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**The Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition: A
neighborhood organization and its membership in conflict and
struggle**

Trumino, Joseph Anthony, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1991

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THE NORTHWEST BRONX COMMUNITY AND CLERGY COALITION: A
NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION AND ITS MEMBERSHIP IN CONFLICT
AND STRUGGLE

by

JOSEPH TRUMINO

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Sociology in partial fulfillment of the
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1/24/40
date

Robert N. Alf...
Executive Officer

William T. ...
Paul Blomberg
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Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

Abstract

THE NORTHWEST BRONX COMMUNITY AND CLERGY COALITION: A
NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION AND ITS MEMBERSHIP IN CONFLICT
AND STRUGGLE

by

Joseph Trumino

The dissertation describes and analyzes the neighborhood organization known as the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition and its efforts to save the northwest Bronx from physical deterioration. Key foci are the historical conditions associated with the organization's founding and the central role of the Catholic Church in the organization's establishment and operation. The internal dynamics of the organization, especially its grassroots and democratic elements are closely scrutinized. In addition, the manner in which the organization dealt with the issue of racial and ethnic change is described, with Gerald Suttles' concept of "the defended neighborhood" used for evaluative purposes.

Finally, the issue of class struggle is examined, focusing on the conflicts between the organization and both public and private sector institutions. Analysis centers on the type of class struggle engaged in by the organization and its relationship to the development of class consciousness.

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Finally, there is my family. My mother and father, Gaetana (Jean) and Ignazio (Rudy) Trumino, have provided support and encouragement throughout my years of study. I wanted them to be proud of me; I hope I have lived up to their high expectations. And last but not least, I thank my wife, Nancy Wohl. She, more than anyone, got me through this. Our discussions of chapters, paragraphs, phrases, commas, and, of course, Marx and Weber, helped me bring this dissertation to a successful conclusion. To Nancy Wohl and our children, Rebecca, Joanna, and Matthew, I dedicate this work.

THE NORTHWEST BRONX COMMUNITY AND CLERGY COALITION: A
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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is about the struggle by a group of people and the organization they founded to save their neighborhood from deterioration. The struggle took place in the northwest Bronx during the 1970s and 1980s. It was during that period that the area experienced social upheaval, brought about by metropolitan and regionally changing demographic, economic, and political conditions. Briefly, demographic change involved racial and ethnic transition, with poor and working class blacks and Latinos moving into New York, and the white working to middle classes moving out to the suburbs or to other states; economic change involved the decline of New York City as a manufacturing center (with a high proportion of low and semi-skilled factory jobs) and its rise as mainly a service economy, with banking, finance, publishing, and retailing jobs dominating the new economic structure, and political change involving, above all else, the fiscal crisis of 1975 and its accompanying austerity budgets which dominated city government well into the 1980s, first under Mayor Beame, from 1974-1977, and then under Mayor Koch, from 1978 until 1989.

The northwest Bronx was affected by all these changes, with the most obvious ones being racial and ethnic transition, with the newcomers being mainly

minorities who were often poor and on public assistance. Economically, the change in the northwest Bronx was related to the general economy of New York City which during the mid-to late nineteen seventies went downhill, and was accompanied by negative consequences in other spheres of social life, especially more and more poor minorities coming up from the South Bronx in search of decent and affordable housing. The influx of newcomers into the Northwest Bronx created tension and conflict as the newcomers moved into previously all white neighborhoods and changed the relationships among community residents and between community residents and local institutions like the Church, schools (both public and parochial), landlords, and local businesses. Politically, the best that can be said is that local political institutions were unable to have any real effect on the social and economic changes that were taking place. This was a time when the most consequential decisions of New York City government were being made more by bankers than by democratically elected representatives. The city government's accomplishments were more in the line of "successfully" cutting costs than coming up with innovative or progressive programs to deal with the serious problems affecting areas like the northwest Bronx.

It was under these conditions that the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition came into being, an organization established to preserve and maintain the stability of the neighborhoods of the northwest Bronx. As will be described in the body of this dissertation, the Coalition was founded by a Jesuit Scholastic and clergymen from northwest Bronx parishes. Its history, development, and change were the object of research during the mid-1970s and again in the early 1980s.

While the research initially focused on the phenomenon of racial and ethnic transition, over the course of almost two years of observation and interviewing a huge amount of data was collected on a multitude of different issues. The research was originally sponsored by the New York City Human Rights Commission, under Eleanor Holmes Norton. Dr. John Goering, then Assistant Professor of Sociology at the City University Graduate Center, was the project director. I was employed as a research assistant, in charge of data collection in the northwest Bronx. For two years, from February, 1975 until the spring of 1977, data were collected mainly by observation and interviewing. On certain occasions I acted as a participant observer. I attended innumerable Coalition meetings and interviewed scores of community activists and local officials, both formally and

informally. I was able to develop an excellent rapport with Coalition personnel, especially with the community organizers. [In fact, at one point, I was offered employment by the Coalition, which was politely refused.]

During the spring of 1982, I returned to the field to gather additional data, this time acting independently. At that time the focus was on changes that the organization and the neighborhood had undergone since I was last in the field.

The activities that were my principal concern were those of the organization's Standing Committees, whose task it was to spearhead the campaigns against those whose actions were defined as detrimental to the interests of the people of the northwest Bronx. Thus, the most important data collected had to do with the Standing Committees known as The Reinvestment Committee, The City Services Committee, and the Education Committee. In addition, valuable data were collected on the Coalition's Annual Meetings, held once a year to establish the working agenda of the Coalition during the coming year. While much of the data were collected through observation, there were also additional interviews done, both formally and informally.

In trying to organize the wealth of information gathered during the research, the work of Karl Marx and

Max Weber has been invaluable. Their understandings of social structure, process, and change have allowed for meaningful interpretation of the data collected. Marx's basic understanding of the relationship between inequality and capitalism is fundamental for interpreting the nature of American society. The central role he gives to class and its use as an interpretive device in understanding the behavior of human subjects is without parallel in classical sociology. Furthermore, Marx's notion of contradiction allows for the development of critical consciousness and a non-acceptance of surface interpretation and ideological subterfuge. Marx forces us to see beyond what's given, to look below the surface at interests, and how actions are directly related to real interests rather than symbolic justification or rhetoric. Critical consciousness itself is invaluable as a conceptual tool not only for seeing what is but for seeing possibilities in what is and for evaluating it. In addition, neo-Marxists Adam Przeworski and Erik Olin Wright have been invaluable for their application of Marxian analysis to an ever changing and dynamic economic system. Their insights into class structure and its relationship to class struggle and class consciousness have been especially helpful.

Max Weber's three dimensional perspective on social stratification supplies a historically grounded and helpful modification of Marx's more unidimensional perspective, without denying the empirical validity of Marx's analysis. Most valuable has been Weber's concept of status, as an additional basis for group formation and solidarity. The analysis of the Coalition and its founding owes much to Weber's perspective on status groups. The analysis of divisions in the Coalition as well as in the northwest Bronx also utilizes Weber's perspective on status groups and how status is both a basis for group formation as well as a divisive force in society. The entire analysis on the impact of race on Coalition actions is related to Weber's perspective of non-class based conflict. Max Weber's well known distinction between substantive and formal rationality was a conception that was especially pivotal for properly interpreting the conflict between the Coalition and banking interests.

While Marx and Weber have supplied the overall interpretive scheme for understanding the data, others have also contributed, many of whom are contemporary Marxists (or neo-Marxists), as well as Weberians. Among those whose contributions have been especially valuable have been Ira Katznelson. His book, City Trenches,

supplied me with important theoretical insights into contemporary modifications of Marx's concepts of class and class struggle. His modification related to changes in the structure of Capitalism and the relation of those changes to changes in the nature of class struggle was extremely important. As Katznelson states:

... by what justification are the social relations of work given a special or privileged status with respect to other sets of social relations that are also structured in class ways ...¹

The research was better informed about the nature of the struggle of the Coalition because of the contribution of Katznelson. Ida Susser's work, Norman Street, was also helpful. Her analysis of the relation between macro changes in the economy and their impact on the everyday lives of neighborhood residents in Greenpoint/Williamsburg, Brooklyn provided an important parallel for the study of northwest Bronx residents. William Kornblum's work, Blue Collar, basically a Chicago School type of ethnography and analysis, with its concept of "negotiated aggregation", was used to understand the Coalition's Reinvestment Committee and why its membership used less divisive symbolism than other Coalition committees.

¹Ira Katznelson, City Trenches, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), P. 203

Another whole area of literature that was important in interpreting the data was that of collective behavior and social movements. The Coalition came into being at a time when social activism was an important part of American life. American society was still strongly affected by movements for equality by blacks, women, and gays. The formation of the Coalition did not take place in a vacuum; it was related to the political-economic conditions that existed in American cities throughout the country, including changes in the economy, and the fiscal crisis of the state. Thus, the Coalition was part of a broad based national social movement associated with people's desire for greater freedom and democracy.

In the 1960s and 1970s people chafed under the domination and control of impersonal economic and political forces and organized to battle those forces. The combination of the establishment of a culture of protest, owing especially to the Civil Rights Movement, and changes in the conditions of life in America, created the groundwork for, what Harry Boyte called, The Backyard Revolution, his theoretically interesting (though perhaps overly optimistic) overview of the neighborhood movement. The Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition is, in fact, one of the largest community organizations in America and, as such, an important social phenomenon.

While Harry Boyte sees the "neighborhood movement" as the savior of American democracy, Manuel Castells (The City and The Grassroots) brings us back to reality, especially in his critique of Alinsky-style neighborhood organizations, such as the Coalition. For Castells, the Alinsky organizations of the 1970s involved more interest group and pluralist politics than the radical aims of the movements of the sixties. Castells forces us to examine how the self-styled radical, Alinsky, was not a radical at all, and nor were the organizations that used his ideas and strategy as a model for their endeavors, such as the Coalition.

Thus, with Castells we remove the proverbial "rose-colored" glasses and take a good hard look at what organizations like the Coalition are doing. Do they create real social change or do they simply help to smooth over the crises that periodically afflict urban neighborhoods like the northwest Bronx? Do they create a new social structure or help reproduce in slightly modified form the old one? These are the kinds of questions good sociology raises; Castells' work raises such questions.

Another book of this genre, Poor People's Movements, by Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward presents a thesis that is different from most understandings of

social movements. Where traditionally, from Marx to Lenin to Alinsky, the watchword of all those who would seek social change has been, "organization," Piven and Cloward argue that organization leads to cooptation, stagnation, and ultimately, a decline in gains for the oppressed. They argue quite convincingly that the key to gains by the poor against those who hold power, the key to getting concessions allowing the poor to live better, whether through higher welfare benefits or better wages, is not through organization but through unorganized disruption of the system, as in wildcat strikes or mass civil disturbance. Their significant historical research of poor people's movements tends to substantiate their thesis, and certainly, recent history, with its quieted labor movement, women's movement, and civil rights movement and the "give backs" all such groups have had to endure, in spite of their impressive organizations, also does little to cast doubt on Piven and Cloward's thesis. The Coalition was an organized effort from the start; where one might have been tempted to accept "its press" and its own view of itself as a maverick grass-roots organization, Poor People's Movements stops you in your tracks. How radical can such a highly organized and hierarchically structured organization be?

