

“We Will Wield Power”

WCO Leadership Takes Militant Turn

Frank H. Joyce

Struggle, Chairman Mao teaches us, moves in stages.

The West Central Organization (WCO) after a long series of internal problems previously reported in the *Fifth Estate* has moved to a new stage.

It represents an advance for the group.

A new staff headed by, former WCO organizer, 33 year old Lorenzo Freeman, has been created to bring new talent, energy and direction to the organization.

Assembled by Freeman himself, the staff includes Kenneth Cockrell, Jim Williams, Thomas Gonzales, Mrs. Mary Valentine, Mrs. Margaret Shine and Judith Gardner. Only one of the staff members, Miss Gardner, is white. All, according to Freeman, have been selected for their proven talent and ability as grass roots community organizers.

Kenneth Cockrell has long been active in the Detroit Negro community as well as on the Wayne State University Campus where he attended law school. In 1966 he was a candidate for State Representative in the 11th district against Thomas White. More recently, he has served as Vice Chairman of the Inner-City Organizing Committee which is headed by Rev. Albert B. Cleage.

Twenty-two year old Jim Williams has been active in CORE and other militant Detroit Civil Rights organizations.

Thomas Gonzales, a graduate in Sociology from Wayne State University is originally from Laredo, Mexico.

He is a Spanish-speaking Catholic who has worked previously in the Mexican-American Detroit community around Bagley.

Mrs. Shine and Mrs. Valentine have been members and organizers for WCO practically from its inception. Mrs. Valentine has been a popular spokesman for the group and was recently co-director of its staff. She is, under the new arrangement, Director of Fund-Raising and Public Relations.

Following the new staff's selection, they “retreated” to a center in Northern Michigan to hammer out the principles and direction they would take. Following their return to the city, Mr. Freeman commented, “We have a high degree of staff unity. Our meeting was excellent and we are ready to move.”

Move where?

“At this point our purpose is to build the organization beginning with the real have-nots of this community. We will take an interest in all of the issues which affect the people,” Freeman said.

“We are building toward the annual convention of WCO to be held June 18. We hope to bring a new constituency into that convention—people who have not previously been involved in the organization.”

Taking the organization to the grass roots represents a departure from past WCO policy in which the base of the organization consisted primarily of a coalition between already existing community—and out of community—groups. Structural changes in the constitution of WCO to allow new people a substantial voice in the policy making will be recommended if necessary, according to Mr. Freeman.

Lack of funds remains a problem for WCO as with all such groups, although the situation is improved over what it has been in recent months. “We can function freely for at least two months,” explained Freeman. “The budget

is slim but all the old debts are paid off. We still do not have a full-time secretary because we have chosen to hire organizers instead and no money is left over to hire one.”

Asked about black power, which the organization’s professional consultant, Saul Alinsky endorsed in a Detroit appearance with Stokely Carmichael last January, Freeman replied, “We will definitely build power in this community. There will be a lot of black people involved. Draw your own conclusions.”

The change in WCO is reflected in the appearance of its office at Grand River and Trumbull. It is cleaner, more orderly and the atmosphere more intense than before. New telephones have been installed to facilitate communication for the enlarged staff.

A broken toilet bowl used in a WCO demonstration at the Detroit City Council reposes majestically atop a shelf, a symbol of past struggles and those to come.

“The haves,” said Freeman, “the landlords, the mayor, the police, the labor unions and the University, had better stock up on Excedrin...We will emerge with a new organization on June 19.

“We will not be appeased. We will wield power. We will win.”

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