

UPDATE

Since this article was written in 1975, ACORN has grown by leaps and bounds, expanding beyond Arkansas, South Dakota, and Texas into Louisiana, Missouri, Tennessee, Florida, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Nevada, Iowa, Michigan, Oklahoma, and Arizona. In 1979, three already-established statewide community organizations affiliated with ACORN — Carolina Action in North Carolina, Georgia Action and the Citizens Action League in California — and organizing began in Connecticut and South Carolina. The total ACORN membership now tops 25,000.

A multi-state Association Board consisting of two elected representatives from each state is now firmly established as the governing board of ACORN. It meets twice annually to set policies and an agenda for the organization as a whole. Local groups, citywide executive boards and statewide executive boards continue to make autonomous decisions about their own campaigns and day to day operation, working together when their agendas coincide.

As the organization grows, so does the list of ACORN wins. Some of the highlights of the last couple of years include:

- abolishing the sales tax on medicine in Arkansas and Missouri;
- securing passage of a bill outlawing insurance redlining in Missouri;
- increasing the school tax exemption for senior citizens in Houston;
- winning Lifeline telephone rates in Texas;
- establishing strict regulations on utility shut-offs and other utility consumer rights in Colorado, Arkansas, Georgia, Iowa and Tennessee;
- winning a new \$2 million youth job program in Philadelphia;
- getting the Public Utilities Commission to revoke the phone company's franchise in Redfield, Arkansas;
- blocking the investment of \$8 million of city funds in a downtown parking garage in Des Moines;
- beating a sales tax increase in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

While ACORN continues to emphasize local organizing, it has also begun to work at the national level. In December, 1978, ACORN held its first national convention in Memphis, Tennessee. There, 1000 delegates adopted a nine-point People's Platform and braved freezing temperatures to deliver it to the Democratic Party which was holding its national meeting six blocks away.

Over the next six months, ACORN members met in local group meetings and statewide conferences to add more detailed planks to the Platform, developing a concrete blueprint for reform on the major issues that concern low and moderate income people: energy, health care, taxes, jobs and income, housing, community development, rural issues, banking and representation.

The People's Platform is firmly grounded in ACORN's nine years of grass roots organizing experience. It reflects an understanding that many of the issues local groups have addressed must ultimately be won at the national level, and acknowledges ACORN's increasing ability to have a national impact. For example, the energy plank is based on ACORN's long experience fighting utility rate increases and energy development projects. While there have been some significant successes in this area, many of these efforts have been frustrated by the fact that major energy policy decisions are made not at the local level, but by the federal government and to a great extent, by the energy industry itself. The Platform, therefore calls not only for immediate reforms to "Put people before profits at the utilities," but for measures to "break the grip of the big energy companies," including establishing new public energy corporations to develop and

market renewable sources of energy and to develop oil and gas reserves on federally-owned land.

On other issues, the People's Platform demands equally strong measures:

On BANKING — Restoration of the concept that banks are chartered to serve the credit needs of the local community, with bank charters granted only for set periods of five years with renewal based on the bank's record in meeting its obligation to the community.

On TAXES — A thorough re-structuring of the tax system to lighten the burden of taxation on low and moderate income citizens, close the enormous number of loopholes available to wealthy individuals and corporations, and tax the untaxed wealth of America — intangible property, privately-owned natural resources, and tax-exempt commercial property.

On HOUSING — Action to prevent the displacement of low and moderate income people from their homes and communities, including strict relocation requirements, property tax relief for low-income homeowners and renters, restrictions on condominium conversions, rent ceilings for all government-sponsored rehab projects, and a punitive tax on speculation in real property.

ON JOBS AND INCOME — For everyone who wants to work a guarantee of a job paying a living wage and offering opportunities for advancement and a guaranteed minimum annual income for those who cannot work.

On RURAL ISSUES — Measures to preserve the family farm, including property tax reform, redesign of the agricultural price support programs, public land pools, and a flat prohibition on ownership of agricultural land by non-farm corporations.

On HEALTH CARE — A comprehensive national health care system which makes 24-hour, 7 day-a-week medical care available in every neighborhood through a network of community clinics, places special emphasis on preventive care and maintenance of a healthy environment, puts doctors on set salaries, is progressively financed, and is managed by democratically elected community-based committees.

On COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT — Increased control by citizens over the impact of private development on their communities through mechanisms such as democratically elected community boards with veto power over major development projects, a requirement that every major new private development file a "community impact statement" detailing its potential impact, and a requirement that any large company desiring to leave a community obtain an "exit visa" from the community board signifying that it has adequately compensated its employees and the community-at-large for losses due to its relocation and that it has paid back any incentives previously granted to it by the community.

On REPRESENTATION — More democracy in the neighborhoods, in elections, in the government and in big business through requirements that low and moderate income people be represented at all levels of government and on large corporate boards; and measures to establish automatic voter registration, allow recall, referendum and initiatives and institute public financing of political campaigns.

The People's Platform is ACORN's agenda for the '80s. On the last weekend of June, 1979, 1500 ACORN members from 17 states met in St. Louis to ratify a final version and make plans to put it into action. The first steps to implement the Platform will focus on the 1980 elections with ACORN members seeking election as delegates to the nation Party conventions, endorsement of the Platform from other convention delegates and political candidates, and an opportunity to present the People's Platform to the 1980 Party conventions.