Finally, behind much of the analysis that was undertaken in this work, and behind the critical consciousness that was adopted to understand and analyze the phenomena are three still very dangerous ideas associated with the rise of sociology as a perspective on reality, i.e. freedom, equality, and democracy. These three ideas, embodied in the work of people like Marx, Wright, Przeworski, Castells, Susser, Katznelson, and Piven and Cloward, go to the heart of what this whole endeavor has been about; not simply to scientifically observe reality, but to engage it, interpret it, and analyze it, and to help in some perhaps minuscule way to establish a society whose structure and way of life embody those ideas.

Chapter One

Historical Conditions Associated with the Establishment
of the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition

The Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition [henceforth to be known as the NWBCCC] was founded during a period of rapid social change. In fact, it was founded for the specific purpose of dealing with the changes affecting the whole fabric of social life in the northwest Bronx. To neighborhood residents of the northwest Bronx in the 1970s, the area was rapidly going the way of the South Bronx. What this meant to long time residents of the northwest Bronx was all too obvious, and widely reported in the media: deteriorating housing and abandonment, a rising crime rate, more and more fires, dirty streets, unmaintained and dilapidated parks, and other physical signs of a neighborhood rapidly going bad. Besides these real physical changes, many also viewed with ambivalence and sometimes outright hostility the arrival of large numbers of black and Latino newcomers, most of whom were poor or at best working class, and often on some form of public assistance. The combination of a deteriorating physical environment and the arrival of newcomers from a different socio-cultural background was viewed as nothing less than a disaster and a crisis

to many of the residents of the northwest Bronx and its institutions. Thus, the fear expressed by many northwest Bronx residents was that the neighborhood would soon go the way of the South Bronx. Monseigneur McCarthy of Holy Spirit parish, located south of Fordham Road on the southern border of the northwest Bronx, said in a 1976 interview that the South Bronx was moving north at the rate of ten blocks a year.² In the atmosphere of the Bronx in the 1970s, no one needed an explanation as to what that meant.

The changes described above were phenomenologically there to be seen by those aware of such categorizations, evaluations, or even social facts. However, they were changes that might be described as immediate changes, more like effects and consequences of more global and structural changes. While they were there for all to see as the reasons why the northwest Bronx was going bad, they, themselves, were dependent on not so visible changes that had been occurring for the previous twenty or thirty years. These broad based structural changes were economic, political, and demographic. In order to understand the immediate and phenomenological ones

² Interview with Monseigneur McCarthy, at Holy Spirit Parish Center, February 20, 1976.

described above, these broad based structural and background ones must be described and analyzed.

Economic Changes

To fully understand what happened to New York City in the 1970s, it is necessary to look broadly at a whole host of changes occurring in the global marketplace, changes in global capitalism. No city, not even a world city like New York, stands alone in the global marketplace. Not since the heyday of feudalism have localities been economically self-sufficient or economically independent. After World War II the economy of the old industrial cities of the northeast and middle west began to change. The key change involved a gradual shift in the economic base of these regions, away from manufacturing and more and more toward services and information processing, i.e. the classic post-industrial economic base. In his book, The Long Default, William Tabb writes:

...At the end of World War II New York was a manufacturing city. The garment, costume jewelry, toy, and other industries flourished in a thousand small factories located in lofts in Manhattan, the Bronx, and Brooklyn. ...
Manufacturing employment in New York City reached a peak of 1,073,000 workers in 1947, and had declined 12 percent by 1960. By 1970, a further 121,000 manufacturing jobs had been lost, and by 1977 another 287,000. In 1950, manufacturing jobs had

accounted for 30 percent of payroll employment; by 1980 the figure was 15 percent.³

In addition, New York City's biggest industrial employer, the garment industry, between 1960 and 1970 alone (generally regarded as a period of great prosperity) lost almost one-third of its jobs. The other major employer, the printing/publishing industry, also lost six percent of its jobs.⁴

The key reasons for the erosion of New York City's previously strong industrial sector are rooted in the national and global economic structure. The reason for its loss of jobs was at first city-suburban competition, but later inter-regional competition between the old industrial north and the emergence of the lower wage and politically friendlier sun belt states. Also important was the rise of the Far East as a manufacturing region. Nations like Hong Kong, Korea, and Taiwan began to compete with cities like New York for investment, with these new Capitalist "tigers" having the advantage of a largely passive, low wage work force and anti-union governments.

³ William Tabb, The Long Default (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1982), p.75.

⁴ John Mollenkopf, The Contested City (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), p.229, citing 1960 and 1970 Censuses of Population, industry by occupation tables.

Another significant economic factor affecting New York City and the Bronx in the 1970s was a rather drastic downturn in the economy. Starting in 1969 and continuing until 1975, all sectors of the city's economy went into recession, including its strong service sector, i.e. banking, finance, advertising, legal services, and real estate. The city's unemployment rate went from 4.8% in 1970 to 10.6% in 1975.⁵

Thus, by the mid-1970s, the combination of radical changes in the structure of New York City's economy and a serious recession were taking a heavy toll on the life of the city. A significant proportion of the city's residents and its institutions were experiencing economic turmoil. Of course, it was the poor who experienced the most serious hardships. "Between 1950 and 1970, the proportion of families in New York City with incomes below the nation's median income level rose from 35% to 49%." ⁶ By 1978, 1,312,000 persons or 18.5% of New York City's population were living below the poverty level.⁷

⁵ Eric Lichten, Class, Power, and Austerity (Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, 1986), p.75.

⁶ Ida Susser, Norman Street (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.21.

⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports Series p-60, "Characteristics of the Population Below the Poverty Level: 1977" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), Table 46, p.197, cited by E. Barbara Phillips and Richard LeGates, City Lights

With serious unemployment and poverty, between 1960 and 1970 the proportion of the city's population receiving public assistance increased from 324,200 to a rather staggering 1,094,700, or from 4% of the population in 1960 to 14% in 1970. ⁸ In The Long Default, William Tabb writes that:

According to the city's Department of Social Services, by early 1972 one in five New Yorkers was receiving some form of public assistance. Over the decade, welfare costs rose from 12 percent to 23 percent of the city's expense budget. The welfare population accounted for three-quarters of the caseload of the city's courts and two-thirds of the patients in its hospital clinics. ⁹

Given the above, it should not be difficult to understand why it was that during the late 1960s and early to mid 1970s New York City began to experience serious fiscal strain, culminating in its near bankruptcy in 1975.

Demographic Changes

As was true of economic change, the most significant demographic changes affecting New York City did not occur overnight. Changes in the composition of the city's population are easily dated to the post-World War II

(New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 9.

⁸ Lichten, loc. cit.

⁹ Tabb, loc. cit. p. 80

period. After the war, the federal government began providing incentives for the rapid development of the American suburb. Cheap FHA mortgages were made available to the young men who had fought in World War II. In addition, the Highway Trust Fund was created and Uncle Sam began spending billions of dollars on highway construction. In addition, more and more industrial firms began to move from central city locations to the friendlier pastures of suburbia. The reasons for the move by industrial firms are rooted in cheaper costs (land, energy, and taxes) and plain and simple class struggle, for the suburbs provided friendlier local governments and less worker solidarity and union strength.

In addition, the boom in highway construction facilitated the move to the suburbs not only by providing a means to transport industrial products, but also by providing a means of commuting for the millions of workers. Thus, it was after World War II that America became more than ever before a far flung commuter society. As American industry spread beyond the confines of the central city and Americans moved to the suburbs both in pursuit of jobs and an easier and better quality of life, throughout America there was an almost incredible dispersal of industry and workers, a radical

transformation of the economic and demographic landscape. Whole metropolitan areas were transformed, both central cities and suburban environs.

In terms of population movement, the key dynamic was the movement of the people from the central city to the suburbs. The population of the United States began to spread over a larger land area, from the densely populated city to the suburbs. Americans began to change their pattern of living, from being a nation of central city and apartment dwellers to being a nation of suburbanites and private home dwellers. No where was that more true than in the New York City metropolitan region.

Table 1 (below) indicates changes in the population of New York City from 1950 to 1980:

TABLE 1

NEW YORK CITY POPULATION: 1950-1980

1950	1960	1970	1980
7,892,000	7,782,000	7,895,000	7,021,000 a

a Data from U.S., Bureau of the Census, 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980.

As the above figures indicate, there was general population stability between 1950 and 1970. While there was no growth to speak of, neither was there significant decline. But the 1980 figure indicates a steep decline

in population, a loss of almost nine-hundred thousand inhabitants, or 10.4% of the population.

During the same period, i.e. between 1950 and 1980, the suburbs around New York grew at an astounding rate: between 1950 and 1960 at 74.8%, between 1960 and 1970 at 26.9%, and even between 1970 and 1980, when the City of New York lost almost 900,000 inhabitants, the suburbs grew at a rate of 1.9%.¹⁰

Clearly, by the 1970s, the decline of central cities, especially those of the northeast and middle west, was proceeding at a rapid pace. New York (along with cities like Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Philadelphia) was losing population, and even its adjacent suburbs grew only minimally. (New York's intermediate and outer ring of suburbs [as defined by the Regional Plan Association of New York] actually increased population, adding over six hundred thousand people. These outer suburbs include areas such as the eastern end of Suffolk and Sullivan Counties in New York, Warren and Ocean Counties in New Jersey, and Litchfield County in

¹⁰ William Frey and Alden Speare, Jr. Regional and Metropolitan Growth and Decline in the United States (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1988) p.512 citing County and City Data Book, Consolidated File for Counties, 1947-1977, and Cities, 1944-1977; and County and City Data Book, 1983 file (prepared by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C.)

Connecticut.)¹¹ By contrast, most southern and western cities gained population, and their suburbs increased dramatically.

While New York City's suburbs were growing (from the 1950s until the 1970s) most of that growth came from former city dwellers departing for the greener pastures of suburbia. But the migration of city dwellers to suburbia was not a random migration. The out-movers were overwhelmingly white and mostly middle class. And, just as important, since the population of New York City remained stable from 1950 until 1970, the social characteristics of the in-movers taking the place of the departed white middle class out-movers was extremely consequential for understanding New York City's crisis in the 1970s. In fact, the newcomers to New York City were overwhelmingly black, Latino and poor. Between 1950 and 1970 the boroughs of The Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan lost 1,215,000 whites. During that same period of the 1950s and 1960s, the suburbs around New York increased their white population by over 3,500,000.¹² The whites leaving New York City were replaced mainly by Latins and

¹¹ Michael Danielson and Jameson W. Doig, New York: The Politics of Urban Regional Development (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1982) p.35 and p.65.

¹² Ibid., p.52

blacks, most of whom were poor. In 1970, the average household income of suburbanites around New York City was \$17,062, while that of city dwellers was only two-thirds that amount, \$11,269.¹³ In his book on the New York City fiscal crisis, Ken Auletta writes:

Though the city's population remained a stable 8 million, between 1950 and 1970 the composition of New York changed dramatically. In those years, the city lost about 25% of its white middle-income population (1.6 million) and gained an equal number of (mostly) poor blacks and Hispanics. In 1960, just 4 percent of the city's population—324,000—received public assistance. By 1970, the figure was 14 percent—over 1 million people....¹⁴

Between 1970 and 1980 New York City population dropped by 900,000 inhabitants, but equally significant was that during that period almost 1,800,000 whites left the city. While their numbers weren't sufficient to make up for the loss in white population, approximately 900,000 minorities moved into the city during this period: 300,000 Latinos, 120,000 blacks, and a new group of newcomers, approximately 480,000 people of Asian ancestry, most of whom were Korean, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, and Filipino. By 1980, two-thirds of Bronxites were black and Latino, as were half of Brooklynites and forty-four percent of Manhattanites.

