid.

civil disobedience and police arrests continued. On Wednesday, March 17th, demonstrators occupied the waiting room of the Las Vegas Welfare office and refused to move at closing time. They were forcibly removed and many were arrested. The next day 50 more demonstrators again returned to Mr. Fallon's office where they broke into the office area, disrupting it, and Mr. Fallon was "personally struck, mauled, assaulted, pushed and physically dragged from his upstairs office through the corridor to the stairway and then down the stairway to a point where police officers and other staff personnel rescued your affiant from further physical and verbal abuse."^{46.} This action resulted in 12 more arrests.

Nonetheless, the Operation Nevada was not through with Mr. Fallon. On the next day, Friday March 19, 1971, 40 demonstrators returned to Mr. Fallon's home for the second time during the campaign where they "demonstrated, shouted, chanted and disrupted the peace" of Mr. Fallon and neighborhood.⁴⁷ There were no arrests, but the demonstrators had succeeded in forcing the welfare administration to officially close down the Las Vegas welfare office. On Monday, March 22, 1971 demonstrators who had come to picket the local office found that it was closed.

The next time the office opened, however, it was to process the victory of Operation Nevada. On March 19, 1971, the very day demonstrators visited Mr. Fallon's home, Federal District Court Judge, Roger Foley,

46. Vince Fallon. Affidavit. Op Cit. p. 4.

47. Ibid.

ordered "3000 Nevada welfare recipients put back on welfare and said the state had to pay them the money withheld since their checks were stopped in December."⁴⁸ This was the beginning of the end for a week and a half later State attorney's filed a "consent judgement" with the district court that closing approximated the demands of Operation Nevada.⁴⁹

It would be quite difficult to assess the interconnection between the disruptive, street-level political action and the legal decision of March 19th which was a victory for NWRO. Clearly, the consistency of the demonstrations and the commitment of NWRO to keep it up, e.g. the scheduled march for March 27th, at the very least created pressure for "something to be done" about the situation. Although Operation Nevada was virtually ignored by the eastern press, the local Nevada papers gave the campaign consistent and favorable coverage. Perhaps one indicator was the rapidity with which the federal judge came to a decision followed closely by the state's "consent judgement" and the final ruling of the 3 judge federal panel. The substance of that first legal decision by Judge Foley that set the stage for "total victory" seemed to be the result of the legal groundwork done by the Clark County Legal Services, under the direction of Jack Anderson, rather than the political pressure created by NWRO's disruptive effect on the Las Vegas economy.

The inclusion of restoration of budget cuts in the state's consent judgement, which was not mandated by the federal court action, however, was another indicator of the political might of the NWRO disruption.

48. San Francisco Chronicle. "U.S. Judge Overturns Nevada Welfare Cutoffs", (March 20, 1971).

49. Chris Chrystal. "State Concedes Welfare Battle", Las Vegas Sun (April 2, 1971). p. 1.

This inclusion was a purely political decision and clearly a state move to halt further disruption by NWRO, which was not satisfied with the mere reinstatement of those terminated. The substantive decision that led to this inclusion, however, was legal in nature and a result of the legal strategy devised by the NWRO-Operation Nevada lawyers.

Legal Action

The court effort on the part of the Operation Nevada legal team began the same day that the National Coordinating Committee (NCC) of NWRO met in Las Vegas. The legal action was concerned with reinstating those welfare recipients who had been terminated from the welfare rolls. The legal team first sought this relief by filing a motion to show cause why Dr. Miller should not be held in contempt of an October, 1970 Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) and then, after meeting resistance to the contempt charge, shifted to filing a motion to enforce the TRO. This latter tact proved successful, but it only effected those recipients who had been terminated. Capitalizing on the strength of the Operation Nevada political strength, the legal team negotiated a consent judgement with the state's attorneys that also covered those whose budgets were reduced, and this consent judgement was upheld by a three judge federal panel in mid-April, 1971. The basis of the Operation Nevada legal effort, however, pre-dated the campaign itself. In the Fall of 1970 the Legal Aid Society of Clark County, Nevada brought a suit against Dr. Miller and the Nevada State

