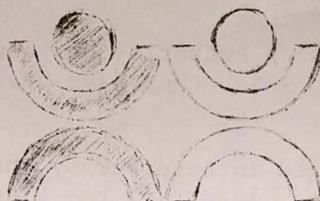


UNDERSTANDING



THE COMMUNICATION MEDIA FOR OPERATION UNDERSTANDING
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Notes, books, newspaper clippings all sat before me during the holidays and as the New Year began I attempted to get them together, to bring Newark, its needs and the crisis of its people back into focus. Somehow, be it lethargia or simply a loss of the feel for what I was doing - nothing happened - everything just sat...until Friday. On Friday I went to court...

STELLA WRIGHT RENT STRIKE

Promptly at 2 p.m. as Judge Ward Herbert had ordered, a patient group of tenants from Stella Wright Homes assembled in the hall outside room 316 at the Hall of Records in Newark. They were still waiting there at 3:30 when the two cases scheduled to be heard after them were finally finished. At twenty-five minutes to four, Mr. Brach from the Newark Housing Authority stated his case concerning the monies withheld by tenants during the rent strike and finished at 4:05 p.m. At that point the judge stated that it seemed to be a very simple matter that he had to decide... Whether or not to put the money allegedly withheld into receivership. This, without having even heard from the other side...our side. Mr. Michael Callan, lawyer for the tenants, asked to be heard and informed Judge Ward Herbert that the funds were being maintained in a safe and secure manner, producing a signed affidavit to this effect. He also pointed out to the judge that the Housing Authority would have the court believe that the issues are simple ones. He listed about eight issues relating to the rent strike including Federal-State relations and the conditions under which the tenants are living and asked that the judge hear their side of the situation. Without preamble or politeness the judge said it was obvious Mr. Callan was "going to make a long drawn out affair of it", that it was ten after four, that he was tired and he'd continue on Monday, and I quote, "I've had enough for today", and he turned his back and walked out.

Even to my inexperienced eye this was obviously not the polite formal, impartial behavior I would expect in a courtroom. At least a judge is paid to be tired. The tenants had a long day too, and none of them were being paid for the day off which they had to take in order to be in court. This was a real hardship for them. Children also had to be taken care of by others. It was not easy for the 50 people who sat in that hallway to be there... And at 9:30 a.m. on January 19th they will have to be there again.

The coverage of this "hearing" by the Newark Star Ledger voiced only the Housing Authority's position, said nothing of the tenants side of the situation, and the fact that they had no chance to present arguments and didn't even mention the tenants who waited patiently for justice in their case.

On October 26th, 1971 U. S. District Court Judge Frederick B. Lacey assured the tenants they could expect just treatment no matter which jurisdiction they came under, but after being in State Court on Friday I really wonder.

CRISIS IN THE CITY

For years the Housing Authority has been collecting rents in the projects but the use to which they have been put has never been seen by anyone living there...

In a letter received in December by the Hon. Parren J. Mitchell, House of Representatives, leader of the Black Caucus, from H.U.D.'s Norman V. Watson, in response to an inquiry concerning conditions at Stella Wright, the true picture there was sadly distorted. Rep. Mitchell was told that some of the requests from the tenants have been completed or are near completion and the examples given were of improved interior and exterior project lighting, and construction of a ball field and play area. If you remember from the Day of Judgement in March 1971 - the lights were installed in time for our visit. The ball field was also for visitors to see. The three tenant priorities were security, depopulation and tenant involvement.

H.U.D.'s answer to these three items was that "H.U.D. and the Housing Authority responded to the permissible limits of the law governing maximum funding levels". The fact that these levels were not sufficient to solve the problem was of no concern to them but should concern us. What good is a law if it does not help to solve the problem for which it was drawn?

HUD also authorized the Housing Authority in cooperation with the Mayor's office to select a housing consultant to work with all concerned parties, to recognize their differences, according to the letter it stated "working vigorously with the tenants and Authority staff" he submitted to HUD a "Request for Proposal" for tenant involvement. In actuality he simply looked briefly at the Tenant Association plan, said it would never be accepted for funding and drew up his own, which would have the effect of fragmenting the tenants. There was no "working vigorously with" anyone and the tenants will not have a say in his plan, nor as a result of it.

Concluding, Mr. Watson said "HUD is prepared to do all that is necessary within statutory limits to achieve a better living environment for all Newark Housing Authority tenants, including tenants of Stella Wright Homes." The modernization program never came to pass... the tenant requests are not being solved...how can they say things will get better when they refuse to listen to the people whose lives are involved?