¹³ Ken Auletta, The Streets Were Paved With Gold (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p.40

¹⁴ Ibid., p.32

Between 1970 and 1980 the black and Latino percentage of New York City's population changed from 35% to 45% .¹⁵

As for specific demographic data on the Bronx itself, Table 2 indicates overall population change from 1950 to 1980 (in thousands):

TABLE 2

CHANGES IN THE POPULATION OF THE BRONX: 1950-1980

1950	1960	1970	1980	% Chg. 1950 to 1980
1,451	1,425	1,472	1,169	-19.6% (282,000)

As Table 2 indicates The Bronx did not grow from 1950 to 1970 and it lost 282,000 people during the decade of the 1970s.¹⁶

During this period, the white population of The Bronx dropped from 1,352,000 in 1950 to 1,114,000 in 1970, and to an almost astounding 400,000 in 1980. Thus, between 1970 and 1980 The Bronx lost just over 700,000 of its white inhabitants. By 1980, blacks and Latinos constituted approximately two-thirds of The Bronx's inhabitants.¹⁷

Even more significant than the change in the numbers of whites and minorities was the change in their

¹⁵ Danielson and Doig, loc. cit. p.51-54.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

respective economic positions. As mentioned above, most of the out-moving whites were middle class people, while most of the in-coming blacks and Latinos were poor. Like the European immigrants who preceded them, after World War II blacks migrated to New York in search of economic opportunity. As southern agriculture become mechanized, thousands of poor black tenant farmers were forced off the land. They came north by the thousands in search of work. Latinos, most of whom were Puerto Ricans, came north from the island of Puerto Rico also in search of a better life. The economy of the island was stagnant and the level of poverty on the island was staggering. Thus, both groups came to New York for the same reason-economic opportunity. Unfortunately, both came at a time when the streets were no longer paved with gold, and good jobs were difficult to come by. Both blacks and Latinos came when the economy of New York was changing. What had been the number one industrial city in America before World War II was a city slowly but surely losing its industrial base. Jobs which in previous decades had allowed poor, largely unskilled white ethnics to improve their lives and offer promise to their children were no longer there. Instead of offering economic opportunity to the teeming masses of poor people streaming to New

York City, what New York offered was welfare dependency and the life of an indigent.

Political Changes

Politics has to do with power and the allocation of scarce resources. One of the defining events in America for the decade of the 1970s was the New York City fiscal crisis. The fiscal crisis, even its name, implies a simple economic problem. In fact, it was eminently political because it had to do with the distribution of societal resources and the power to decide their distribution. While the fiscal crisis was superficially about a shortfall in revenue and an excess in expenditures, it was that and much more. It was related to the changes in the national government, changes in the economy, the changing social characteristics of New York City's population, especially its newcomers (as discussed above), and what has been called by economist, James O'Connor, "the fiscal crisis of the state," related to changes in the nature of Capitalism and the demands made on the state to satisfy Capitalism's need to accumulate and at the same time its need to legitimate its system private accumulation at the expense of working people. Finally, it was related to changes in the cultural environment, and the development of a culture of protest,

as exemplified by the important social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, such as the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, the women's movement, the welfare rights movement, the gay rights movement, and, what Harry Boyte called, "the backyard revolution," or the citizen's movement.

To begin, the election of Richard Nixon in 1968 and his reelection in 1972 ushered in a real change in American political priorities.¹⁸ The ascendancy of Richard Nixon to the presidency involved the defeat of the old New Deal Coalition, put together first by Franklin Roosevelt and then later successfully utilized by Truman, Kennedy, and especially Johnson, with the implementation of his Great Society Program. The New Deal Coalition was a coming together of various interest groups for the purpose of achieving electoral success and of course for advancing each group's own program. The New Deal Coalition brought together liberal reformers, labor, working class ethnics, and minorities.

In addition, the New Deal Coalition was urban and much of its program was directed at cities, the cite of its principal constituents. Of course, the New Deal also

¹⁸ John Mollenkoph, The Contested City (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983). The following analysis of changes in federal government policy is based largely on the work of John Mollenkoph.

involved local business elites who were willing to work with the new Coalition. The New Deal was never anti-capitalist and the New Dealers worked closely with business elites to implement projects designed to bring prosperity both to the Coalition's constituents and the business elites that supported the program. Local business elites such as bankers, developers, and builders were an integral part of the New Deal Coalition and they shared in the prosperity brought about by federal support of local development in cities throughout America.

Richard Nixon's presidency and the continuation of its program by Gerald Ford signaled the end of the New Deal Coalition and the rise of a new alignment, one that was conservative and generally pro-suburb and anti-city. In effect, the new conservative program derived its support from the newer metropolitan areas, i.e. the suburbs, rather than the old ones, i.e. the central city. Nixon's program involved cuts and modifications of the Office of Economic Opportunity, the Model Cities Program, and the implementation of new programs, such as revenue-sharing and the Community Development Block Grant Program, all of which had in their general thrust, cuts in programs aimed at cities and increases in programs aimed at suburbs and the newer metropolitan areas of the south and west. Nixon's New Federalism aimed to reward his constituents

and, if not punish, at least weaken the old New Deal Coalition and its big city, liberal constituency. As John Mollenkopf puts in The Contested City:

Conservative successes made matters difficult for the Democrats in a number of ways. Obviously, they reduced the political efficacy of federal urban programs for Democrats, and made urban program reform a high priority for in-coming Democratic administrations. Conservative successes also made the internal conflict within the Democratic coalition more acute by preventing Democratic programs from delivering what urban liberal Democrats had promised to their central-city working-class constituents. Conservatives make sure that public housing would never provide "a decent home and suitable living environment" for central-city families and that urban renewal would spur downtown development rather than neighborhood rehabilitation. . . .¹⁹

The election of Jimmy Carter held the promise of the revitalization of the New Deal Coalition, and during the first two years of his administration changes were made revitalizing programs scuttled by Nixon-Ford. Most importantly there was a 25% increase in aid to big cities. Unfortunately, the last two years of the Carter presidency were marked by stagflation, i.e. recession and inflation, and Carter chose to become a fiscal conservative and "...apply recessionary rather than expansionary policies, for 1979 and 1980."²⁰ The effect was the cutting back of programs aimed at helping big

¹⁹ Ibid. p.137.

²⁰ Ibid. p.275.

city poor and working classes. The revival of urban liberalism under Carter was short lived and ultimately a failure.

Thus, at the national level the decade of the seventies was one where the cities of America, especially those of the old industrial belt, from the northeast and the middle-west, entered a period of decline. They were losing jobs in what had been their area of economic strength, i.e. manufacturing. While their service sectors were picking up some of the slack, service sector jobs were commonly non-union and low paying. These new jobs would not allow the hundreds of thousands of the new urban masses from America's south and the Caribbean and South America to "pick themselves up by the bootstraps" and make a decent life for themselves as the European immigrants had done a generation earlier. So, at a time when hundreds of thousands of poor people were streaming to cities like New York, these old industrial cities were declining in just the sector of the economy that traditionally had employed the poor and immigrant masses. To make matters even worse, under the Nixon-Ford administrations, and even to a good extent that of the Democrat Carter, the federal government was cutting back on its commitment to America's cities and its urban poor and working classes. At a time when America's cities

needed more help than ever before, the federal government moved to make as its priority the battle against inflation and recession, rather than the battle against poverty.

Put differently, the late 1960s and the 1970s might be termed the period of national fiscal crisis. Following James O'Connor's analysis, it was a period of crisis for the government, a period when the economy was not creating the kind of surpluses necessary to maintain harmony between corporate America and America's working classes. Corporate America demanded that the government adopt policies permitting it to make high profits, while at the same time, many groups of working class people made their own demands on the government to adopt policies to permit them to partake in the surpluses produced by the economy. The 1960s and 1970s were decades of mass protest and as authors Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward describe in their book, Poor People's Movements, poor and working class people demanded that their government represent their class interests. The government thus became the arena of class conflict, with each group fighting for its own class interests, thus precipitating fiscal crisis.

At the local level, which is not easily separated from the national level in a modern industrial or post-

industrial society with a [relatively] strong central government, the political, economic and demographic changes described above led to what was termed "the defining event of the decade", i.e. the New York City fiscal crisis. There are many explanations and analyses of the fiscal crisis and its causes, but certainly all are in agreement that it led to a period of rather severe austerity for the city and its citizenry. From the very beginning of the crisis it appeared that New York City would get little sympathy for its plight. This attitude was perhaps epitomized by the famous Daily News headline of October 29, 1975:

FORD TO CITY:
DROP DEAD²¹

In spite of above headline, President Ford did in fact approve of a short term loan to New York City, but this was only a stop gap measure. Ultimately, it was under the auspices of the Governor of New York State, Hugh Carey, that the Municipal Assistance Corporation was formed, known as MAC, and later, the Emergency Financial Control Board was legally established, both of which were more permanent solutions to New York's fiscal crisis. In

²¹ Jack Newfield and Paul DuBrul, The Permanent Government (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1981), p.56 citing New York Daily News of October 29, 1975.

his book on the fiscal crisis, Eric Lichten calls the EFCB, "The Austerity Board" and states that:

It was, in all respects, a formal and legally authorized austerity board. Most important of all, its function was mandated by law, and it was able to institute austerity regardless of any potential resistance from the city's unions, workers, or residents. It had been isolated from potential popular movements against austerity.²²

This "austerity board" had real power over the government of New York City, and significantly, this meant that a group of appointed officials had the power to veto the decisions of democratically elected city officials. In other words, real power in New York City government had shifted away from the political sphere to the corporate and financial spheres. The priorities of these people were budgetary and not humanitarian. For them it was truly the bottom line that mattered. Under the EFCB budget cuts became the highest priority.

In their book, New York: The Politics of Regional Development, authors Michael Danielson and Jameson Doig describe some of the key consequences of austerity:

New York City's financial crisis ... left fewer resources available for development projects. Capital funds for industrial parks, sewers, and other projects were cut by a quarter in the austerity budget that resulted from the 1975 financial collapse.....
Lack of money ... also drastically reduced the funds available for housing development. In the wake of financial collapse, New York was forced to

²² Lichten, loc. cit. p.138.

shelve almost all of its housing development activities, including the construction of 50,000 apartments for low-and middle-income families. As a result, the gap steadily grows larger between the rhetoric of the slum-free city and the reality of meager housing programs ...

Last but hardly least, financial adversity has undermined development efforts ... by reducing the level and quality of public services. "Our parks are filthy," pointed our Manhattan's borough president at the end of 1976, "our highways are strewn with garbage, there are more potholes, our bridges are deteriorating, schools and day-care centers are being closed." For New York City austerity meant less police and fire protection, fewer garbage collections, and a 25 percent increase in class size in the schools.²³

If, as stated above, politics has to do with power and the allocation of scarce resources, in the 1970s New York City was a city at the end of its rope. The national government and the powerful corporate/financial sectors were exercising power over the city, and the effect was a decline in the quality of life for city residents. Most of all it was the poor and working classes that suffered under austerity. Because they are the ones that depended most heavily on public services, whether for transportation, medical care, recreation, or housing, the cuts in the city's budget most affected them.

