

RURAL HOUSING ALLIANCE -- DELEGATE'S REPORT
October 15, 1970

TO: Those concerned about rural housing poverty problems
FROM: Rev. Paul Hackett, delegate to the Fifth Annual Membership Meeting,
Rural Housing Alliance, held October 4-6, 1970, Riverhead, New York

A housing famine exists in America and particularly in rural America. For five years now the Rural Housing Alliance has been working to expose these needs to public scrutiny and hopefully to raise the priority in the nation to solve these pressing problems.

Around 200 persons met in Riverside, New York for a two-day annual meeting at the site of a self-help housing project. The project staff had looked forward for three years to the coming of the national meeting and survived the shock during the meeting of their woman bookkeeper being murdered. The conferees somehow managed to pull together and focus in on the rapidly expanding role of the RHA in our nation.

RHA has a staff of over 30 persons who are funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity, the Ford Foundation, and a few other sources. RHA has extensive literature and these can be purchased by writing to "Rural Housing Alliance, Dupont Circle Building, 1346 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C., 20036."

I'll only give titles of work roles that the RHA is working on: a national rural housing conference, a research center, a revolving loan fund, technical assistance, a migrant housing section, a Volunteers in Service Housing America (VISHA) in the south (so far), encouraging the formation of the "National Rural Housing Coalition" (NRHC) in early 1970, a new HUD-USDA Rural Housing Task Force, legislation proposed, and guidance to other "ad hoc" national housing groups which are springing up such as the National Tenants Organization, the Urban Coalition, and the National Association of Nonprofit Housing Organizations (NANHO). Full explanations of these programs can be obtained by writing to RHA. Low income persons may join for \$1.00 annual dues.

There was strong interest expressed in our Washington State Low Income Housing Coalition. In fact a North Dakota editor, chairman of one of the workshops asked me to present to the entire membership our story at the concluding session of the Annual meeting. I showed our "roots and tree" idea. I believe interest was high because the chairman, Clay L. Cochran in his annual message said at the outset of the meeting. "How do we begin to create the institutional resources at the state or regional level which can both serve to speak for rural interest and through which skills in the utilization of federal housing program can be improved?"

Key to me in meeting the persons who are spearheading the national program. For instance Sharlene Belanger and Jack Hernandez were there. Also Mike Cardinas, the director of the Napa County California self-help project. One speaker urged clustering small towns together to form a "community" which can then seek to work together to solve its housing problems. On the church scene, Rev. Robert Johnson, of the National Council of Churches, was there. He is also vice-chairman of the NRHC referred to above. Also there was Pat Miller who is pulling together a voice in three states of the Navajho Indians. A Pat Gish of a Housing Development Corporation funded by OEO encouraged low-income involvement and also a broader base than that saying that "if there isn't enough "establishment type" persons on proposals they get voted down."

Just off the press is a book (with photographs) called "Pieces and Scraps" for \$2.50 which includes many mentions of migrant housing in Washington State. Write to RHA for this book.

Stressed at several of the sessions was the concept of seeking to place housing aides from the low income to serve on all decision making boards with regard to housing. This can help prevent misfiring of programs and enable grassroots participation in the planning and program stages.

A source mentioned for funds was the National Association of Community Development.

Over and over again the theme was expressed that the federal government is moving toward regional administration. This would mean a heightening of the regional offices and a lessening of the role of the federal government "from the east".

Also state Offices of Economic Opportunity should be looked to for help in organizing, programming, local action, and funding. The two words used quite often were "clout" which means the power or effect that a group uses, and "bread" which an organization uses which is commonly known as money.

RHA has over 800 members and hence is listened to by Congress. However it was pointed out in the smoking room that this number is actually small and that the size should grow.

One national leader gave me a warning which I think we all had better remember. "Don't be funded by someone or a government agency who might give bread one year (which gets one dependent like a bear in Yellowstone) and then suffer when that person or agency cuts off the supply of bread which effectively kills the effort."

Regarding the "yes" and "no" aspects of lobbying by a group our attention was called privately to the problems the Sierra Club has encountered in this regard. The NRHC is political and hence has not sought its tax-exempt status. There are some ways in which OEO persons however can take part in this as long as funds are not expended and as long as they are off hours of the employees.

Senators referred to often were Goodell and McGovern, and a candidate Ottinger from NY. state spoke.

The Ford Foundation has various grants and they can be contacted by writing Mrs. Jane Mavity, E. 43rd. Ford Foundation, NY, NY, 573-5000.

Also the Foundation for Cooperative Housing can help provide staff if one has the bread. Write Dr. E.S. Sessions, 1012 - 14th St. N.W., Wash. D.C. 20005. Phone 202-737-3411.

The editor referred to above is "Harlan Severson, 1201 Monte Drove, Mandan, North Dakota, 58554."

The two-day meeting was exhausting yet fulfilling and encouraging in seeing what is beginning to boil on the national level.

May I close by thanking the members of the Coalition for naming me a delegate to the meeting and closing with a couple of personal "happenings" on the trip. My check book turned up missing in Long Island. A search of plane seats and hotel stops resulted in a "find" in my room in a Boston Hotel. And at the O'Hare Airport at ten p.m. I came on a small group getting autographs. Drawing near I had the opportunity to talk with H.H. Humphrey for about twenty minutes. . . including his voicing the need for adequate housing in America.

PAUL HACKETT