In order to realize the lies and half-truths in this letter one would have to be involved with the situation constantly. Those who are need your support.

If the tenants are ordered to turn over the money from the rent strike and refuse because of the principles involved, some of them may go to jail. The Housing Authority's lawyer stated the fund had a certain psychological status to the tenants, that they felt the less known about it gave them leverage to put right problems at Stella Wright. After seeing Fridays courtroom scene I feel that if they are treated like this with the rent strike going on, they haven't a prayer in the world without one. They were not even recognized as people to whom normal courtesies should be extended. The money was all important, the people were unimportant: We will have to back them firmly from the suburbs if their days in court fail to provide the answer to their search for a decent life.

To have come down to a Day of Judgement is not enough.

YOU MUST DO SOMETHING!!!

Come to the court sessions (call 824-3110 for dates).

Follow the newspaper reports.

Write to HUD concerning funding levels, and if you want them

higher tell Romney so. It's your money. (The Hon. George Romney, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Washington, D. C. 20413)

The tenants are trying to act according to the law, to win their fight in a peaceful, respectful, acceptable manner. But they are continually thwarted, ignored and mistreated in their efforts. How long can those who have the power to change things continue to resort to court action instead? Do they really care about decent living for the tenants?

The law must go beyond the narrow confines of the written word to the expansive needs of human beings in order to really represent justice for all people. Only people, generous caring people, can make it happen. Write to those in Federal positions in Congress, in HUD, and let them know your views. It's important.

BATTLE OF THE SUBURBS

Closely tied in with the Stella Wright Tenant Association's rent strike is the Battle of the Suburbs.

It would seem that 13 storied buildings are not workable as a home for low income families. Although part of the solution is a project like New Community in Newark - three stories high with housing for the elderly as well as low and middle income, the remaining part is to be found in the opening up of the suburbs to these same people. Years of red tape have held up New Community. It could have gone through long ago if its planners had agreed to another high rise building or lesser quality construction. But they don't want another failure like the Projects. They want a good home for needy human beings. Even if this planned community and others like it set the precedent for the future in the cities, other families will need to look to the suburbs for their homes.

It would basically involve two drastic changes to accomplish this:

- 1 - A change in zoning supported state wide
- and 2 - A change in tax structure.

Zoning

Home Rule is President Nixon's answer to accomplishing peaceful integration in the United States. Well maybe we can surprise him by accomplishing the "impossible". The struggle for Open Suburbs has already begun (biblio: Newsweek Cover, November 15, 1971; N. Y. Times Magazine Section, November 7, 1971; The Sunday Record, Opinion Section, November 14th or the Record front page, November 23rd.) It is no longer just a dream. The zoning laws of Mahwah are being attacked in court by the National Committee against Discrimination in Housing and the United Auto Workers. At last a union is representing this area of need of its workers. Coming to their support is the New Jersey Council of Churches and the Bergen-Essex Chapter of the American Jewish Committee as well as the Fair Housing Council of Bergen County. On January 7, 1972 the national, state and county Leagues of Women Voters asked court permission to join the lawsuit. This is the first time that the League, with more than 160,000 numbers in the nation, has entered the mushrooming legal challenge to suburban land-use controls.

Historically, the generally accepted concept of zoning is that it is an instrument for the constructive guidance of land for private uses. In substance, zoning is a form of land use regulation under the police power. It was created by man and it can be changed by man. When it becomes a tool for the exclusion of those people less fortunate and with lower earning power, or those of a different race or color then perhaps zoning becomes not a tool for the betterment of the general welfare of the community, but an immoral facade behind which lies fear and prejudice and selfishness.

Operation Understanding has held four meetings in order to better

understand the problems of zoning - in West Orange on November 15th, in Woodcliff Lake on November 22nd and in Newark at Queen of Angels on December 15th and January 6th. We contacted as many people as possible in the local areas but we want to extend a plea to all of you now to get involved.

We are actively looking for land suitable for developing for low and middle income housing in the suburbs. It should be near transportation and have job prospects located close by. A local support group could help with any zoning problems. If its your town and you want it, it makes a difference. It might be helpful if you get a copy of your own zoning ordinance or become a member of your zoning board as a way of knowing what's happening in your town. Call the office if you have a location which might be suitable. We'll investigate it.

Tax Structure

A report will be issued the second week in February by Gov. Cahill's Tax Study Committee. Former Senate Majority leader Harry L. Sears (R. Morris) Chairman, has voiced the hope that the public will evaluate the full, final report before rendering its opinion. All members of Operation Understanding should read this report.