Conditions in the Bronx

The Bronx of the 1970s was probably the most written about area of a city in the history of America. While

²³ Danielson and Doig, loc. cit. pp.282-283.

the New York City fiscal crisis may have been "the defining event of the decade," The Bronx and what happened to it in the late 1960s and 1970s constituted one of the symptomatic causal elements bringing about fiscal crisis. Behind the deterioration of The Bronx were the same factors that led to the decline of New York City, i.e. economic, social (demographic), and political changes discussed above. This is not the place to add yet another lurid description to what everyone already knows about The Bronx. Nevertheless, in order to understand what will be described in the following chapters, i.e. the establishment of the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, it is worth recounting the description of The Bronx written by two well known New York journalists, Jack Newfield and Paul DuBrul, at a time when people were still shocked by such things:

By the early 1970s, the South Bronx was perhaps the most wretched urban slum in America ... The infant mortality rate there was 29 per 1000 births. In 1970, the average median family income in the South Bronx was \$5,200, compared to the city-wide average of \$9,682. The South Bronx has a quarter of all New York's reported cases of malnutrition and 16 percent of all its cases of venereal disease. In 1972 less than 6 percent of the public-school pupils could read at grade level. Three out of every four housing units were below standard and in violation of housing and health codes. There were 6000 abandoned buildings. Residents ran wires from an abandoned building with electricity to an inhabited one with none. Street gangs were armed with automatic weapons, and packs of wild dogs lived in the abandoned buildings.

Engine Company 82 ... responded to twenty alarms a night. The firemen were often ambushed and pelted with bricks and glass by teenagers.

Starting in the summer of 1975 a new factor began to make the South Bronx an even worse hell, an even more grotesques symbol for the fall of New York. Arson. Organized, systematic burning. Thirteen thousand fires broke out in the 12 square miles of the South Bronx in 1975. Forty people were killed, including three firemen. More than half the fires were reported as "cause unknown." Block after block today is in ruins, with only occasional charred halves of tenements standing.

.....
 It is estimated that about 75,000 of the city's poorest people have been made homeless refugees by ... arson-for-insurance fires. Families have been burned-out three and four times. Many of the victims now have to live in welfare hotels around the city, and large families have been broken up. In 1980, there were 10,000 arson fires - 6,000 of them in Brooklyn because there was nothing left to torch in the South Bronx.²⁴

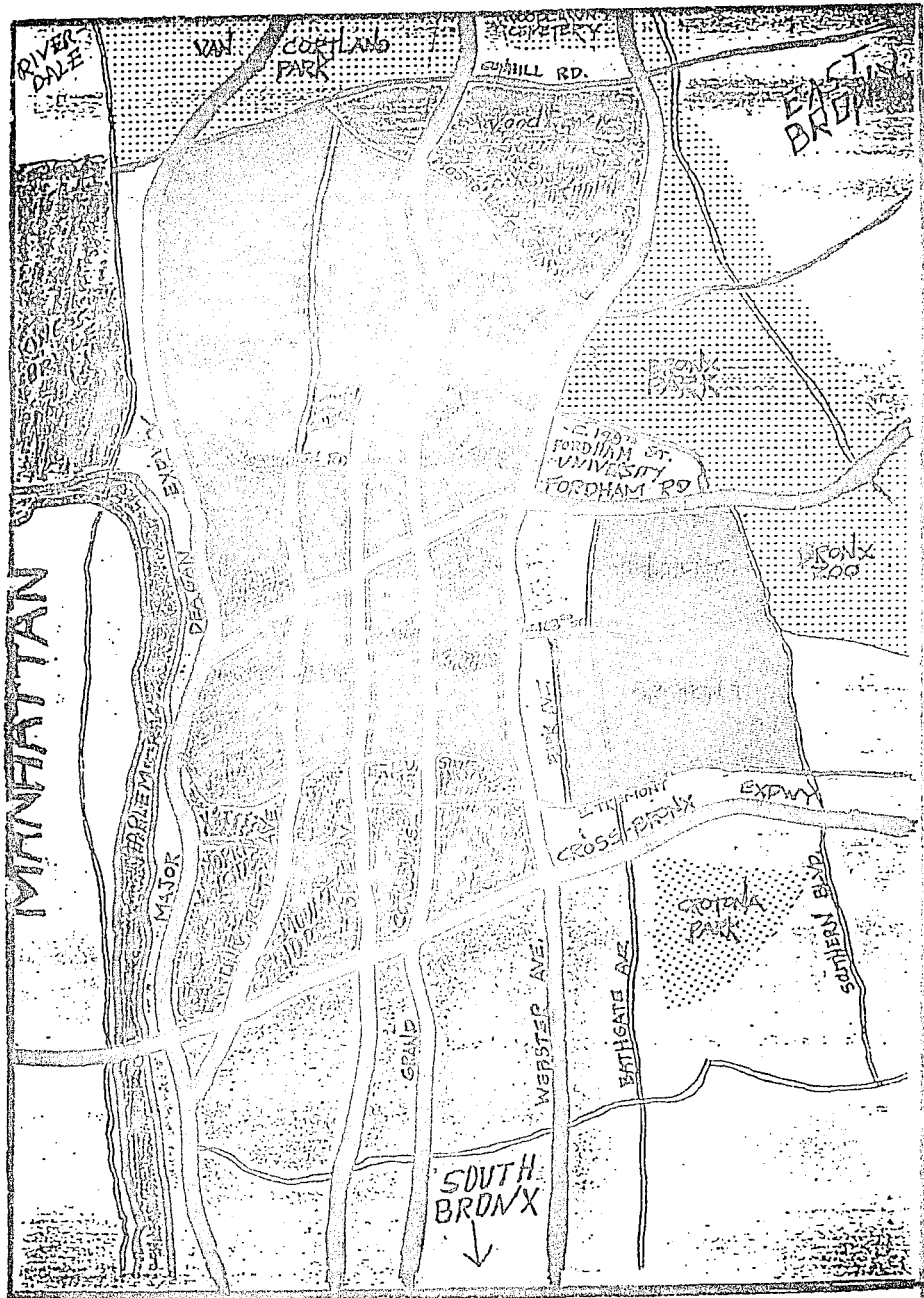
While The South Bronx stood as a kind of national symbol of all that had gone wrong with America and its cities, to the people of the northwest Bronx it was not a symbol at all, but a threat. To the people and institutions of the northwest Bronx, which stood in a direct path to the ever expanding and northward push of deterioration, what was happening to the areas to its immediate south was real and alarming. As will be discussed in the next chapter, it was one of The Bronx's oldest and strongest institutions which moved strongly to stop the deterioration from spreading to the northwest Bronx.

²⁴ Jack Newfield and Paul DuBrul, loc. cit. pp.6-7.

Chapter Two

The Founding of the Coalition

The Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition came into being as a consequence of a man, Paul Brant, two important Catholic institutions, Fordham University and the Bronx Catholic Church under Vicar Bishop Patrick Ahern, and, most importantly, the rapidly deteriorating conditions of previously vibrant Bronx neighborhoods. While each of these factors was important in the establishment of the Coalition, the changing conditions of northwest Bronx neighborhoods was the immediate reason for the initiative taken by Paul Brant and the supporting roles played by Fordham University and the Bronx Catholic Church. Paul Brant was a Jesuit scholastic, studying for the priesthood and working at Fordham University as a philosophy professor. (The campus of Fordham University is located in the northwest Bronx, though somewhat at its eastern border. (See Map of Northwest Bronx on page 37)) Arriving at Fordham in 1968, the young Brant was forced to seek housing off campus due to a housing shortage at the university. He moved into a rental apartment in the South Fordham area, just to the south of the Fordham campus, an area that was beginning to show signs of physical deterioration. Coming from a North Carolina



NORTH WEST BRONX

town, as Brant put it, "...I developed a strong sense of 'neighborliness,' a strong belief in people taking care of each other ...," he was taken aback by the apathetic attitude of the residents of the neighborhood in the face of the deteriorating conditions.²⁵ He thus began to get involved in neighborhood activities, at first initiating such things clean-up campaigns with neighbors and friends. He also involved students from his philosophy course, appropriately titled, "Elements of Social Thought."

Then, on December 25, 1969, the infamous Christmas blizzard hit New York City. This was the same blizzard that created political nightmares for Mayor Lindsey. Long after the snow had stopped falling, the streets of the Queens had remained unplowed. The usually quiescent, even apathetic, residents of Queens arose in a fury seldom seen in the long history of New York City. Their anger over unplowed streets was directed at "hizzoner," Mayor Lindsey. Ironically, according to Brant, long after the great Queens scandal, long after Queens streets had finally been plowed, northwest Bronx streets remained

²⁵"A Tree Grows in the Northwest Bronx," Fordham Summer, 1984, p.17

unplowed and no scandal was noted.²⁶

Brant had tried to get the city moving on this, but he was unsuccessful. Clearly, unplowed streets in Queens were scandalous while the same situation in the Bronx got no attention from anybody: no city politician, no city agency, and no city newspaper; the Bronx had indeed become the stepchild of New York City. A short time later, having convinced Fordham University President, Father Finley that something had to be done to revitalize Bronx neighborhoods, Brant was appointed the university's community liaison person.

During the next two years activist Paul Brant became president of a local planning board, and even more importantly, in 1972, he helped to establish the Morris Heights Neighborhood Improvement Association. (See map on Page 37, area in lower left hand side) With the help of a grant from the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (under Mildred Zucker), and the support of Holy Spirit pastor, Monseigneur John McCarthy, Brant set out to realize an ambitious project aimed at stabilizing the neighborhoods of the northwest Bronx. He enlisted the help of two former classmates and seminarians from the Jesuit seminary in Illinois , Jim Mitchell and Roger

²⁶ Jill Jonnes, We're Still Here: The Rise, Fall, and Resurrecion of the South Bronx (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986),p.345

Hayes. So, while Brant became president of Community Planning Board #5 in the South Fordham area, Mitchell and Hayes were busy organizing tenants in the Morris Heights area, immediately to the west. When the new community association was established. Morris Heights was already an area with severe problems. First, it was an area whose racial make-up had changed radically within a span of less than ten years. As Monseigneur McCarthy put it "... in 1965 there were 1,400 parishioners in Holy Spirit (congregation) and 95% were white (and now in 1976) of that 1400 only 100 are left and the rest are non-white. The school was 90-95% white and now it is 1/3 black and 2/3 Hispanic. The (few) white children are from outside the parish".²⁷ What was true of the parish was also true of the general Morris Heights area, which contained a population of approximately 45,000 inhabitants. Secondly, the newcomers to Morris Heights, besides being different racially and ethnically, were also poorer. According to the President of the Morris Heights Neighborhood Improvement Association, Roger Hayes, approximately 20% of the residents were on welfare. Lastly, the area had serious social problems, especially a rapidly deteriorating housing stock, with a high level of abandonment, and the often accompanying social ills,

²⁷ Interview with Monseigneur Mc Carthy, 1975

especially crime, drug addiction, and poor sanitation²⁸.

In spite of the near impossible task it had put upon itself, the Morris Heights Neighborhood Improvement Association did achieve its successes, and perhaps most importantly, it served as a model, even a kind of pilot project, demonstrating that something could be done to stop the deterioration if people were willing to put time and effort into it. As Roger Hayes put it:

We're going into buildings and completely turning them around. We're going into build- buildings that would have been abandoned in six months We're developing leadership and seeing people take a little more control over their environment. I think its definitely a way of saving more buildings. We have to fight bad forces in the in the community, such as bad landlords and un-responsive city agencies. We say let's not cry about the situation, let's do something about it. ²⁹

Thus, through the use of tenant organizing, rent strikes, and the formation of security patrols, and community self help efforts, such as turning vacant lots into gardens and monitoring local businesses (such as so called Medicaid Mills) the Morris Heights organization was instilling hope, not only in local residents but also in the hearts of other interested parties, especially other local Catholic parish priests, faced with the same difficulties.