Welfare Board in U.S. District Court for the District of Nevada. The law suit, which was on behalf of Johnnie B. Woods, a welfare mother, and "for all others similarly situated", sought a TRO on the basis that a predetermination hearing, prior to the termination of her welfare assistance, is required by the due process clause of the fourteenth amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The suit, which was based on a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Goldberg v. Kelly* (March 23, 1970), was accepted by District Judge Roger Foley; and on October 1, 1970, he issued a TRO which temporarily enjoined and restrained Dr. Miller and the Nevada State Welfare Board "from proceeding to terminate or effecting termination of Plaintiff's welfare benefits or the welfare benefits of the class she represents (emphasis added) until such time as they have afforded to Plaintiff and the class she represents a prior hearing consistent with due process..."^{50.}

The TRO issued by Judge Foley outlined a 5 point procedure that would be "consistent with due process." This procedure mandated that the recipients must be provided with:^{51.}

"1. written notice, at least 7 days prior to the proposed effective date of any action, informing the recipient that his grant is proposed to be terminated, of the reasons for the proposed action, that he may request a hearing, that assistance will be continued pending the hearing and until notice of the decision is mailed to him, of the method of obtaining a hearing, that he may be represented by others, including legal counsel, and that he may bring witnesses to testify on his behalf;

"2. an informal hearing that includes the right to appear in person and be represented by others, the right to present oral and documentary evidence and oral argument, the right to bring witnesses, the right to examine and question the authenticity of welfare department documents and records, an impartial hearing officer, and a decision based solely on the evidence presented at the hearing and including a statement of the facts on which the decision is based;

50. Temporary Restraining Order. *Woods v. Miller*. US District Court, Nevada. (October 1, 1970) p. 1

51. *Ibid.* p.2.

"3. written notice to the recipient and his representative of the hearing officer's decisions;

"4. continuation of assistance until notice of the decision is mailed to the recipient or his representative or until the proposed effective date of termination, whichever is later; and

"5. an opportunity to request a fair hearing before the state agency if the recipient is aggrieved by the pre-termination hearing."

In response to this federal court order, the Nevada State Welfare Administration, on October 16, 1970, issued District Office Instruction #48 which "spelled out in detail" the procedures to be followed in termination and designed Form 2-049(Notice of Action Taken) to comply with the notice requirements of the TRO.^{52.} This form was then used by the Welfare Administration in its termination procedures.

The TRO, which was continued throughout the remainder of 1970, did not, of course, mean that the Welfare Administration was enjoined from terminating welfare recipients. Dr. Miller's administrative audit was continuing during this time and so were terminations of welfare recipients, which culminated in Dr. Miller's January 8th announcement that 22% (3,000 people) had been terminated from the rolls and 4,000 other recipients have had their budgets reduced due to failure to report income from other sources. It was at this time that NWRO began its preliminary legal investigation and set the stage for the next legal effort to enforce the TRO.

The legal effort, then, which began during Operation Nevada was based on an attempt to enforce an October, 1970 TRO. When the legal team went into court on February 5, 1971, they filed a motion to show cause

52. Robert List, Attorney General, State of Nevada. "Memorandum in Opposition to Plaintiffs' Motion to Enforce Temporary Restraining Order," Woods v. Miller. US District Court. (March 9, 1971). p. 2.

why Dr. Miller should not be held in contempt for violating the October, 1970, TRO, and asked the court for relief by reinstatement of all those ADC mothers who had been terminated since the TRO was established. Judge Foley, however, was not receptive to this approach. On February 16, 1971, Judge Foley chided the Operation Nevada lawyers for continuously citing Dr. Miller for contempt, "But holding Mr. Miller in contempt and even putting him in jail, if such a drastic remedy were necessary, won't help one of these mothers and the children. From the point of view of the bench, you often see things a little clearer than an adversary before you."⁵³ On this same date, Judge Foley began to question whether he wasn't premature in granting a class action as part of the October, 1970, TRO, and therefore dissolved the October, 1970, Temporary Restraining Order.