Sears said the reports of task forces on revenue and schools would necessarily have to dovetail because New Jersey's problems are tied to burdensome property taxes which pay for the costs of running local schools. He noted that California's Supreme Court recently struck down a system of local property taxation and that a New Jersey court is expected to rule shortly on a suit challenging the constitutionality of the formula for funding local education.

If a statewide property tax were recommended it would replace, not be in addition to the present local property tax.

An income tax might also be among the recommendations of the Committee. Gov. Cahill has said he will support an income tax if recommended, so long as the proposal were tied to property tax relief.

The effect of these measures if recommended and successfully voted into law would be that low and moderate income housing would no longer present a tax burden educationally to an individual suburban community.

In order to pass in the legislature your assemblymen and Senators in the State government must know they have favorable support. They can only know that if you write and tell them.

Read the report - write a letter - let those of us to whom much has been given share with those in need.

Watch for the report in the newspapers!

Listed below are the names of your current legislators, write to them at the State House, Trenton, N. J. 08625

Senators:

9th District (Union)

Jerome M. Epstein, R.
Francis X. McDermott, R.
Matthew J. Rinaldo, R.

11th District (Essex)

Ralph C. DeRose, D.
Frank J. Dodd, D.
Michael A. Giuliano, R.
Wynona M. Lipman, D.
James H. Wallwork, R.

10th District (Morris)

Joseph J. Maraziti, R.
Peter W. Thomas, R.

13th District (Bergen)

Garrett W. Hagedorn, R.
Harold C. Hollenbeck, R.
Alfred D. Schiaffo, R.
Frederick E. Wendel, R.
Joseph C. Woodcock, Jr., R.

12th District (Hudson)

James P. Dugan, D.
William F. Kelly, Jr., D.
William V. Musto, D.

Assemblymen:

Union

(9 A Assembly District)
Joseph H. Higgins, D.
Alexander J. Menza, D.
(9B Assembly District)
C. Louis Bassano, R.
Herbert H. Kiehn, R.
(9 C Assembly District)
Peter J. McDonough, R.
Arthur A. Manner, R.

Essex

(11 A Assembly District)
Ronald Owens, D.
George C. Richardson, D.
(11 B Assembly District)
Anthony Imperiale, I.
Frank G. Megaro, D.
(11 C Assembly District)
John N. Dennis, R.
Carl A. Orechio, R.
(11 D Assembly District)
Eldridge Hawkins, D.
Peter G. Stewart, D.
(11 E Assembly District)
Philip D. Kaltenbacher, R.
Thomas H. Kean, R.

Bergen

(13 A Assembly District)
Harold A. Pareti, R.
Peter J. Russo, R.
(13 B Assembly District)
Byron M. Baer, D.
Albert Burstein, D.
(13 C Assembly District)
C. Gus Rys, R.
John A. Spizziri, R.
(13 D Assembly District)
Richard W. De Korte, R.
Charles E. Reid, R.
(13 E. Assembly District)
Edward H. Hynes, D.
Robert C. Veit, R.

Hudson

(12th Assembly District -- At Large)
David Friedland, D.
(12 A Assembly District)
Joseph A. Le Fante, D.
David A. Wallace, D.
(12 B Assembly District)
Michael P. Esposito, D.
William G. Wilkerson, D.
(12C Assembly District)
Silvio J. Failla, D.
Christopher J. Jackman, D.

Morris

(10 A Assembly District)
Josephine S. Margetts, R.
Albert W. Merck, R.
(10 B Assembly District)
Ann Klein, D.
James P. Vreeland, Jr., R.

LATE NEWS ON STELLA WRIGHT RENT STRIKE:

On Wednesday, January 19, 1972, in the Chancery Division of the State Court of Equity, Judge Ward Herbert ruled against the motion of the Newark Housing Authority that the Stella Wright Tenant Association should turn the money it had collected in the period April, 1970 -- January, 1971, to a court appointed receiver. He said he saw no reason for the money to change hands at this time.

As a protection for the N.H.A. he did order the S.W.T.A. to provide the Authority with an accounting for the money it had collected during this period.

He suggested that the case now go to the District State Court to decide on the legitimacy of the strike itself and who is to blame for the conditions and therefore, who is responsible for them.

A large number of tenants were present in court and also a number of people from Operation Understanding. This certainly affected the atmosphere of the court room. This court decision -- which was precedent-setting -- was clearly a victory for us, but we still have a long way to go. STAY WITH US!!