

Conclusion

Five and one half years is difficult to compress when evaluating the development of ACORN. The big strengths spring out; the vitality of the constituency, the diversity of issues, the quality of the leadership at all levels, the competency of the staff, the magnitude of some of the victories, the political power built by converting these same victories, and the broad multi-state impact of ACORN's organizing.

But, at the same time there are easily ignored phenomena which could quickly steer one away from really understanding the organization. For example, ACORN could have lost every big campaign and by still winning the hundreds over the last years, would still be at the same level of strength. There are other examples at every turn that would linger on the imponderable 'ifs' in the business of community organization. ACORN grew because it was consistently able to put to rest the folk myths and popular ideologies about organization, about people, about income breaks, about racial divisions, and any number of other themes which have killed other organizations for one reason or another. If it had not, it would be something different, or more probably it would simply be the same as every other community organization.

In fact one of the greatest strengths of ACORN is the difficulty which most people have in sorting it into the usual categories of community action, citizen action, consumerism, environmentalism, or any of a number of other restricting limits. Breaking these confines has allowed ACORN the ability to define itself, to set its own standards and even the standards for other community organization. ACORN is a different kind of

animal. And, it is that uniqueness and the factors that contribute to it that have as much as anything else forged the role and responsibility of ACORN.

Where will ACORN go now? There are some simple answers. As a statewide organization, ACORN still has another half-dozen regions that must be organized as the first eight have been. As a multi-state Association, ACORN will clearly organize in yet more states, cities and town. ACORN will clearly get bigger and older. These two things will increase its strength in whatever areas in which it works.

At the same time, one can wonder what unexpected avenues ACORN may still travel. If it proceeds along the lines it has mapped out to date, continued success can lead the organization even further past the bounds of what one normally would expect of a 'community organization.'

Perhaps governmental takeovers, similar to the Quorum Court victory last year in Little Rock, would repeat themselves over and over. Perhaps ACORN would even up the ante at other levels of government as time goes on.

Certainly, the process of ACORN development leads one to believe that the organization is coming closer and closer to stretching the limits of what millions of people in this country define as "possible." Perhaps in the way stations of the country like Arkansas, South Dakota and even Texas, the rhetoric of power for low to moderate income people will even become the reality.

Who can tell?

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