The Operation Nevada legal team moved quickly to deal with these two points and within a weeks time had reestablished the TRO and filed another law suit to find relief for those terminated. On February 19, 1971, Judge Foley reinstated the TRO nunc pro tunc and defined the "class" as "all welfare recipients who have been receiving public assistance since October 1, 1970." Now that the basis for reinstatement of all those terminated had been re-gained the legal team, on February 23, 1971, filed a motion to enforce the temporary restraining order instead of relying on a motion to show cause for contempt. Now the stage was set for substantive legal arguments on both sides.

53. Ibid., p. 18.

On March 1 and March 9, 1971 the plaintiffs' (NWRO) and the defendants (Dr. Miller) submitted their respective arguments (memoranda) for and against the enforcement of the TRO. In essence, the plaintiffs' argued for enforcement of the TRO, "alleging that the benefits of certain recipients have been cut off in violation thereof. Plaintiff seeks an order of this Court restoring these recipients to the welfare rolls and directing that they be paid an amount equivalent to the public assistance payments they would have received had they not been terminated."^{54.} The defendants argued that even though the court has the power to enforce its own order this was not the issue. The defendants asserted that only before a three judge panel after a full evidentiary hearing could enough information be supplied for an enforcement judgement. They argued that the court would be putting the "cart before the horse" and, in any case, the defendants has complied with the TRO and the notice requirements of due process of law. Each side filed numerous affidavits to support their respective arguments. The plaintiffs' filed 58 affidavits from welfare recipients who had been terminated alleging the lack of 7 day notices, coercion, no mention of fair hearing rights, threats of prosecution if a fair hearing appeal was filed, etc. The defendants filed affidavits from caseworkers who swore that "It has been my experience that the vast majority of recipients do not apply for a fair hearing because they recognize that the facts upon which the Welfare Division was acting were correct."^{55.}

Ten days after the defendants had filed their memorandum Judge Foley ruled in favor of the plaintiffs. The Court was concerned solely with the question of "whether the notices of termination of the aforesaid

^{54.} U.S. District Judge, Roger Foley, "Order on Plaintiff's Motion to Enforce Temporary Restraining Order" (March 10, 1971) p. 2.

OPERATION NEVADA AND ITS AFTERMATH

Operation Nevada was not only an attempt to offset the actions of Dr. Miller in Nevada, it was also a demonstration project, intended to develop a new national approach that would deal with similar state actions against welfare recipients. The 7 week campaign was a spectacular success for NWRO in terms of gaining its immediate goals, even though these gains were completely wiped out by the political and legal actions that followed in the wake of the campaign. Also, the idiosyncracies of the Nevada crisis, both legal and political, made it difficult to develop a new national approach to similar situations, if indeed, that was the intention. If it had not been for the fact that a strong WRO and Legal Services was left behind in Nevada, Operation Nevada could have been a total failure.

Immediate goals

"NWRO is rushing assistance to Nevada to see that all who were illegally purged from the assistance rolls are immediately reinstated."

-George Wiley, Johnnie Tillmon
January 27, 1971

The immediate goals of Operation Nevada can be stated as the reinstatement of those terminated, the restoration of the budget cuts and the challenging of Dr. Miller's administrative audit. Stated as such, these goals were accomplished during the time span of Operation Nevada. The enforcement order of Judge Foley's accomplished the first goal and the semi-political stipulation, negotiated with state officials, accomplished the second goal.

The third goal, the challenging of Dr. Miller's administrative audit, was also successful. Dr. Miller, when he announced the results of his

AFDC recipients comply with the notice requirements of the temporary restraining order and, in turn, whether the notice requirements are necessary in order to afford the recipients due process of law."^{56.}

The Court found that "in many cases" notices were not mailed or delivered 7 days before termination date and that in many cases notices were received after benefits had been terminated. The Court also found that in all cases the termination notice did not state how a pretermination hearing could be obtained and, "in understandable language" state that benefits would continue pending a pretermination hearing. Noting the haste and sheer number of terminations, Judge Foley concluded that "the Administrator and his staff ran roughshod over the constitutional rights of eligible and ineligible recipients alike."^{57.}

