

New Pride in Warren-Forest

Fifth Estate Collective

1970

Last week, some 50 American student radicals experienced the joy of work that was both socially productive and non-alienating.

The students were not part of the Venceremos Brigade. They were mostly individuals from Wayne State University but others were members of organizations such as the White Panthers and the Warren-Forest SMC.

The location was not the sugar cane fields of Cuba, but an alley behind a row of wooden and brick houses along Lincoln Street, south of W. Forest, in an area known on the blueprints as University City II.

Ten years ago, this two-square mile area was declared an Urban Renewal project. This meant that the neighborhood as it existed then was literally condemned to death. Plans called for virtually total demolition of the area, which is now made up of Southern Whites, Blacks and retirees, all working-class poor, factory workers, and unskilled laborers.

The only official plans for the re-development of the land after it is to be completely cleared are those submitted by the community's wealthy neighbor and monopoly landholder, Wayne State University.

The University desires very much to have the land between Cass, Trumbull, Warren, and Canfield to construct student and faculty housing. Essential to its future development is the removal of persons Wayne State views as unesthetic and non-academic.

On Saturday, April 11, Wayne State students who have aligned themselves with the community worked beside Mr. Willie Young and his neighbors, members of People Concerned About Urban Renewal (PCAUR). From 10:00 a.m. until 7:30 p.m., they worked continuously sweeping broken glass, picking up garbage and raking debris from alleys and yards.

The work was laborious and tiresome, muscles were strained to the maximum by people who insisted collectively on working into the evening hours. For nine and a half hours, less time off for hot dogs and pop, people worked, breaking up the monotony of the labor by occasionally trading a broom for a rake or a shovel.

One 64-year-old man kept pace with the students and young boys from the neighborhood, saying he had worked hard all his life, but he had never enjoyed it more. He was still around at 7:30 p.m. to help load the garbage trucks.

For most of the students, it was the hardest physical labor they had performed in a long time, but, as one of them said, expressing the feelings of others, it was the most satisfying.

The students were donating their labor to the residents of University City II who are presently engaged in a struggle for their neighborhood with a liberal institution of higher learning that seeks to rob them of their community.

A few years ago, Wayne State got its way with University City I, when its agents, the City of Detroit Housing Commission, "evicted" more than 2,000 residents north of Warren to build the Matthaei Fieldhouse.

The community was first promised, when the announcement of Urban Renewal came through, that low-cost housing was going to be built on the land. Later on, the University changed its mind and built an Olympic-sized pool and fieldhouse, promising then that the facility would be open to the community.

The community, led by the Young Prides, an emerging organization of White Appalachian youth, is currently demonstrating Sunday afternoons to open Matthaei to all of the kids in the community. Eight of the Young Prides led work crews in last Saturdays clean-up.

The labor Saturday ordinarily would be menial and alienating in a capitalistic society, like performing an inane operation a thousand times each day in an unhealthy factory to make profits for somebody else. However menial labor took on a new and revolutionary meaning as students worked alongside the Young Prides and other community residents.

The people were working, not as wage slaves, but in order to begin taking control over their own lives and environment.

With their clean-up campaign, the residents of University City II have taken the initial step in mobilizing their own community. They have long recognized that so long as Wayne State or the City of Detroit controls their community their needs will never be given priority. They will always be pushed around and Urban Renewed off their land.

“Help us clean up Wayne’s mess” reads a recruitment leaflet that is being distributed on the Wayne campus this week. It goes on to explain that in the ten years that Wayne has controlled the area, they have made a mess of planning for the community.

Wayne’s messing around has turned a once-respectable older community into a city-made slum, a tragic victim of Urban Renewal.

PCAUR is announcing through its actions that it is “repealing” Urban Renewal and “firing” its administration and planners. They have already proved themselves incompetent to meet the needs of people and serve only the interests of corporations and institutions.



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