

PCAUR Drives it Home

J.R. Kennedy

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The cement never sets on the WSU empire.

A sign is attached to the cement wall of the new Foreign Language Building at Wayne State University. It faces the John C. Lodge Freeway and the Matthaei Physical Education Complex beyond it. The sign, without reservation announces that Wayne is "Building For Our Second Century."

The University is apparently not afraid to advertise the fact that they have been around in the Inner City for over 100 years and have yet not made a single contribution to that location. In fact, they have been one of the primary sources of suffering and degradation for the people of the Warren Forest Community where it is located. The grounds upon which both the Matthaei Complex and the New Language Building are built were once occupied by the poor people that live in the Inner City.

For 100 years poor people have been pushed off the land and into black and white ghettos like 3rd street and 12th street to make room for university cement progress. The noble but gilded academic ideals of this university are confined within the boundaries of their ever expanding property, and are extended only to those that have not been the victims of social and economic starvation.

The people of the Inner City are not only excluded from the services of the "urban university," but the structures themselves contrast with the quality of their own lives and stand as constant reminders that they are powerless to control them.

It is one thing to talk about the important needs of the University for a language building and for physical education facilities and quite another to compare them to the desperate needs of the poor who must receive not only immediate assistance programs and relief, but an entire transformation of the society as well.

Wayne State University, playing the role of urban imperialist, has not paid the people back for what they have taken from them. They have not fulfilled their academic boasts about serving the needs of Detroit. They have in fact turned instead to exploit and use the people for their own ends.

Their only interest is to emerge with a reputation that will make them respected in the eyes of the corporate structure, even if it means that they must do so at the expense of poor people who have always carried the load of that phony cement progress.

People Concerned About Urban Renewal, a local community action organization, has resisted these kinds of activities by WSU as well as similar activities by other groups such as the Detroit Housing Commission, local slum lords, and absentee businessmen.

In the last issue of the Fifth Estate, we reported that PCAUR had militantly moved against a local slumlord. The organization had entered a major confrontation over tenant rights to demand adequate heat and hot water.

In a conversation with a PCAUR representative it was learned that although the slumlord, a Mr. Gordon, had given the tenants minor concessions only after their insistence and refusal to bend to his attempts at intimidation, they still were not entirely satisfied. Both PCAUR and the tenants, many now members of the organization, felt that Golden was not acting in total good faith.

They have organized themselves into a tenants union that included the entire three building complex and threatened a rent strike. PCAUR lawyers and representatives were ready to act if any repressive moves were made. At this time it appears that the unity and organization has paid off as the tenants report a substantial increase in hot water and heat.

Again both parties are not convinced that this is the end of their struggle. A cold spell in February should make clear the actual extent to which the slumlord had moved.

Although the rent at the apartments is reasonable, in contrast to many other slum buildings, the tenants are required to pay for the utilities and they are still not completely satisfied with the amount of hot water.

It is certain however that as the tenants of the Inner City unify and recognize their strength that it will become increasingly difficult to exploit them. Any individual or group that has a complaint should contact PCAUR at 4603 Third or call 831-5664.

In pursuing the issue that Wayne State University does not serve the needs of the community PCAUR has decided to take action against WSU concerning the communities' use of the Matthaehi facilities.

This has developed into a central issue at PCAUR and they have held several conferences at Wayne State University and planned a direct action against the university. The Matthaehi Complex uprooted 3000 community people when it was constructed.

It was Phase One of the University's plans to clean up the surrounding fringe areas and make them more acceptable towards creating an insulated urban university. The very people who were victims of this expansion are directly denied use of its services. PCAUR have seen this denial as being an excellent example of the entire attitude and form that has dominated university-community relations.

On February third members of the community, PCAUR, students and faculty planned to converge on the Matthaehi building and demand that it be opened to the public without any restrictions. As this paper goes to print the action has received wide support and many faculty members and local politicians have indicated that they are willing to participate in a demonstration and sit-in to emphasize the seriousness of the action.

The university already has taken steps to buy off the supporters and co-opt the issue by offering token compromises. It is not clear at this point how the "establishment supporters" will react to this, but PCAUR has made it obvious to all that they will accept no compromises. The final outcome of the action will be reported in the next issue of this paper. Listen to WABX for news as the story breaks.

The conferences held at Wayne were implemented as an attempt to organize student-faculty support for the community action. According to Gary Kapanowski, WSU-PCAUUR coordinator, the conferences were a success in that David Levine of the WSU History department has been able to organize many faculty members against the administration and in support of a community planned and community led action. The conferences went on to establish an on-going committee to deal with any future confrontations over the university's refusal to serve the people.