The reaction on the part of NWRO to Judge Foley's decision was jubilant but cautious. Because the original TRO had referred to only those who had been terminated from the welfare rolls, those recipients who had their budgets reduced as a result of the administrative audit, approximately 4,000 people, were not affected by the legal decision. The restoration of these budgets, however, was a prime demand of the Operation Nevada campaign. Although a planned demonstration at the Mustang Ranch near Reno, a house of prostitution, was called off, Dr. Wiley promised more trouble if the Governor was not flexible. "Now it's up to the governor (Mike O'Callaghan) to keep his promise to the people and do what the court says, or we'll be back on the streets and there will be more trouble."^{58.}

56. U.S. District Judge, Roger Foley. Op. Cit. p.2

57. Ibid., p. 11

58. Chris Chrystal. "Wiley Says Edict Better Be Enforced," Las Vegas Sun (March 20, 1971).

"Total Victory for NWRO" was only two weeks away. On April 1, 1971, the Nevada state attorney general's office filed a stipulation with the U.S. District Court which was a testament to the political might of Operation Nevada. Dr. Wiley called the stipulation the "final step of a victory over repression";^{59.} and the staff writer for the Las Vegas Sun accurately described the feat, "The welfare rights protesters have whipped the State of Nevada, which yesterday conceded defeat in a battle fought in the courts, on the Strip and in the halls of the state welfare office."^{60.}

The stipulation, which was ratified by the three judge panel on April 8, 1971, was drafted after negotiations between Operation Nevada lawyers and state officials, including Governor O'Callaghan.^{61.} The stipulation included not only the reinstatement of those terminated, as ordered by Judge Foley, but also the elimination of budget reductions that occurred since October 1, 1970. Furthermore, the stipulation provided for procedures to be followed in termination or budget reductions that went beyond the due process procedures outlined in the October TRO. For example, the procedures to be followed were for all categorical assistance programs, not just ADC; also, the time period before the proposed agency action was raised from 7 days (TRO) to 15 days, the name, address and phone number of the Legal services office was included on the form, the reason for agency action had to give not only factual basis but legal basis also, and finally a new notice form was devised and became a part of the legal judgement.^{62.}

59. Chris Chrystal. "State Concedes Welfare Battle", Las Vegas Sun. (April 2, 1971) p.4

60. Ibid., p. 1

61. Ibid., p. 4

administrative audit, he stated that "about 3,000 men, women and children" had been dropped from the welfare rolls "on grounds that they have been cheating the state at a rate of about \$1-million a year," by not reporting earned income.^{63.} This allegation of cheating, although not the subject of legal action, was substantially challenged as a result of the campaign. An HEW administrative team dispatched from San Francisco in February, 1971, to "audit the audit" found that "the rate of ineligibility which can be properly derived from the State Review is an estimated 3.8%."^{64.} Besides challenging the justification of the terminations, i.e. unreported income ("cheating"), the HEW report found that the errors found in Dr. Miller's administrative audit were in a "significant proportion of these cases" the fault of state administrators and not welfare recipients. Furthermore, an insignificant number of the alleged cheaters were ever referred to the state attorney for prosecution. After the Woods decision, the welfare division did refer over 100 cases to the District Attorney's officer for fraud prosecution. However, 75% of these cases were sent back to the welfare division because they were "utterly without merit."^{65.} The five prosecutions that did commence were all dismissed.

The fourth immediate goal of the campaign, although not a formal one, but one emphasized by Edward Sparer, was perhaps the most important of all. This goal was to leave behind Operation Nevada a strong local WRO and Legal Services. Without the success of this goal, the vast organizational commitment of NWRO to the Nevada crisis would be open to serious question.

63. New York Times. "Nevada Welfare Cuts," (January 12, 1971) p. 20.

64. HEW. "Eligibility of Families Receiving Aid To Families With Dependent Children in Nevada in December 1970." Report of an Evaluation. April, 1971. p. 2.

