taxing authorities interpreted the state property tax law. The staff put together a detailed study of neighborhood by neighborhood discrimination in assessments (the low and moderate income neighborhoods, not surprisingly, had received larger increases than the richer neighborhoods), and after a series of confrontations with the Pulaski County assessor and the Board of Equalization the members received a committment that at least one of the ACORN neighborhoods (the largest and the most discriminated against) would have its assessments reduced. At the same time ACORN released a study which proved that, contrary to state law, industrial property was being taxed at a lower rate than residential property. ACORN groups once again visited the assessor and Board of Equalization en masse. The officials were not prepared to give way on this issue, however, so ACORN took the matter to the State Attorney General. The AG recently issued a formal opinion which held that such disparities were unconstitutional, and ACORN is presently preparing to bring the assessor to court on this issue.

In 1975 ACORN moved the property tax campaign out into the rest of the state, as ACORN groups all over the state attacked neighborhood by neighborhood discrimination in the assessment of property taxes. And, in what promises to be the most far-reaching phase of the ACORN property tax campaign, ACORN members began getting ready to demand that the property tax be applied against intangible wealth-- stocks, bonds, and money in the bank-- as well as against real property. The property tax can be a very fair tax, ACORN members feel, IF it is used to tax the property of the rich as well as the property of the low to moderate income homeowner. The intangible property tax campaign began in rural Lawrence County in northeastern Arkansas where several ACORN members obtained a writ of mandamus ordering their county assessor to begin assessing, as the state law clearly states, intangible wealth. The campaign will be statewide in early 1976, when ACORN members throughout the state demand that the currently untaxed but easily identifiable assets of banks by put on the tax rolls.

School Board Elections

ACORN's first heavy involvement in electoral politics came in 1972, when ACORN endorsed, and, through campaign work, elected a Little Rock School Board member. The endorsement (like all ACORN political endorsements) was made by the ACORN Political Action Committee (APAC), which is composed of the chairmen of each of the local ACORN groups. This particular candidate received ACORN's endorsement because he was committed to: Free textbooks, abolishing school fees, a progressive form of special education, and more school board spending in eastern and central Little Rock (the low to moderate income areas) instead of the wealthy and 100 per cent white western suburbs.

ACORN members did extensive precinct work in the city's low to moderate income neighborhoods. Door to door flyering, arranging speaking engagements, and running buses to the polls gave the candidate an overwhelming majority in ACORN's precincts. The candidate lost in the wealthy suburbs, but his margin in the ACORN neighborhoods was enough to make him the first city-wide candidate in 25 years to win an election while losing the western suburbs. In a newspaper interview after the election the new School Board members called ACORN's support "the most critical factor in my election."

White Bluff Power Plant

In September of 1973 Arkansas Power and Light Company announced plans to build the gargantuam 2800 MW coal-burning White Bluff power plant near Redfield, Arkansas. At close to a billion dollars, the plant was to have been the single largest private investment ever undertaken in the state.

Were electricity the only product of the plant, Redfield citizens would doubtless already be accustomed to the rumble of bulldozers and earth moving machines preparing for the construction site. The plant, however, was also going to turn out 178,000 tons of sulfur dioxide damage, and AP&L had no plans to install sulfur dioxide pollution controls on the plant.

As rumors of potential pollution levels began spreading, local citizens grew apprehensive and angry. The Jefferson County Improvement Organization, and ACORN affiliate near Redfield, whose previous focus had been the poor conditions in local schools, asked the organization for help in discovering more about AP&L's plans for Redfield. ACORN's research department discovered that the plant would turn out more than enough pollution to cause damage to the crops that the area around Redfiled depended on for its economic well-being; the ACORN Executive Board decided to authorize a full scale organizing effort in the area. With initial help from the JCIO members, ACORN began organizing hundreds of farmers in the Plum Bayou, Ferda, Tucker, Wright, and England areas into two new ACORN affiliates; The Protect Our Land Association (POLA/ACORN) and Save Health and Property (SHAP/ACORN). Meanwhile, ACORN released the results of its research in a report to the Public Service Commission, and forced the long dormant state pollution and environmental agencies to begin taking a closer look at the proposed power plant.

Back in the countryside, the by now highly organized and irate farmers began to directly confront the utility company. A request delivered by a delegation of ACORN farmers and signed by over 1,000 area residents asked the company for a $50,000,000 'Deposit in reverse.' The deposit would serve as a guarantee against any damages suffered by the farmers from the plant's operations. AP&L, of course, refused to put up the deposit.

AP&L countered with an intensive public relations effort designed to prove that the plant would 'help build Arkansas'. ACORN responded by pointing out that the decision to build the plant had nothing to do with the needs of Arkansans; that the decision had been made by AP&L's corporate owners in the New York offices of Middle South Utilities. ACORN members hammered away at this point, for AP&L had long enjoyed a reputation as a benevolent local company-- especially in the rural areas of the state, where the electric lights were first turned on within the memories of most adult farmers.

The appeal to the farmers latent populism proved to be extremely successful, especially when the ACORN members dramatized the point by writing a letter to Middle South's largest single stockholder-- Harvard University-- demanding that the University do an 'independent' economic and environmental study of the plant's impact, and that Harvard use its leverage as the largest stockholder to pressure Middle South on the question of the sulfure dioxide controls. ACORN sent an organizer to Harvard and lined up a coalition of about 20 student groups to support the farmers' requests. When Arkansas Governor Dale Bumpers spoke at Harvard that fall, he encountered stiff questioning about politics back home. He responded by calling for responsible measures by AP&L to protect