²⁸ Jonnes, loc.cit. pp.346-347

²⁹ New York Post, Article by Peter Freiberg, 1976

For many years Catholic clergymen of the northwest Bronx had been meeting periodically to discuss Church related matters. These meetings in which the clergymen discussed such things as bingo receipts were formalized as "The Northwest Bronx Clergy Conference." Then, around 1972, a nun, Sister Pat Dillon came on the scene. Sister Pat had done community work with a Protestant Minister in Providence, Rhode Island. She talked to the gathered prelates of the Clergy Conference about her work and convinced them of the importance of social activism.³⁰ Soon after, many of the pastors, like Father Mc Nally of St. Nicholas of Tolentine Church and Father Mc Nulty of Our Lady of Mercy began to get involved in tenant organizing and battling both local landlords and municipal agencies for better services. A short time later, Monseigneur John McCarthy of Holy Spirit parish brought Paul Brant on the scene. To better deal with the immense problems involved in revitalizing the parish neighborhoods Brant outlined a plan to the pastors of the Northwest Bronx Clergy Conference, calling for the establishment of a northwest Bronx-wide community organization, composed of the sixteen parishes of the area. In effect, Brant was proposing the establishment

³⁰ Interview with Bishop Ahern, 1975

of a federation of community organizations, a coalition.³¹ The area covered by the new organization would be immense, constituting about one-quarter of the land area of Bronx county, roughly from the Cross Bronx Expressway on the south, to the Yonkers\Westchester border on the north, and from the Harlem and Hudson Rivers on the west to the Bronx Botanical Gardens, the Bronx Zoo, and Boston Post Road to the east. [See Map of New York City with Northwest Bronx shaded on p.45] The population of this area was approximately 400,000 people. While the name of this new organization would ultimately be the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, at the time the proposal was made by Paul Brant it appears that the organization was at least initially to be part of the Northwest Bronx Clergy Conference. Furthermore, whether the "community" aspect, i.e. the non-sectarian aspect, was always intended or not, it is clear that the new organization was viewed by its founder, Brant and presumably his supporters, as principally a Catholic organization or certainly one that was to be "steered" or run principally by the Northwest Bronx Catholic Church. Thus, even though Bishop Patrick Ahern would in 1976

³¹ Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition files, 1974

describe the Coalition as "... grow(ing) from the neighborhood

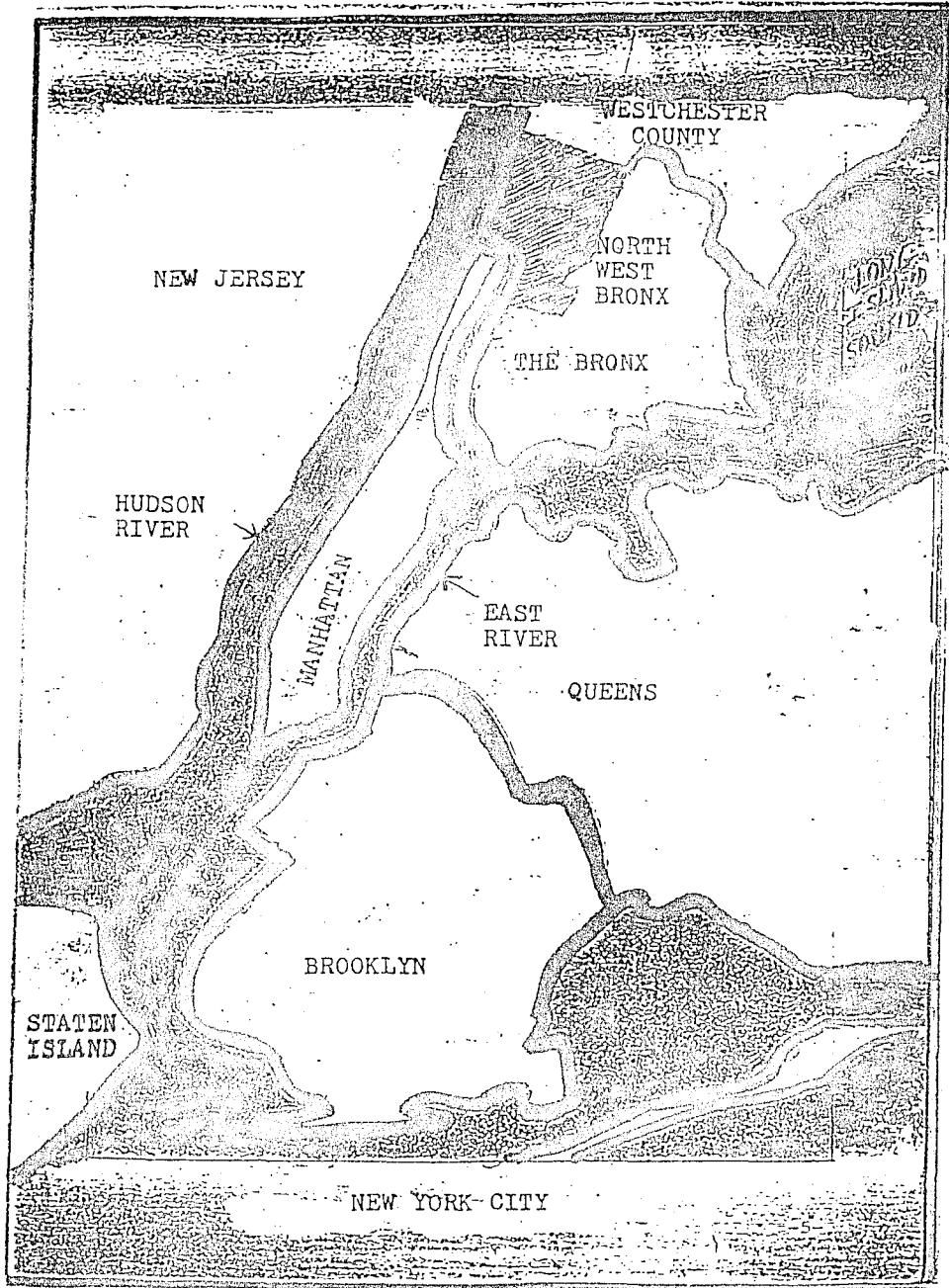
concerns of the pastors of the 16 parishes to become a broad-based ecumenical community organization," it is clear that it was above all else a Catholic organization! or at least a Catholic Church dominated organization.³²

At a gathering of the northwest Bronx pastors to prepare for a forthcoming meeting with the President of Dollar Saving Bank, Henry Waltermade, Paul Brant distributed a background paper to the assembled parish priests of the Northwest Bronx Clergy Conference. The purpose of the meeting with Mr. Waltermade was to enlist his support for the establishment of "... a program of neighborhood stabilization in the 16 parishes of the NWBCC (Northwest Bronx Clergy Conference)." and to convince him to "... contribute \$25,000 to the start-up budget ..." for the "... privately-controlled, community-based stabilization effort."³³

It is clear from the text of the background paper that Brant wanted the Catholic Church to be the "prime mover" in this effort at neighborhood stabilization; he told the assembled pastors:

³² Interview with Bishop Ahern, 1976

³³ NWBCCC files, 1974



NEW YORK CITY, WITH NORTH WEST BRONX SHADED

Part of our plan includes getting our people involved to demand responsible political leadership and accountability of civil servants. The Catholic Community has been a slumbering giant,... Our people are going to learn something about the precesses of government. We'll take our lead from Bishop Mugavero's letter ...

and

... We prefer to start with our own group because we speak the same language and can come to decisions in a relatively short time. When we have specified concrete projects in different neighborhoods, then we will recruit others for the effort. We view ours selves as a catalytic group engaged in starting a non-sectarian project. For reasons of efficiency, like starting a corporation with one incorporator, we have chosen this route.³⁴

He further focused his attention on "parishes," not simply neighborhoods, stating that:

"... Fordham students are already at work in Our Lady of Mercy Parish ... and another group will start work in St. Martin of Tours parish ..."

and

... We would add projects in the (St] Philip Neri/Our Lady of Refuge area, [St Nicholas of] Tolentine/Holy Spirit area, St. Brendan's/St. Ann's area, etc³⁵

Adding to the Catholic Church-centeredness [or domination] of the proposal was Brant's emphasis on the Northwest Bronx Clergy Conference as the directing agency of the entire proposal. In discussing the aims of the proposal, Brant stated "... the NWBCC will not tolerate

³⁴ NWBCCC files, 1974

³⁵ NWBCCC files, 1974

further spreading of deterioration..."³⁶ So, while Brant and the assembled pastors may have intended to "... move as soon as possible to involve all the people in the neighborhoods", and be careful "... not making this a strictly Catholic effort ...", he also said "... we know that the burden of the effort lies with us, but we need the help of other segments of the Bronx to help us get started."³⁷ Perhaps, most significant of all is Brant's perspective on reasons to involve other groups. In one specific proposal Brant stated:

#6. Start looking for Protestant Church leaders (ministers, elders, etc) and Jewish leaders (rabbis, temple presidents, etc.) and others who have access to a constituency in a geographical area, ask them to join in a concrete project and to help muster further volunteer support and leadership. This will enhance the possibility of getting big funding after the first year.³⁸

Thus, the Catholic Church was to be at the forefront of this effort to stem the tide of deterioration spreading from the south Bronx to the northwest section of the borough. The Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition was actually founded in January, 1974. Almost all the initial members and directors were Catholic

³⁶ NWBCCC files, 1974

³⁷ NWBCCC files, 1974

³⁸ NWBCCC files, 1974

Clergymen, mostly pastors of the sixteen parishes of the northwest Bronx churches, Monsgr. Louis Martorella, Father Leo Halpin, etc, etc. 16 priests/Msgrs. one Jesuit(Brant), one Catholic Layman, and one Bishop, Ahern)

In June, 1974 the leader of the New York Archdiocese, Cardinal Cooke, addressed a Fordham University conference on "Strategies for the Ministry" sponsored by the Northwest Bronx Clergy Conference. At the conference Cardinal Cooke gave his blessing to the clergymen's new found activism and stated that the parishes "... are a promise of stability, of permanence in a storm of change, of security that at least one of the major structures of our society, the Church, has not pulled out and thrown up its hands, in frustration at the appalling convergences of urban crisis."³⁹

With the Cardinal's support now counted in, the most powerful Catholic leaders and institutions were now involved in the northwest Bronx effort: the Bishop of the northwest Bronx, Patrick Ahern, all the local pastors, the President of Fordham University, Father Finley, plus a number of professional staff and a cadres of student volunteers, all in support of a Catholic Church-led contemporary crusade against what a Coalition program

³⁹ Jonnes, loc.cit.p.349

summary had called an "evil force" threatening the stability of the northwest Bronx.

Why Catholic Church Involvement?