65. Jack Anderson. Letter to Dan Leahy. May 24, 1972.

Clark County Welfare Rights Organization

"Mr. Miller's role in radicalizing the poor in Nevada parallels the job done by Judge Julius Hoffman in Chicago."

- President Ruby Duncan, CCWRO.

The membership of the Clark County Welfare Rights Organization (CCWRO) before Operation Nevada has been estimated at between 7 and 20 members. Since Operation Nevada its membership has not only grown to over 600 members, but it has become an active lobby group and community organization with the help of the Clark County Legal Services Program. In the summer of 1971, CCWRO successfully negotiated with the Clark County commissioners for substantial code revisions that were of a great benefit to local poor people. It also won the establishment of an advisory board to the commissioners with 50% representation. Following up the code revisions and with the help of a \$15,000 grant to its affiliate, Food For All, CCWRO waged successful campaigns around the issue of hunger that resulted in 66. "\$2,000,000 for food programs" from private and public sources in Nevada. This success in turn has led to a proposal called Operation Life which is seeking to renovate a hotel that will be used as a major community center serving the poor communities in Nevada. The proposal has received wide support from business and government representatives and is close to becoming a reality. CCWRO has also become a potent force in Democratic politics when it successfully got a resolution passed in both the Clark County and Washoe County Democratic Conventions calling for a Special Session of the Nevada legislature to deal with the welfare crisis.

The significance of this local development is all the more important when it is realized that the 7 week Operation Nevada campaign conducted

66. Jack Anderson. "Clark County Welfare Rights Organization Succeeds in Having County Code Revised," Clark County Legal Services Program. (mimeo) no date. Ruby Duncan. Report on Food For All activities. CCWRO. May 15, 1972.

by national NWRO was met with a political and legal reaction that reversed the first two "immediate" goals of the campaign.

Political and Legal Reaction: The government's reaction

The reaction to the poor people's victory was severe. Through a series of legislative actions and administrative policy shifts the reinstatements and restorations won in Operation Nevada were negated soon after the campaign ended.

At the very height of Operation Nevada, in fact, on the same day that the "total victory" was accomplished through the stipulation agreement, the Governor's "welfare crackdown package" was passed in the state assembly. The three bills, all of which eventually became law, gave the Welfare Department the power to subpoena any of a recipient's personal records under penalty of termination, made welfare fraud a felony, punishable by a one year sentence or \$5,000 fine, and constituted the court instead of the Welfare Board the place to appeal a termination.^{67.} Added to this, the money which was to be appropriated for a \$5 increase per recipient^{68.} was diverted to pay the costs of Dr. Miller's legally defined blunder. Thus, not only did Nevada state welfare recipients pay double for Dr. Miller's actions, but they also were intimidated by new laws which assumed the recipients were "cheating", a charge never proved and substantially challenged by the HEW report and the welfare divisions own actions. Furthermore, the administrative appeal process, which they had used so effectively during the campaign, was made more difficult.

67. Las Vegas Review Journal. "Controversial Welfare Bills Pass Lower House, (April 2, 1971)

68. _____ . "Lawmakers decide not to increase welfare pay, (April 2, 1971).

Although these punitive actions by the state legislature were in response to the Operation Nevada campaign, they did not eradicate the "total victory" won by the campaign; this was accomplished by a joint legislative-administrative action. This action resulted in the fact that by July, 1971, "all but some 34 of the reinstated cases were reterminated and all of the cases that had received higher grants were returned to their proper grant amounts." In other words, the "total victory" won in April, 1971, was eliminated by July, 1971.^{69.}

The retermination of recipients, of course, was threatened throughout the campaign both in court and in the press. In court, the state attorneys' stated, "It is know to all parties that any re-instatement would be purely temporary. Since it is the Defendants' contention that Plaintiffs are not lawfully entitled to public assistance, they will most assuredly renotify any parties reinstated by this court that they will be terminated."^{70.} In the press, after the stipulation was agreed to, Keith MacDonald, chairman of the State Welfare Board, commented that "We will continue to remove ineligible recipients, but ... we are going to be much more diligent in complying with what the judge says is the law,"^{71.} and Dr. Miller stated that "welfare recipients who have cheated will still be cut down or cut out, but 'this time we'll dot the i's and cross the t's'"^{72.}

69. David T. Tomlinson. Chief, Eligibility and Payments, State of Nevada, Welfare Division. Letter to Dan Leahy. (April 3, 1972).

