Representation Now!

As America's largest community organization, ACORN has fought for its principles at the national level. In 1978, ACORN members met for our first national convention in Memphis, Tennessee. We forged a People's Platform calling for fair taxes, jobs for all, national health insurance, and Lifeline utility rates, and we took it to the national Democratic Party convention down the street.

The Platform was refined through local group meetings and statewide conferences, and ratified at our second national convention in St. Louis in 1979.

ACORN put the Platform into action during 1980, concentrating on our Representation plank. Through actions and electing delegates to the 1980 Democratic National Convention, we pressed our demand for a voice in Party affairs.

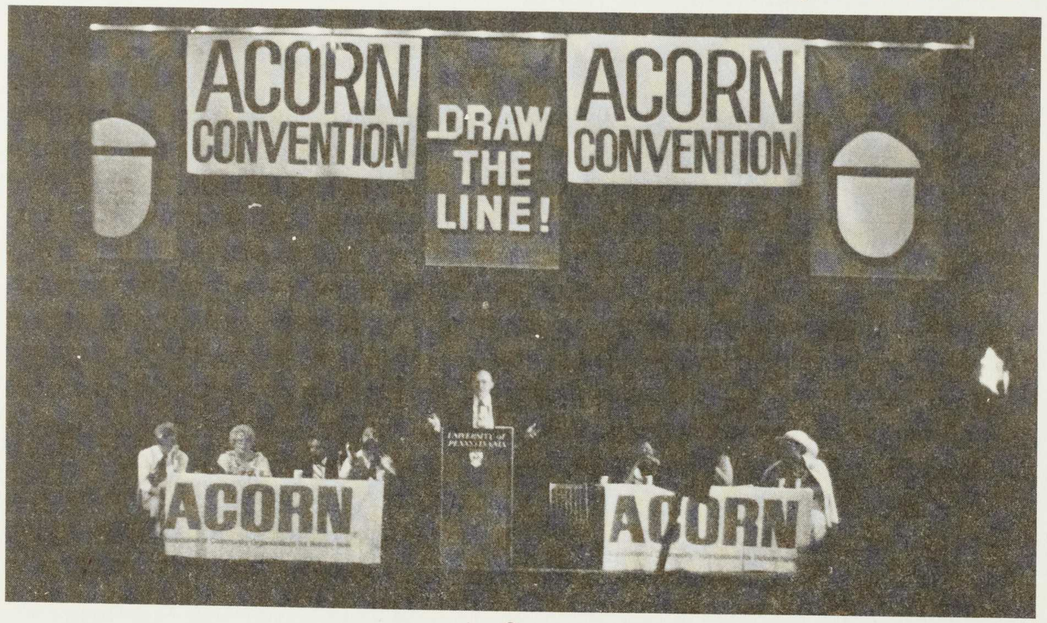
We challenged the Republicans too, inviting their national convention delegates on a tour of Detroit to see the People's Platform issues firsthand.

By August of 1980, when we marched to the Democratic National Convention in New York City, we could celebrate an important victory—the establishment of a national Commission on Low and Moderate Income Representation. Hundreds of ACORN members and supporters turned out for the Commission's field hearings and we won support for our principal demands.

At the last minute, though, Democratic Party leaders balked at giving low and moderate income voters their rightful representation. They deleted the Commission's most important recommendations before unanimously adopting the remainder of its report. We let the Democrats know that the pressure will continue when, in June, 1982, our national convention in Philadelphia confronted Democratic Party convention delegates all over town.

Taking What's Ours

In 1982, ACORN launched another bold and successful national campaign. In a dozen cities, more than 300 squatters took over abandoned houses to dramatize the housing crisis and pressure public officials to respond. We demanded large-scale homesteading programs to turn over vacant properties to low and moderate income people who are willing to rehabilitate them, an end to mortgage foreclosures, and repair and rental of all public housing units.



In June, when ACORN squatters set up a tent city behind the White House, a special Congressional hearing on homesteading was held and the Secretary of HUD finally agreed to negotiate with us.

In the fall, the tents went up again in 37 cities as unions, churches, peace groups, and other organizations joined forces with ACORN to erect "Reagan Ranches." Like the Hoovervilles in the Great Depression, the tent cities symbolized the failure of Reagan's economic policies. They provided a staging ground and focus for a week of actions, rallies, and get-out-the-vote efforts. The Ranches were frontpage news across the country and around the world.

As a result of the squatters campaign, homesteading programs have been created or reformed in several cities, and our proposals to improve the federal homesteading program have been introduced in Congress. Along with our allies from the "Reagan Ranches", ACORN members are taking action to cut funds from civil defense bomb shelters and provide money for homesteading instead.

As ACORN grows larger and stronger, we will continue the fight for all the rights and dreams our People's Platform represents, from City Hall to the Statehouse, the White House and the corporate boardrooms.

STRUCTURE

ACORN members are first and foremost members of ACORN neighborhood groups. Each group is organized "from scratch," beginning with an Organizing Committee that takes responsibility for researching and developing issues, recruiting their neighbors through doorknocking and mailings, and making a fundraising plan to support the organization. All neighborhood residents are invited to a founding meeting where the group is formally established, officers are elected, and initial actions are planned. Neighborhood groups continue to meet monthly and to carry out campaigns on local issues.

Neighborhood groups work together through a citywide executive board composed of the elected chairs of each group. The board meets monthly to plan actions and campaigns, oversee the finances of the organization, and set ACORN policy. Where there are ACORN groups in more than one city within a state, a statewide board is made up of the chairs of every local group. The boards have several standing committees—budget, fundraising, ACORN Political Action Committee (APAC)—and establish special committees to run particular issue campaigns.

As a nationl organization, ACORN is governed by an Association Board, composed of two delegates elected by each state board. The Association Board meets twice a year in April and October. It elects a President, Vice President, Secre-