There are three basic reasons for Catholic Church involvement in the social activism of the Coalition. The first one has to do with Paul Brant, the founder of the Coalition. He came on the scene at a time when the northwest Bronx was undergoing rapid social change, when the established institutions appeared powerless to change the northward push of deterioration slowly but surely moving up from the south Bronx. With intelligence, drive, and even charisma he was able to bring together the resources necessary to mount an offensive against the forces of deterioration. Brant's own motivation was partly personal, partly religious. As he put it, "I woke up one morning with feeling that the city ought to work and that I ought to do something." Of course, the previously mentioned 1969 Christmas blizzard and its aftermath of bureaucratic neglect of the northwest Bronx galvanized Brant. His inability to get action from anyone in city government drove him, not to throw up his hands, but to press forward, saying, "I thought there was something wrong with that." Coming from Raleigh, North Caroling, a city of 170,000 people where people looked

out for one another, Brant said, "The apathy I encountered among many Bronx residents was simply unacceptable to me". His other motivation was surely religious in nature. Brant was a philosophy instructor at Fordham College, teaching a course entitled, "Elements of Social Thought". As part of the curriculum of the course Brant had his students involved in community work in northwest Bronx neighborhoods. In fact, the first full time paid community organizers of the Coalition had been students of Paul Brant. The focus of the course was on the relationship between morality and social activism. Clearly, Paul Brant believed that the good Christian was someone who did good deeds, that there was more to Christianity than going to Church on sundays and reading the bible. As Paul Brant put it: "When the history of the Coalition is written, three or four hundred good leaders have gotten the Catholic Church out of its navel gazing..."⁴⁰

The second reason for the Church's involvement was self interest. While the devastation of the South Bronx affected the hundreds of thousands of people living there, it also affected the whole institutional structure, including economic, political, educational, and religious institutions. A religious institution like

⁴⁰ Interview with Paul Brant, 1977

the Bronx Catholic Church was tied not only to its parishioners but also to the whole institutional infrastructure of the area. As the population of the Bronx began to change racially and ethnically, the Churches' parishioners also changed. The new parishioners were poorer, and often on public assistance. Furthermore, with the newcomers came the devastation, including crime, arson, drugs, broken families, illegitimacy, and housing abandonment. And, with the devastation came the erosion of the fabric of social and economic life: businesses fled, and with them jobs, schools fell into decline, and with that decline came a loss of hope for the future. Old politics had failed and a new perhaps more sleazy and opportunistic breed of politician took over, people like Ramon Velez. The Catholic Church, with many parishes scattered throughout the south, central, and northwest Bronx was deeply concerned about the situation. While its moral concern is easily appreciated and understood, the Church also had concerns of a more worldly nature. While the Church was not involved in money making endeavors, its whole institutional structure, including Churches, parochial schools, and social activities, was based on an economic base. More specifically, the Church had bills to pay; even a tax exempt institution like the Catholic Church

has bills to pay, e.g. mortgages for new school buildings and churches, salaries for paid staff, building maintenance costs, including fuel, routine maintenance and repair, supply costs, and money for the archdiocese to run its many city-wide programs. When the south Bronx began to change, when the devastation began to move northward, enveloping more and more neighborhoods and parishes, an economic crisis arose within the Bronx Catholic Church and other Catholic institutions, such as Fordham University. With most parishioners poor or on public assistance neither the Sunday collection nor the array of fund raising activities (like bingo or Las Vegas nights) could any longer be counted on to raise enough money to pay the bills. When Cardinal Cooke came to the conference at Fordham University in June 1974 to give this blessing to the Coalition, and a wholehearted "go gettem," he was not simply applauding the pastors' moral fortitude, he was also hoping that this new social activism on the part of his pastors would help stabilize the whole parish structure. In other words, while the Cardinal was undoubtedly concerned about neighborhood deterioration, he was at least equally concerned about fiscal deterioration, i.e. the fiscal deterioration of what for decades had been one of the most economically solid areas in the American Catholic Church. If the

northwest Bronx became another south Bronx, the Archdiocese of New York stood to lose thousands of its solid middle and working class members, and the contributions they would make annually to the Church's operating budget. A rapid transition of newcomers, involving large numbers of Black and Latino poor as they were, would bring with them the threat of fiscal crisis for the individual parishes, and even the whole archdiocese. As Paul Brant put it [in his preparation material for the pastors of the northwest Bronx before their meeting with Henry Waltemade, President of Dollar Savings Bank]:

Pastors are concerned about advancing deterioration, particularly of housing, and the exodus of stable families from the northwest Bronx. Rents are soaring, and in every parish there is a marked increase in welfare families, with consequent shock effect to neighborhoods. Elderly are being harassed in many instances by landlords seeking to have them move so their apartments are decontrolled ... The handwriting is on the wall, unless we and our people take a stand and fight this evil force that is overpowering us, the whole northwest Bronx is going to collapse like the South Bronx. In Holy Spirit and Simon Stock and Our Savior and Martin of Tours parishes, the first wave of middle class black and Puerto Rican families are moving out rapidly, being replaced by welfare families who, in addition to the problems they create because of their social situation, are being taken advantage of by unscrupulous realtors."⁴¹

⁴¹ NWBCCC files, 1974

The last reason for Church involvement in the formation of the Coalition is cultural, related to general social changes occurring in Western society, including the United States, and changes occurring in the American Catholic Church. Certainly the Papacy of John xxiii and Vatican II and the reforms that were enacted by Catholicism are important factors, but in order to understand the Church's involvement in the Coalition it is perhaps better to examine the general tenor of the times as it existed in the America of the 1960s and 1970s. This was a period of social upheaval characterized by social movements and political protest, people working collectively to change society, often to right what they viewed as unjust or unfair or even immoral in American society. In short it was a period of social activism. This climate of social activism affected millions of people, including clergymen. In fact, clergymen were often at the forefront of social protest, from Martin Luther King to Fathers Daniel and Philip Berrigan and on to the Reverend William Sloane Coffin to scores of lesser known religious leaders, clergymen throughout America were "engaged," spreading the gospel of social activism, perhaps the new gospel of good works. But good works no longer meant charity or do-gooding, it meant putting one's body on the line, for

Jesus, for mankind, for the poor, self sacrifice for the sake of one's less privileged brothers. People like Paul Brant, the pastors, especially Father McNally, Sister Pat Dillon, and the Coalition's community organizers, like Bill Fisher, John Riley, Bill Frey, Joe Muriano, Peter Bourbeau, Lois Haar, and many others, in one way or another, all of them were affected by the new gospel of social activism.

Tensions and Conflicts within the Fledgling Organization

All organizations need resources in order to operate. The purpose of the previously alluded to meeting between the Catholic clergymen of the Northwest Bronx and the President of Dollar Savings Bank, Henry Waltermade, was to win his support for the neighborhood stabilization plan and to convince him to contribute \$25,000 in "seed" [or start-up] money to get the organization going. The Coalition succeeded in getting from President Waltemade a contribution of \$15,000. A short time later and partly through the active influence of Mr. Waltemade, the Coalition solicited and received contributions from other locally operating banks, i.e. \$5,000 from Eastern Savings Bank, \$10,000 from Harlem Savings Bank, and smaller amounts from Chase, Morgan Guarantee, First National, and

Manufacturers Hanover Trust.⁴² Overall, during the Coalitions first three years of operation, from 1974 to 1976, it received a total of \$60,000 in contributions from locally operating savings and commercial banks. In addition, the Coalition received grants and contributions from other sources: the New World Foundation gave \$50,000, Catholic Charities gave \$5,000, and other foundations like the Ford Foundation were considering additional grants. Another source of monetary resources was what might be termed "in house" fund raising. Bishop Ahern, visited all the parishes of the northwest Bronx, explaining to the parishioners what was about to be done, and telling them:

If the Bronx dies, the hopes of a million and a half people for justice and a decent life, here and now, will die with it. We're trying to stop that from happening ... And so far as we know, what we're undertaking in 1975 in the northwest Bronx is unique in the American Church, both for its scope, and for its challenge ... The scope is to renew the neighborhoods of the northwest Bronx ... The adversity which our life in the city subjects us to can make us bitter or it can make us better. It can destroy cities, or inspire us to r e n e w them.⁴³

In response to Bishop Ahern's inspirational sermon the

⁴² Interview with Monseigneur McCarthy, February 20, 1976 and

Jonnes, loc.cit. pp.349-350

⁴³ Jonnes, loc.cit. p.350

faithful of the northwest Bronx contributed an additional \$45,000.

Obviously, all these grants and contributions were of critical importance to the fledgling organization. The Coalition needed this money to hire its first staff, including community organizers and an executive director. The problem with this initial fund raising was the potential conflict of interest that could arise between the Coalition and one of its principal sources of funding, i.e. the banks. Certainly, the Coalition, and especially, Paul Brant, was aware at the time of the potential conflict between the new community organization and the banks. It certainly was not the case that he naively thought that the banks were neutral bystanders to the devastation that was sweeping the Bronx. In Brant's memo to his fellow clergymen before the meeting with Dollar Savings Bank President Henry Waltemade, he wrote:

Dollar Savings has been accused of disinvesting [i.e.refusing to give mortgages to minority real estate holders and of calling in mortgages on buildings in 'high risk' (transitional) areas ...

and

We are disturbed that the banks, particularly the savings banks, haven't been more forceful in resisting the deterioration of the Bronx. Why didn't the banks seek out the local leaders and sit down with them to work out a strategy to keep the neighborhoods strong? why don't the banks demand that owners of buildings maintain their property? Is the only thing banks are interested in whether

the mortgage payments are made on time? What about the future? We think its high time that the banking institutions in The Bronx assumed some of the MORAL RESPONSIBILITY [my capitals] which goes along with having a great deal of financial power. It's the little guy in the Bronx ... like our parishioners ... who are hard working and thrifty, who have made the savings banks as rich and powerful as they are. Its time that the banks began to reciprocate and we're telling you [[Mr. Waltemade]] a way to do it. Today's the time to start.⁴⁴

Clearly, Brant and presumably his fellow clergymen were aware of the role of the banks in contributing to the deterioration of the Bronx. What Paul Brant appears to be doing is giving the bankers the opportunity to "redeem" themselves, or simply, holding out the proverbial "olive branch." He appears also to be giving the generally conservative pastors a lesson in how to understand and interpret the role of banks in the problems of the Bronx. He tells his fellow clergymen that Waltemade and the other bankers are to be held responsible for being Philistine-like [Is the only thing bankers are interested in whether the mortgage payments are made?]. He then tells his fellow clergymen that when all is said and done, "Its the little guy in the Bronx ... who has made the savings banks as rich and powerful as they are." Finally, he practically demands that the bankers "reciprocate" , that they return the favor to

⁴⁴ NWBCCC files, 1974

those who have made you "rich and powerful;" start now to repay your debt, [Today's the time to start].

But, through all this accusatory and even moralistic language, it is important to note that ultimately Brant and his fellow clergymen will seek a partnership with Dollar Savings Bank, for as the memo clearly states:

The idea of this meeting is to obtain the backing of a rather important figure in Bronx banking and real estate circles for the plan ... [we have developed] and ... to take a stand with us in the fight against decay.⁴⁵

So, is there a conflict of interests? What is obvious is that there is a definite contradiction between identifying banks as one of the causes of the deterioration of the Bronx and then seeking their financial support in a campaign to stop the deterioration. It sounds a little like a community petitioning a business that is polluting its environment for money to mobilize the people against it. As we well know, however, no business would give to such a fund and a community would be unlikely to petition such a business for such funds. So, why did the Coalition petition the banks, and why did the banks actually donate money? The answer appears to lie in the respective worldviews of the Coalition and the banks, and how, in spite of their differences, the clergymen of the

⁴⁵ NWBCCC files, 1974

Coalition and bank personnel, like President Waltemade, believed they had more in common than they had in conflict, or contradiction. Nevertheless, it was the contradictory aspect of their relationship that created problems for the Coalition, and especially its membership, for they were not blind to contradiction, and the conflict of interest it could engender.