70. Memorandum in Opposition. Op. Cit. p. 13.

71. Las Vegas Review Journal. "State Says Will Restore Reduced Welfare Checks," (April 2, 1971).

72. Chris Chrystal. "State Concedes Welfare Battle," Las Vegas Sun (April 2, 1971) p.4.

These threats of retermination based on the same grounds of "cheating" were never carried out. Apparently, the fact that the cheating charges were groundless coupled with the stricter termination notice requirements won by Operation Nevada protected the welfare recipients from such action. However, confronted with this reality, the state merely changed the law to make the reterminations possible.

The same legislature that passed Governor O'Callaghan's "welfare crackdown package" also passed bill, AB 319. Among other things, this bill "removed the floor from the grants, imposed a ceiling, and gave the Welfare Division sole discretion in expending the funds appropriated."^{73.}

Using this discretion, the State Welfare Division instituted a new policy by which outside resources of recipients are subtracted from the grant instead of from the standard of need, in effect lowering the income eligibility. Then, on the basis of this new policy, the Welfare Division "terminated or reduced the grants of over 60% of all ADC recipients,"^{74.} effecting mainly those people who had been the beneficiaries of Operation Nevada. Thus, although not one of these people were terminated on the basis of fraud, the threat of retermination and budget reduction was accomplished.

The reaction on the part of the state government could only have been expected by the NWRO leadership. Throughout the history of the welfare rights movement, such reaction has circumvented the victories of NWRO, e.g. the flat grant. Although NWRO strategy at the local level could not be expected to nullify the power of state legislature, it did protect

73. CCWRO. "The Welfare Crisis: Dilemma in Nevada," (February, 1972) p. 3.

74. Ibid., p. 4.

the recipients from a repeat of similar action (i.e., terminations and reductions based on fraud charges) on the part of the Nevada State Welfare Division, and it did protect them by ensuring the existence of a strong local WRO and Legal Services to continue to fight after the national NWRO withdrew. If these two "protections" had not been accomplished, then, in the light of the actions by the state legislature, national NWRO's efforts would have spelt disaster for recipients at the local level.

National goals

"We have won a victory in Nevada and it should put New York, California and other states contemplating similar cuts on notice."

-George Wiley, April 2, 1971⁷⁵

In a very real sense, Operation Nevada was suppose to be a national event. The alacrity and enormity of NWRO's action in Nevada can only be explained by this fact. It was hoped that the setting, Las Vegas and Reno, the presence of movement stars, and the possibility of legal victory, would provide the stage for a nationally publicized media event which would serve notice to the "country that repressive moves will meet with massive resistance."^{76.} The media, however, did not cooperate^{77.} on the national level, and, even if it had, the threat of massive resistance, along the lines of other "Operation Nevadas", would not have materialized. Despite the hopes of some participants that Operation Nevada would develop a new strategy for moving against similar massive cuts in other states,^{78.} the leadership of NWRO had already decided on a

75. Las Vegas Review J. "State Says Will Restore Reduced Wlfare checks," (April 2, 1971)

76. NWRO. "Operation Nevada," (January 27, 1971) mimeo.

77. Sylvia A. Law. "Crisis in Welfare," Civil Liberties #279(July, 1971)

78. Ibid .

national strategy and that was lobbying at the federal level. By May, 1971, the NCC had decided to go back to lobbying at Washington, D.C., and NWRO continued this activity until the time of its national convention in Rhode Island.

Operation Nevada, then, was not the beginning of a new strategy for NWRO, but rather a rescue operation made possible by the Congressional calendar. It did prove that the national NWRO could still move swiftly into crisis situations, but it demonstrated more conclusively that the national NWRO pinned most of its hopes for a solution to the welfare crisis on action taken by the federal government through welfare reform legislation.