

Inevitable does not mean that there are no conditions or circumstances which could not have produced other options and alternatives in Massachusetts, even with Fair Share. But, there had been no sign in recent years that anything was happening in Boston, which would negate out of hand potential ACORN organizational initiatives. And, on the leadership side had been a step backward from any potential communication, understanding, or relationship between ACORN and Fair Share at the earlier Philadelphia meeting.

The Philly meeting is key, because in the perspective of ACORN leadership they were ready to talk frankly and openly about problems between Fair Share and ACORN that they had heard were on the grapevine. These problems included: The Institute-East office in Boston; Steve Holt's entry into New Hampshire to direct the New Hampshire Peoples Alliance; and ACORN's planned entry into Bridgeport, Connecticut to organize Connecticut ACORN. The leadership of Philly ACORN was prepared to discuss these questions because they had been informed by ACORN staff based on discussions with Fair Share staff and others close to them, that Fair Share and its leaders were very upset about these things. According to their staff and others, they had planned to organize in New Hampshire and felt that we had assisted Holt in "backdooring" them, thereby shutting off New Hampshire. They were upset about the Institute-East because it developed that they had been planning to open some kind of a training center in conjunction with the Midwest Academy out of Chicago. They were upset about Connecticut because they were planning to work out a relationship to Connecticut Citizen Action Group (CCAG) or expand into Connecticut themselves. According to their staff and others, ACORN's initiatives in all of these areas were seen as hostile to Fair share. Therefore, the leadership of ACORN was prepared to discuss these issues in detail. Comes the meeting, and ACORN leaders raise these issues to Fair Share leaders, and it is all news out of the blue. Fair Share leaders had no problem with ACORN's activity in Connecticut, since they had no plans there. Fair Share leaders had no problems with the Institute-East, since they weren't involved in anything like that. Fair Share leaders had no problem with any assistance or relationship we had with Steve Holt and NHPA, because they had no plans in New Hampshire. The ACORN leadership felt frustrated by this lack of communication and a forum to resolve any potential differences. Because they felt that the individuals from Fair Share seemed to be good people on the whole, they concluded that the staff of Fair share was unaccountable and that the leadership was not in control of the Fair Share. It is important to remember that Steve McDonald and the board had requested this meeting in order to open up communications links with Fair share. There was a meeting, but there was no communication.

Leadership also came out of the meeting with Fair Share convinced that the Fair Share organization did not represent the same constituency as ACORN does either economically or racially. ACORN leaders thought these were good people, but that the organization was obviously white and middle income. That is not bad, but it is different.

I had hoped that this meeting would achieve a different result. I had hoped it would establish a direct communication channel between ACORN leaders and Fair Share leaders to solve any problems that might exist between the two organizations. It failed to achieve this purpose, and in fact led to a more fundamental questioning by ACORN leaders of Fair Share and the control of Fair Share by its membership and leaders.

Professionally, I was not surprised in some ways and this also accounts for my initial openness around this question. Historically, one might have thought Fair Share would have taken a different course over time. Originally, the founding organizers (Mark Splain, Barbara Bowen, and Lee Staples) had all shared the same background in Massachusetts