

PROSPECTUS FOR ECONOMIC RESEARCH AND ACTION PROJECT IN CHESTER,  
PENNSYLVANIA, DURING THE SUMMER OF 1964

Movements for social change are born of discontent. They are born of discontent with the objective conditions of life under which people are forced to live. They are born of dissatisfaction with the efforts society is making to change those conditions. The Negro in America has had to bear the worst the American system has to offer, and so it is only natural that he should express the most discontent with the system.

Out of the Negro's discontent has come the "Negro movement", essentially a movement of protest composed of many different elements working towards goals which are for the most part undefined. If a movement is to change society, however, it must agree on certain specific goals and develop a strategy for reaching them--only under these conditions can a movement be sure where its tactics are leading, and thereby use these tactics to its fullest advantage. The Negro movement must do more than protest; it must propose solutions to the problems it protests, and it must then work to realize these solutions.

The Negro movement is probably agreed in its entirety on the general goal of seeking a better life for the Negro in America. There are several methods of realizing this goal however. Separatism is an answer proposed by a minority of the movement. Predominant is the desire to integrate into the system which has provided so many benefits for its members. This fundamental desire often leads those who work in the movement to believe that if segregation and discrimination are eliminated in schooling, housing, and job opportunities, the Negro will take his rightful place in American society.

No one can doubt the justice of the fight for an end to segregation and discrimination. No one can question the desirability of an integrated society in which men are judged not by the color of their skin, but by their qualities as individuals, and where each man has the fullest opportunities for development. But there is one question which we must ask ourselves: "If segregation and discrimination were ended, would American society then be able to give a place to the Negro?" This is a question which every movement in America will be facing this summer. If the answer to this question is "No", that does not mean the fight against discrimination is a bad fight, or a false fight; it only means that the struggle to find a place for the Negro in America is going to be longer and harder than the fight against discrimination.

For two reasons we believe that the Negro movement may indeed be in for the longer and harder fight. First, an economy which is constantly subject to an unemployment level of 6% may never offer economic security to all citizens. An end to discrimination would only allow the Negro to share poverty equally with whites. It would not mean the end of poverty. Many local movements are finding that the solution to their problems may lie only at the national level; their local communities do not possess the resources to give everyone a good job, adequate housing, and adequate schools.

The second indication that the problems faced by the Negro movement may be deeper than the problems of discrimination is that more and more other groups are joining him in the "other America." Miners in Hazard, Kentucky, migrants in California, Mexican braceros in Texas, millions of the aged, high school dropouts and graduates who cannot find jobs anywhere--these groups are beginning to face some of the same problems the Negro has been fighting for years. These newer members of the other America are not necessarily racial minorities, for the defects in our economy no longer affect only the Negro.

It is within this context that we must look at Chester, Pa., a depressed industrial city located between Wilmington, Delaware, and Philadelphia, Pa. More than 40% of Chester's 63,000 citizens are Negroes. The city has been dominated politically for more than half a century by the McClure machine, a Republican machine which takes second place to few in the country. Industry has been moving out of Chester for many years. A Ford plant recently closed down and left several thousand jobless. Chester is also subject to the general condition of urban areas: its wealthier inhabitants have been moving to nearby suburbs, leaving the city with a more concentrated population and at the same time decreasing the tax base that the city can call upon to meet the needs of its inhabitants.

There has been a protest movement of sorts in Chester for several years. Two winters ago Chester students, in cooperation with students from nearby Swarthmore College, led an attack on a segregated skating rink. This attempt, renewed the following winter, was frustrating to most of those involved since the manager of the rink would not give in and the issue did not seem to reach the community. A short-lived and unsuccessful protest against abuses in public housing also took place last winter. The summer of 1963 saw the stir of activity as Chester students split off from the NAACP and formed an action group of their own.

However, the "movement" was not really born until the fall of 1963 when a skeleton group of Chester students and parents formed the Committee for Freedom Now (CFFN) and decided to demonstrate at Franklin School, a fifty year old school with most inadequate facilities for its overcrowded enrollment. Two hundred and fifty parents, children, and students went to jail during two days which saw the movement close Franklin School by blocking the doors with chains of people. This was followed by marches through town to the City Hall and Board of Education. Both buildings were closed by the demonstrators; a massive march-in was the tactic used at City Hall. Freedom Schools for the children from Franklin were held in a nearby church. After days of mass meetings, marches and closed buildings, the city yielded to the demands of the demonstrators.

From the enthusiasm and the contacts gained through these demonstrations CFFN was vastly enlarged. It could now claim to be the movement in Chester. Under the leadership of Stanley Branche, the Committee has been active ever since. Many minor concessions have been won, especially on the issue of fair employment, by threatening demonstrations. Eight neighborhood groups have been formed, in order to involve more people directly in the movement and to permit more effective mobilization of the community for CFFN demonstrations. These neighborhood organizations have concerned themselves with voter registration, bad housing and schools. CFFN has made contact with workers in a large non-union shop, and the possibility of working with union leaders to organize the shop is being investigated. A small contingent of Chester Negroes demonstrated early this year in Washington for more jobs, and a major voter registration drive took place in late January. The most conspicuous success of the movement since the demands for Franklin School was the city-wide boycott of schools which took place on February 13. Over 600 pickets helped make the boycott 40% successful.

