The People Shall Rule

Since our first national convention in Memphis in 1978, ACORN has waged a campaign to make the Democratic Party truly a "Party of the People." In Memphis, we adopted a People's Platform and marched with it to the Democratic Party's national convention. We were locked out but we did not give up.

We developed the Platform into a detailed program at our St. Louis convention in June, 1979, and concentrated for the following year 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.

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.

That Commission, chaired by Congressman Mickey Leland from Houston, held a series of regional hearings in Philadelphia, Chattanooga, Los Angeles, Detroit, Little Rock, and Houston. Each time, hundreds of ACORN members turned out, along with supporters including Congressman John Conyers and George Crockett from Detroit, William Gray from Philadelphia, and Julian Dixon from Los Angeles; William Lucy from AFSCME, Leon Lynch from the United Steelworkers of America, and representatives of Democratic Agenda and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC).

When the Commmission's report was finally drafted, it included ACORN's two principal demands: a requirement that state Parties set goals for representation of low and moderate income people in their convention delegations and guaranteed financial assistance for those who can't afford to attend on their own.

At the last minute, though, the report was watered-down and its most important provisions were dropped. Instead of guaranteeing a voice to low and moderate income voters, the Party's leaders decided to give more representation to the rich and powerful. They set a quota of 550 uncommitted delegate seats for Party and elected officials.

Though the Democrats balked at giving the majority of Democrats their rightful voice in Party affairs, they knew our demands could not be ignored. The Commission's amended report was adopted unanimously. It falls short of the concrete assurances we sought but provides a framework to achieve our representation goals through increased pressure back home.

As ACORN's 1982 national convention is held in Philadelphia, the Democratic Party is holding its national conference down the street. Once again, low and moderate income people are shut out. But our convention will show the Democrats what representation really means. And as Party leaders meet to discuss the issues, ACORN members will put forth the People's Platform as the true agenda for Democrats. Here, and in our cities and states, ACORN will make the "Party of the People" recognize the "power of the people."