

Off Center

Sol Plafkin

1967

If the once highly-touted, but now quite tarnished “War Against Poverty” has done nothing else, it has provided a new battleground for political bickering—among the poor themselves and among the middle-class citizens who think they’re trying to help the poor.

Probably the greatest boondoggle around here nowadays is the Wayne County Office of Economic Opportunity (WCOEO) program. Designed to serve the “poor” areas in Wayne County outside Detroit, it makes the Detroit poverty program look like a smashing success in contrast.

If you attend a WCOEO meeting, as I did recently in the “suburban” mostly-black ghetto of Inkster, you’re liable to end up very confused as your mind is bombarded with a plethora of phrases: “programs to develop programs”; “the hard-core poor”; “Operation Summertime,” etc.

I attended the meeting in modern Inkster High School because I had heard that WCOEO had accomplished almost nothing during the past several years since LBJ first dramatically launched his War on Poverty. I had also been disturbed by the fact that some of the best community organizers around town, led by Dave Niederhauser (the brilliant former director of the “power-structure”—disturbing West Central Organization), had been forced to resign from WCOEO. Niederhauser and his friends had just been too effective in organizing community people and were also “guilty” of inciting a little bit of “black power consciousness” among those people who are supposed to be among the major beneficiaries of the Poverty program.

The meeting at Inkster was dominated by one Paul Silver—“Hatchet-man” number one for the U.A.W. Silver is a member of the Wayne County Board of Supervisors and chairman of its special committee on WCOEO to make sure that neighborhood people don’t get any improper ideas about controlling their own destiny.

Silver’s major project last year was to thwart the endorsement of George Crockett for Recorder’s Judge in the 17th District Democratic Organization. Fortunately, due to the political acumen of the 17th Young Dems chairman Marty Slobin, Silver’s threats and near-terroristic tactics failed.

Silver is a big, overbearing guy who speaks at a meeting about any time he feels like it—using points of procedure and points of order to get the floor. It was reliably estimated that of 33 individual speeches given at the Inkster meeting, Silver made at least 14 of them and personally insulted at least four members of the committee—including a Catholic priest.

An allegedly independent analysis of the current WCOEO operation was made by Urban Research Associates (or something like that). It is run by some guys (unfortunately, personal friends of mine) who have their desks—guess where?—in Silver’s office at UAW’s Solidarity House.

One of their recommendations was that the Wayne County Board of Supervisors has the power to appoint the WCOEO director in direct conflict with guidelines of the Regional OEO office in Chicago which states that a committee of at least one-third “poor” should make the choice.

The Supervisors have just appointed one Joe Schore to be the new WCOEO director. Schore is an old buddy of Councilman Mel Ravitz, who happens, by the way, to be Chairman of the Wayne County Board of Supervisors.

(Ravitz's whole political career has been intertwined with the U.A.W. and he would like to be the UAW choice for mayor some day. The plot thickens!)

Schore, who has been a parasite on the public payroll for years, handled his part of the meeting abominably. He gave long tirades against "poverty" and against those interlopers who dared to disagree with his paternalistic approach to the problem. He so insulted one Black community leader that she indignantly stalked out of the meeting.

Schore now supervises a big bureaucracy that's good for a couple hundred grand in pork barrel supplements to pockets of untalented political hacks. And the "poor"—well, they're lucky if they see even a few pennies of the dough that was originally intended for them.

Perhaps, public funds could be a lot more efficiently utilized if most of the "poverty" money was funneled through existing agencies (except for the legal services and community action programs) and not be used to establish new governmental structures whose main purpose seems to be furnishing jobs for uncreative bureaucrats.

fifth Estate

Sol Plafkin
Off Center
1967

<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/38-september-15-30-1967/off-center>
Fifth Estate #38, September 15-30, 1967

[fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fiftheestate.org)