The Chester movement is now one of the strongest in the country. It can also be called one of the most progressive for two reasons. First, block organizations have rarely been implemented with such success. And second, the thirty-

seven demands that CFFN drew up after the Franklin School demonstrations go far beyond the demands of any other Negro movement. They include full and fair employment, equal and improved education, adequate housing for everyone in both public and private dwellings, medical care regardless of ability to pay, as well as protests against the McClure machine, abuses from police, and biased coverage from news media.

Because of the conditions described above, CFFN in Chester is already beginning to face the crisis that the movement throughout the country will have to face this summer. It is largely a crisis of direction -- the movement speaks for masses of discontented Negroes in Chester and this discontent must be channelled in the most effective directions. CFFN has already won most of the battle against discrimination in hiring, yet unemployment is still chronic and disturbingly high. Where will the movement look for more jobs? This is the sort of question which will have to be answered in the coming months. And this is the sort of question that the Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP) can help the movement to answer.

ERAP in Chester will have the closest connection with CFFN. The project should provide three essential services for CFFN: 1) it should work to strengthen the organization of the movement in the ways that CFFN directs; 2) it should do the research necessary for the development of a comprehensive program for the solution of the economic, social and political problems of Chester; and 3) it should assist the movement in looking for other groups in Chester which may be added sources of strength for the movement.

The first function of the project will be carried out at the direction of CFFN and cannot be fully outlined here. One possibility is the extension of the neighborhood groups, with the understanding that such groups will be led by Chester residents in each neighborhood and that project members will provide only the impetus for organization and not the continuing leadership. However, any specific proposals for ways the project can strengthen CFFN will have to await the needs of that committee at a specific time.

The second function that ERAP will serve, that of doing the research necessary for the formulation of a comprehensive program for the movement, is the area in which the least amount of work has been done, and which will require a large part of our efforts this summer. Areas where research is necessary are:

#### Employment

##### CFFN demands are:

- full employment.
- fair employment.

##### Research needed:

- What are the patterns of unemployment in Chester? How does it effect each group? Negro? White? Puerto Rican? Youth? Aged?
- To what extent is unemployment due to discrimination in hiring and to what extent to lack of jobs?
- What jobs are available, and what skills are not being utilized by the unemployed?
- How can unemployed whites and Puerto Ricans be organized to work with the Negro movement for full employment?
- What local, state and federal programs are available for Chester?

### Housing

#### CFFN demands are:

- new or renovated housing for all Chester residents.
- low-cost public housing, if private housing is inadequate.
- the prosecution of slum landlords.
- the enactment of a comprehensive housing code.

#### Research needed:

- What is the condition of housing in Chester?
- What are the reasons for poor housing? low income? closed housing patterns?
- What local, state, and federal funds are available for the alleviation of housing problems?
- What program of housing renovation would work best for Chester?
- What housing programs have worked elsewhere?
- What ways have been used in other places to organize tenants and homeowners to change their housing conditions?

### Schools

#### CFFN demands are:

- a limit of twenty-seven per class.
- appropriation of additional funds to poor schools.
- integration of all faculty, administration and students.

#### Research needed:

- How do Chester school appropriations compare with those of other cities?
- What local, state and federal funds are available for financing improvements.
- What changes in the tax structure would be necessary to provide additional funds for schools?
- What educational and guidance program would best fill the needs of Chester students?
- What integration program can be devised which will preserve the neighborhood school best?

### Medical Care

#### CFFN demands are:

- free clinics in every housing project.
- increased city grants to hospitals.
- adequate provision for hospitalization, drug and medical care for all citizens regardless of ability to pay.
- open employment practices in public medicine.

#### Research needed:

- What are the medical needs of the population?
- What programs of this sort have been tried elsewhere?
- What program would be best for Chester, and how could it be financed?

### Politics

#### Research needed:

- Which political party, if either, offers the best possibilities for the realization of CFFN's program?
- Is it worthwhile to work within existing party structures?
- What are the possibilities for a third party?

These are the needs which are apparent even at this early date. No doubt the movement will come upon many problems in the summer that will require detailed research in other areas. Techniques beyond the normal research methods of analyzing census tracts and consulting reference books, articles, all relevant government publications, and studies of other cities, will be employed. A survey will probably be required to determine housing conditions,

organized research and of the educational activities which the project will undertake as a group. These will include seminars or discussion groups which will be designed to relate events in Chester to national developments and a broad analysis of the movement. Resource people can be brought in as desired-- labor leaders, staff members from other projects, representatives from other organizations. Every effort will be made to include Chester residents in both the action and education programs the staff develops.

Because of the close contact Swarthmore students have with the Chester situation, the leader of the project should be a Swarthmore student who plans to be in the area for at least one more year. Two or three other staff members should be familiar with the area. Students from Swarthmore, Temple, Bryn Mawr, Haverford, University of Pennsylvania or Cheney would be excellent. If possible one project member should be fluent in Spanish. The project should be bi-racial with a maximum of seven whites.

Emphasis throughout the project will be on full discussion and common decision-making on the issues that will confront the project, rather than on a reliance on the experience of one or two members. Frequent sessions will be held to formulate and to evaluate the basic policy decisions of the project. These sessions will be viewed as much more than a chance to share information: they will be an opportunity to relate this information to developments elsewhere in the country in an attempt to make our experiences in Chester meaningful to the movement for social change in the rest of America. Constant questioning of the assumptions under which frequent discussion of principles, policies, and the relationship between Chester and the rest of America should help make the experiences of any one member common to all members of the group.

FOR APPLICATION FORMS FOR SUMMER WORK IN CHESTER, PENNSYLVANIA  
OR FOR INFORMATION ON OTHER ERAP PROJECTS:

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