Since its early existence PCAUR has recognized the importance of actions and organizations that are not isolated, but have a direct relationship to the community. For this reason they have been able to organize some young street kids and high school drop outs. These kids have a first hand understanding of the forces that manipulate their lives. They are active in organization of the community and in action against those forces. They have led demonstrations against the university and participated in meetings and conferences.

Two of these PCAUR youth were recently busted by local pigs at Franklin school. The experience was still another glaring example of the ways in which the society is geared against them and all poor people.

They were taken to Vernor Station Police and held for over three hours. One of the youths, Donald Harris, described his experience of being thrown in the bull pen, finger printed, and then assigned to a cell, all for "loitering on school property."

The next day they were taken to court and he described his experiences there. In a letter he wrote describing the incident he stated in frustration that "I just have got to tell you about the way courts nowadays are being run."

He then went on to relate the railroad techniques of Recorder's Court in this city which are familiar to many of us. So in this youth's early exposure to the system's court procedure, he has already learned that justice and due process are bullshit terms that have little meaning outside of the text books that he has long since given up.

In further action, James Brown, a PCAUR leader, visited Common Council and attempted to stop the Department of Building's proposal that all Urban Renewal areas in the city have their windows boarded up so that sales and demolition of peoples homes could be speeded up.

Brown maintains that many of the structures in the University area, scheduled for demolition, could be remodeled and used by the people of the area. He states that many buildings could be rehabilitated more cheaply than they could be demolished, but he understands that the real purpose of Urban Renewal is not to aid the people, but instead to move them out of the area and replace them with people deemed "more desirable" by WSU.

Brown further states that not only does his organization demand that Urban Renewal serve the people, but also that the people affected have direct control over the form that the renewal may take.

Brown pointed out that due to the lack of success that the government has had with so called public housing projects and low-income housing that this city, according to Councilman Nicholas Hood, will build no more housing of this type. This move further emphasizes the need for the University area renewal to be rehabilitation and not demolition so that community residents can be assured low cost housing. The university and the Housing Commission both want housing that will be above the means of poor people and "suitable for faculty" finances and tastes.

Ernie Elswick, a PCAUR member, sent a letter to WSU President William Rea Keast laying out the demand and explaining the need that WSU open its doors to community kids. His letter was answered by George Gullen, who is vice-president for University Relations.

In that letter Gullen rationalized and vacillated and never confronted the real issue. He talked about the bullshit hype that the university ran on the people this last summer. He stated that hundreds of kids have used Matthaei and then defended himself by stating how difficult it was to schedule the building:

This is crap and the community people know it. All the talk about insurance and health cards and classes is just weak attempts to put off the issue. PCAUR will not accept some half-ass compromise like partial use on specified weekend hours under certain conditions all laid down by the same administration that has lied and robbed the people for years.

The street kids will not accept any compromises either as their lives are too full of the results of such relationships. Gullen's letter is a complete lie. He is long skilled in lying for the old men that run the university. He is a pimp for their interests and has lost all integrity. He is not "making every effort" because to do so would contradict every criminal and social negligent principle that WSU has perpetuated on the people for 100 years.

It is not up to those old men to decide to grant concessions to the community within the confines of their narrow ivory tower definitions. The people of the community do not care what the university or the Housing Commission has decided.

They themselves have already decided. They have decided to take what is theirs and the university had best move aside or be prepared to face the people.

Sidebar

The people of the community in coordination with People Concerned About Urban Renewal make the following demands of W.S.U.:

1. We demand that all Matthaei Recreational facilities be open to the community, unrestricted, for at least 3 hours of each evening of each week day. The exact hours are to be set by the community.
2. We demand further that those same Matthaei facilities be open, unrestricted, to the community every Saturday and Sunday for our use.
3. We demand that any additional supervisory personnel needed for the additional hours must be hired from within the immediate community, by the community, and any such salaries must be paid by Wayne State University.
4. We demand that all sports-entertainment events that are held within the Matthaei Complex be free to the residents of the community.

5. We demand that the decision making group for all future Matthaei policies, recreational programs and facility usage be a group that is composed of three-fourths community residents and one-fourth W.S.U. administration.

6. We demand that the Department of Public Safety of Wayne State University stop any further harassment of or interference with community people who attempt to use any or all of the university facilities, and further we demand that any political charges leveled against any member of the community for having "trespassed" on "University property" be immediately dropped and all prosecution discontinued.

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