In addressing this issue of the contradictory nature of the Coalition's funding, we will first analyze and describe how the contradiction affected the Coalition as organization, and then we will examine the relationship between the Coalition's clergymen and the local bankers to better understand why each was willing to cooperate with the other, at least initially.

Tensions and Conflicts within the Fledgling Organization: Contradictory Interests and Divided Loyalties

Though the Coalition and, at this stage, its clergymen were setting up an organization whose goal was "neighborhood stabilization," the solicitation of the banks for contributions leads easily to the question, "Whose side are they on?" At least on the surface, the question appears a valid one; why would the Coalition want to be morally and perhaps materially indebted to institutions that were at least partially to blame for the neighborhood deterioration that the organization was

attempting to stop? Was it simply desperation for the money? Was it Machiavellian politics, i.e. simply trying to get money from a wealthy source before showing one's true colors?

The answer appears to lie in the clergymen's sincere desire for the bankers to "take a stand with us in the fight against decay." The Coalition wanted everyone, all people and institutions, to work together; "there are no bad institutions, only bad individuals;" this will be a crusade, a holy war against evil:

The basic idea we have is to involve people who want to stay in the Bronx, get them to make a stand, draw an imaginary Maginot line across the strip between Burnside, 180th, and Fordham Road, refuse to let deterioration advance beyond that

.....

 We expect politicians, businessmen, realtors to help us, after all, it is protecting their investments too.⁴⁶

Thus, for the clergymen there was no contradiction because everyone was to be involved in this fight against decay; in a sense, this fight was to involve all men of good will, whoever was willing to "take a stand with us."

For the membership, however, there was a contradiction and a conflict of interests. Months after the banks had donated money to the Coalition, the Coalition's Committee on Reinvestment met to plan a strategy to deal with

⁴⁶ NWBCCC files, 1974

savings bank unwillingness to even talk to committee members about their "Redlining." A number of committee members raised the issue of bankers' influence within the Coalition. People wondered if bankers had "friends" on the Coalitions Board of Directors, especially among conservative clergymen. They wondered if bankers intransigence was related to their view that the clergymen (or at least some of them) would not allow the coalition to take some "radical" action against them (e.g. threatening a campaign to get community residents to withdraw deposits from offending banks). Committee members wondered if the clergymen would be able to "forget" the bankers' gifts to the organization; they wondered if the clergymen could be so ungrateful.

In fact, there were at least four meetings of the Committee on Reinvestment when the issue of bank influence arose as a topic of open discussion. On September 23, 1976, Jim Mitchel, the Executive Director of the Coalition, told the Committee not to worry about bank influence; he said the members of the Board of Directors were "... coming around ..." [that] "...they want to know what banks like Dollar Savings have done, their record ..." Mitchell said it was unlikely the banks would give [donations] again.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Research notes from meeting, September, 23, 1976

At another meeting (January 5, 1977), the discussion focused on Dollar Savings President Henry Waltemade's avoidance of contact with the Committee and about his dealing instead with the President of the Coalition's Board of Directors, Monseigneur Mc Carthy. At this meeting a Coalition employee and community organizer, Bill Frye, stated that the:

problem is that the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition originally went to the banks for money ...[but the Coalition] ...went to them first, knowing that we could never get to them again ...the Coalition is concerned with reinvestment ... it has not been bought off by the banks ... the Board of Directors will have to know [what we are doing] [but they won't be opposed to our action]⁴⁸

The general concern by Committee members was that the President of Dollar Savings and his Vice President, Tom Hunt, were "negotiating" with Monseigneur McCarthy and Bishop Ahern, and avoiding direct contact with the committee members.

At that same January 5th meeting, the Reinvestment Committee engaged in the following discussion [1/5/77]:

R.G. [Com.Mem]: [Vice President T.H. of Dollar Savings has gone to Monseigneur McCarthy twice]
 B.F.: Hunt obviously went to McCarthy and said
 [Coalition Staff] 'Look, I'd like to cooperate but...'
 J.N.: There are now fifteen committees in
 [Coalition Exec. Dir.] the coalition; McCarthy can't be abreast on all activities.
 T.P. [Com. Mem.]: I guess its fair enough to let him [McCarthy] know what's going on.

⁴⁸ Research notes, January 5, 1977

B.S. [Com.Mem.]: [Dollar Vice President] T.H. wanted McCarthy to get the committee to change the word "demand," (as in "we demand")

{Committee then discussed whether to pointedly tell Vice President of Dollar, T.H., not to use Msgr. McCarthy to get to them}

B.S. [Com.Mem.]: [She says that McCarthy has already been told not to talk to Vice President T.H. and he continues to do it; she says she does not want to go the Board of Directors meeting on Monday before the Committee meeting (on that same Monday) because she fears that T.H. will call McCarthy on Tuesday and presumably McCarthy will give him information regarding the Board's meeting and B.S. contribution to it. She then questions whether the Coalition should continue getting money from the banks]

J.M.[Exec.Dir.]: We are not getting money now but just as we expect money from the banks for reinvestment, we can also expect donations.

P.B.[Coalition Staff] ... if we go after the banks, the Board of Directors will get flack [from the banks].

J.M.[Exec.Dir.]: ... that's why they have to know what's going on.

Jon.M.[Com.Mem]: [There are] important points here ... especially after Watergate ... [there are] strings [attached to donations] ; ... the banks gave money; have they bought us? ...

C.F.[Com.Mem]: ... the banks cannot buy us off ...

[the committee asks for a volunteer to go to the Board of Directors to explain what the committee is doing; four people volunteer]⁴⁹

Then, on January 18, 1977, Father McNulty, a member of the Coalition Board of Directors, paid a surprise visit

⁴⁹ Research notes, January 5, 1977

to the Committee on Reinvestment. He came in after the meeting had begun and as he entered, he light-heartedly said, "I am a banker;" everyone laughed. He then asked, "What's going on?"⁵⁰ and he was apprised of the situation regarding the banks. The Committee was at that time having difficulty getting the banks to come to a meeting with them, they had begun to discuss the possibility of taking some action against the intransigent banks, such as picketing.

Father McNulty seemed upset over the whole issue of attacking the banks. He almost appeared to be defending the bank position, saying, "... they see it [the work of the Committee and their attempt to get banks to reinvest depositors money in the northwest Bronx] as an unwarranted intrusion in their business ... you can only go so far here He then related to the Committee how he went to see Dollar Vice President T.H., but that he was not in. Father McNulty cautioned the Committee that they were "... up against big money ... banks, insurance companies, and oil companies ... this is very difficult ...keep trying to talk to them [that is, before you take action against them] ..."

Finally, when the Committee began to get emotional regarding what was termed bankers' "arrogance," Committee

⁵⁰ Research notes, January 18, 1977

member, B.S. posed the question, "... if we picket ...will the Board of Directors back us...?" Father McNulty responded, ... No, they won't ... they will be upset ... its too radical ... I know of no bank in the Bronx which has been picketed."

Then a very significant exchange occurred:

B.S.[Com.Mem]: ... do we have to get the approval of the Board of Directors [for actions this Committee decides to take]?

Fa. McN.: You do ... especially for picketing.

J.M.[Exec.Dir.]: ... decisions and policy is always made by the Board of Directors

B.S.[Com.Memb]: ... I have worked for other Committees of the Coalition and never had to go to the Board of Directors!

Father McN.: ... this is a Coalition ... an umbrella group [you have to inform the Board]

B.F.: ... [but] all this was passed by the membership [Coal.staff] in December [at the Coalition's Annual Meeting where the entire membership discusses and votes on its yearly agenda]

J.M.[Exec.Dir.]: [Yes] ... policy was made at the December meeting... .

C.G.: [Com.Memb]: (to Father McN) Father ... banks will have to be democratized ...[they have a] social responsibility ... banks don't like pressure but its the only way to do something ...

[FATHER MCN. LEAVES]

T.P.[Com.Memb]: Is the Board of Directors worried about the image of Church ...[that we are] radicals?

[Committee members discuss Father McN.; they want to know whether he represents the Coalition's Board of Directors. The answer given is that he does not, only

himself. People on the Committee are visibly upset about Father McN.]

- B.S.[Com.Memb]: ...I have the feeling that the clergy is working against us ...
- K.B.[Com.Memb]: ... the clergy wants a radical revolution without bloodshed!
- B.F.[Coal.Staff]: ...this Committee represents the Coalition ... all the resolutions were passed ...[at the Annual Meeting]
- B.S.[Com.Memb]: ... if we picket ... the banks will call the Board of Directors ...
- J.M.[Exec.Dir]: ...what the Board of Directors wants is consultation ...
- J.B.[Com.Memb]: ... I propose we stop talking about the Board and decide what we want to do ...
- T.P.[Com.Memb]: ... the idea of[behind] the Coalition [is] not to be controlled ...[by banks, outside forces, etc]
- B.S.[Com.Memb]: ... under the name of the Coalition ... we may not get Board support. [She then raises the possibility of taking action against the banks in the name of one of the autonomous, affiliated community associations, and thereby avoiding the need to seek Coalition approval and Board of Director approval of their action; the Committee decides instead to try one more time to speak to Dollar Vice President T.H., and they begin to draft a letter to him]
- K.B. [Com.Memb]: ... won't the Board of Directors get upset this letter?
- B.F.[Coal.Staff]: ...you don't have to worry about that ...
- T.P.[Com.Memb]: ... they [the banks] don't want to deal

with us... [they] only want to deal
with the clergy ... 51

Though the above dialogue almost speaks for itself, it is very clear that the Committee members view the clergy and its motives with great suspicion. They do in fact wonder, "whose side are they on?" Committee members clearly realize that the banks are, to put it minimally, part of the problem; they have also experienced the "arrogance" of the banks, with bankers refusing to even talk to members of the Committee. When clergymen like Father McN. and Mon. McC. are understood to be dealing with the bankers behind the backs of the Committee, not necessarily double dealing, but simply dealing on their own, this is clearly unacceptable and of course highly undemocratic. It is no wonder that the members of the Committee feel that, "the clergy is working against us."

How is it possible for the Committee and the clergy to be at odds to such a degree? If it was the clergy itself that founded the Coalition, why couldn't they see what they were doing? Why couldn't they see the contradictory nature of their behavior? Why couldn't they see the conflict of interests?

The Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition was established through the impetus of the Bronx Catholic

51 Research notes, January 18, 1977

Church for the purpose of stabilizing the neighborhoods of the northwest Bronx. Needing resources to start the organization, the clergymen solicited and received money from various sources, a major one being local savings banks. When the Coalition began a campaign directed against local savings banks for their obvious pattern of disinvestment in the northwest Bronx, non-clergy members of the Coalition, residents of the northwest Bronx, openly questioned the relationship between the Catholic clergymen sitting on the Coalition's Board of Directors and the banks. The members of the Committee on Reinvestment saw the contradiction between clergymen working for the Coalition and, at the same time, soliciting money from the banks. And, just as important, they questioned the informal, friendly relationship between bankers and the clergy, one involving telephone calls and stops at the bank to talk.

