

## ORGANIZING IN THE NORTHERN GHETTOS - SNCC STYLE

The following article appeared in New York City's Village Voice newspaper. Many of the organizing tactics, as well as the philosophical ideas behind them are similar to the tactics and ideas of some SNCC people. This article should be read side-by-side with Stokeley's talk at the SSOC conference (enclosed) to see the similarity between those ideas.

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### "A Mystique Takes Root in a Black City of the North"

by Jack Newfield

Newark's sprawling Negro slum (Newark, New Jersey) looks like every other black ghetto of the North. The tenements are run down and their hallways stink from uncollected garbage and stale urine. By noon the shabby taverns are filled with the jobless and the hopeless. The prices advertised in the windows of the supermarkets are a few pennies higher than in the white section of the city. Children fight with a skill beyond their years. And everywhere ... is the dirt and soot that gives the ghetto its character.

But two things stamp Newark's Clinton Hills as distinct from Harlem or Bedford Stuyvesant, or Chicago's South Side. One is that the City of Newark is now more than half Negro and Puerto Rican, though only one of its City Councilmen is Negro. The other is that a band of 10 white college students have moved into Clinton Hills, opened a storefront headquarters, and begun to organize the poor, the unemployed and under-educated of the ghetto.

What is unique about the Newark Community Union Project (NCUP) is that it REPRESENTS THE FIRST ATTEMPT TO ORGANIZE AN URBAN NEGRO GHETTO ON THE MYSTICAL, ANARCHISTIC STYLE SNCC ... USED IN MISSISSIPPI, rather than on the familiar pattern of hate and race pride used by certain civil rights personalities of the Northern ghettos.

The young staff members of NCUP are trying to organize upon an ideality of being poor and powerless, rather than upon race. They raise questions about democratic control of all the governmental decisions that affect an individual life, rather than on specifically civil rights issues. They have inherited SNCC's mystical faith in "the people" to make all the decisions. The project has no chairman, and all decisions are made at regular Tuesday steering committee meetings, which theoretically are open to all of Clinton Hills 25,000 residents. And like SNCC's field secretaries, the NCUP staff live in the community and eat their meals either in the storefront or with local families, and they draw \$10 -a-week salaries, most of which seems to go toward cigarettes.

The Newark project is one of eight such experiments sponsored by the Students for a Democratic Society.... While most of the projects are floundering and the Philadelphia one just closed down, NCUP seems to be thriving... An average of 50 people attend the regular Tuesday night meetings, about 400 are considered "organized and loyal," and several thousand have been contacted by mailings, leaflets, and demonstrations. The project has been ... praised and attacked... even by a socialist intellectual, who says:

"The project is well motivated, but it's just another symptom of the Narodnkism that is infecting student radicals as a result of SNCC. They have no program, no concept of coalition with other groups, and no strategy. You just can't go out and organize the lumpenproletariat with mysticism."

[The article goes on to describe the people with whom NCUP project works -- how they live, their poverty, and so forth. It describes also what their regular weekly meetings are like. Once a month, at these meetings, a new steering committee chairman is elected to encourage leadership skills.]

[Tom Hayden, of SDS and SNCC, described the project this way:]

"Just like SNCC, we are raising the question of how do people alter the condition of their lives and whom should power be responsible to. We are trying to break down the barriers to decision-making. We are saying people like Jesse Allen [one of the residents of the ghetto] should make decisions, but by society's standards he is the least qualified to make decisions. And by saying that, we are striking at all of society's pretenses, respectability, and hierarchy.

Most ghetto movements are organized around charismatic leaders, synthetic crises, and immediate demands. We're trying to organize so that people develop a consciousness of themselves as poor and powerless, and so that we nurture whatever democratic and poetic potentialities everyone has in them." ....