If the relationship between the clergymen and the bankers was the core of the problem, the center of the contradiction, then what must be examined is the nature of the relationship between the two groups.

In ministering to their flocks, religious institutions establish relations with the people of their neighborhoods, the community of worshippers, but, in addition, they also develop ties with the leaders of

other important institutions of the community, some of whom may even be members of the congregation. The pastor/Monseigneur of a local church-school-community center complex may develop an on-going business and personal relationship with heads of many local institutions, e.g. the president of the local savings bank with whom he negotiated the mortgage for the construction of the new school, or perhaps negotiated the restructuring of the old mortgage, a real estate developer with whom he negotiated for the land for the school or a field for the school sport teams, a construction firm with whom he negotiated a contract for the construction or perhaps rehabilitation of the church or school, and so on. As the head of the institution upholding the moral values of a community, a pastor is invited to many local social functions: community club dinners, political meetings, sporting events, and other such gatherings. He has continual formal and informal ties to heads of many other local organizations and institutions. The pastor is thus a part of a kind of local "power elite," representing the ideological component or the integrative component of the local power structure. So, along with political and economic elites, the local priest does his part in helping to maintain the stability of the community. While clergymen can be very

critical of secular, materialist modern society, they will not ordinarily attack its dominant institutions. Thus, a priest or minister might in his Sunday sermon attack greed or materialism, he will not attack Citicorp; he might attack political corruption, but not the Democratic Party. Another common pattern is to attack individuals, but not the institutions they represent; so Richard Nixon might be fair game, but not the American government; Ivan Boesky is fair game, but not capitalism. Why this orientation to the status quo? At the societal level, mainstream religious institutions are an integral part of the status quo, of the whole institutional structure of American society. They contribute to it and they derive benefits from it. At the local level, the same thing is true; local Churches and their clergymen derive benefit from their place in local social structure. Local pastors get mortgages from bankers, land from real estate agents, new school buildings from construction companies, and, on a social-psychological level, they get respect and honor from other institution heads. In return, of course, they contribute moral integration and community solidarity, i.e. they help supply the spiritual and moral mortar which keeps the system together, helps people make sense of and cope with

their lives, to plug on, in the face of apparent absurdity and frightening angst.

So, "whose side were the clergymen on?" The clergymen started out believing that there were no inherent contradictions between the interests of the savings bank industry and those of the residents of the northwest Bronx. Guided by a generally individualistic morality and a conservative politics, they were not able to see the inherent contradiction in soliciting money from local banks while, at the same time, working with residents to save the neighborhood. Instead, they saw the banks as lacking "moral responsibility" and "forcefulness;" they wanted the banks "to take a stand with us," "against the evil force that's trying to destroy us." In addition, it appears that many of the clergymen were genuinely divided in their loyalties. In effect, they were of two minds because they had their feet in both worlds, the world of the "local power elite," and that of the ordinary man/woman of the neighborhood. When the issue of taking action against local banks arose as a serious topic, clergymen like Father McN. and Mon.McC. were torn between allegiance to two different groups, both of the community, but with different sets of interests. Father McN.'s ambivalence is obvious in his statements to the Reinvestment Committee

membership. The members of the Reinvestment Committee know exactly where their interests lie, and they know that the banks are their legitimate targets for community action ; as one Committee member put it, " ... banks will have to be democratized"

To their credit, when, as they say, "push came to shove," the Coalition's ambivalent clergymen on the Board of Directors did indeed lend their support to the Reinvestment Committee's activities directed against the local savings banks. In fact, the Vicar of the Bronx, Bishop Patrick Ahern, actually joined the Committee, assisted at the meetings and confrontations with local bankers, and even joined the Committee and local residents when they picketed a local savings bank. Why the change of heart, especially on the part of key clergymen, like the bishop? There are three basic reasons for the support that the Board of Directors and its clergymen ultimately gave the Reinvestment Committee. First, the bishop joined the Reinvestment Committee to lend his considerable prestige and power to the Committee. The Committee was having difficulty getting the banks to pay attention to its communication. The bishop may also have joined the Committee to "oversee" the committee, to keep the committee from straying "too far", to keep it from getting "too radical." "Not only

did his presence give real legitimacy to the Committee's work, it also kept the Committee in check. The word "radical" was bandied about all too frequently for the politics of the Committee not to have been an issue with the Board of Directors. One member of the Committee was known to be a leftist, and other members were clearly saying rather radical kinds of things, like, "... banks have to be democratized ..."

The second reason for the Clergymen's change of heart was a "put up or shut up " factor, a moral issue. The clergymen were the founders of the Coalition; they had told the people that it was time to fight, to take a stand. So, here was an issue, disinvestment/redlining, one of the root causes of the physical deterioration of the neighborhoods of the northwest Bronx and the clergymen looked like they were vacillating. They had taken money from the people of the northwest Bronx to get the Coalition started, but they had also taken money from "their friends, the bankers". Now, they were having trouble deciding "whose side they were on?, the peoples's or the bankers? As the woman on the Reinvestment Committee put it, "The clergy wants a radical revolution ... without bloodshed ...". Thus, the clergymen had to choose between siding with the people of the northwest

Bronx or their old business associates, the bankers; they had to "put up or shut up."

The third and final reason for the change of heart on the part of the clergy had to do with the Committee on Reinvestment. The members of the Committee, including resident volunteers, Coalition staff [organizers], and even the Executive Director were all united in the belief that strong action had to be taken against the banks. The clergymen had to support the Committee's actions, else face the charge of being morally bankrupt, of having sold out for the perverbial "thirty pieces of silver."

Chapter Three

Organizational Structure of the Coalition

The General Ideology of the Coalition

In 1975, within a short time after its incorporation, the Coalition put out a "Program Summary" which defined its goals:

The thrust of the Coalition is to get all the "good guys" together to fend off the "bad guys". No one, by virtue of race, religion, occupation or economic status, who expresses an interest in the future well-being and vitality of the northwest Bronx, is unwelcome...⁵²

Rather than acting on the basis of some identifiable ideology or formal political philosophy, the Coalition is best understood as an organization which believes itself to be on a moral crusade. In this moral crusade, there are "good guys" and "bad guys", but no one is to be prejudged as "bad" purely on the basis of "race, religion, occupation, or economic status." Instead, the problem is, as the "Program Summary" mentions, "... the evil force that is overpowering us ..."; it is this "evil force" that the Coalition wants to destroy.

Since no one is inherently bad, the evil that exists is located in the immoral behavior of certain individuals

⁵² NWBCCC files, 1975

and institutions. Thus, the coalition sets out to attack unscrupulous landlords and the harmful practices of banks, insurance companies, and municipal agencies. Such individuals and institutional practices represent the "evil force" that is attempting to destroy the goodness of the northwest Bronx. In conversations with Coalition activists and employees, one regularly hears such terms as "social consciousness," "moral obligation," and "greedy landlord." It is in the use of such terms that the moral thrust of the Coalition is clearly evident.

In its anti-redlining campaign, directed against local savings banks, coalition workers emphasized the banks' moral obligation to the community to reinvest depositors' money [savings]. When bankers responded by stating that they felt no such responsibility to the community, and that it was the bottom line that counted most, coalition personnel answered by trying to convince the bankers that they could reinvest in the northwest Bronx and make a profit too. Coalition personnel did not attack banks because they made profits, but instead because they did not have a social conscience, because they were overly concerned with profits and not sufficiently concerned with the welfare of the community. In effect, the Coalition's effort was directed at making the banks see the error of their ways, at making the banks realize that

they had a moral obligation to reinvest money back into the neighborhood. Implicit in all this is a view of society as a moral order in which stability is created and sustained by the proper behavior of all its members. This is an individualistic morality, one in which no individual person or, for that matter, individual institution is inherently good or bad; everyone is to be judged by his/her actions. The blind spot in this individualistic morality is its inability to view individuals and the institutions that employ them as engaged in organizational practices that have negative consequences for the welfare of neighborhoods. What this means is that the "evil force" mentioned earlier may be an integral part of a seemingly innocuous institution as it pursues its goal of doing business. An obvious example of this is banks and their practice of redlining (which will be discussed in detail later on).

The Goals of the Coalition

In its first issue of Call to Action, (1976), the Coalition newsletter, Bishop Ahern wrote the following description of the Coalition:

... [We are] working to save our neighborhoods, to restore those already damaged, and to preserve those as yet unspoiled Its [the Coalition's] first aim has been to organize tenants to work cooperatively with owners for better

services and for the preservation of our mostly excellent housing stock. It [the Coalition] strives for cleaner and safer neighborhoods, and to these ends it collaborates with a number of community groups which have affiliated with the Coalition ...⁵³

And in a 1975 program summary, written just after the coalition actually began operation, its founders stated:

... The thrust from the beginning has been neighborhood stabilization through collaboration and reconciliation and in partnership with institutions.⁵⁴

Based on statements such as the above, it is clear that the general goal of the Coalition is "neighborhood defense" , or the prevention of further deterioration⁵⁵ to the neighborhoods of the northwest Bronx. Phrases like "save our neighborhood," "restore those already damaged," "preserve those as yet unspoiled," and "neighborhood stabilization" leave little doubt as to the intent of the founders in establishing the Coalition. In the face of the northward push of deterioration coming rapidly from

⁵³ Call To Action, Aug.-Sept., 1976

⁵⁴ NWBCCC files, 1975

⁵⁵ By deterioration is generally meant the physical decline of a building, often formally judged by the number of building code violations existing, with serious building code violations related to such conditions as broken plumbing, inoperative boilers, or inoperative elevators. Other problems often related to lack of routine maintenance include dirty hallways, peeling paint or plaster, and graffiti on walls. All of these constitute sure signs that a building going downhill.

the South Bronx (one estimate in 1976 was that the obvious manifestations of deterioration was moving at the rate of ten blocks a year⁵⁶), the Coalition would create a "human barrier" of residents organized to stop the plague of blight, arson, and abandonment.

As Bishop Ahern put it, this goal would be accomplished by "... organizing tenants to work cooperatively with owners ... in partnership with institutions and through ... collaboration with a number of community groups which have affiliated with the Coalition ..."⁵⁷

Thus, related to its goal of neighborhood defense is its "operational goal" of "organizing tenants" and "collaborating with [already existent] ... community groups." In effect, the Coalition's perspective is that the northwest Bronx is to be defended from further deterioration by means of the collective efforts of the soon to be organized residents of the neighborhood.

While the above statements of the coalition's goals come from the organization's early, embryonic phase, a more recent statement of the Coalition's goals is as follows: "... to combat the causes of neighborhood deterioration and housing abandonment in the northwest

⁵⁶ Interview with Monseigneur McCarthy, 2/20/76

⁵⁷ Call to Action, Aug-Sept.1976

Bronx."⁵⁸ This most recent statement of goals may have represented a subtle change in the Coalition's strategy, i.e. while continuing to engage in tenant organizing, over the last few years, the Coalition has been more and more involved in the macro aspect of neighborhood deterioration, working more closely with banks, realtors, insurance companies, and moving into the area of local ownership and control of apartment buildings. (As we will see later on this may also have represented a shift away from "grass roots" organizing and more and more toward interest group lobbying).

The Formal Structure of the Coalition

The structure of the Coalition is relatively complex and hierarchical. It is a federation of twelve local community associations with a centralized governing body, the Board of Directors. The relationship between the local associations and the Board of Directors is such that local associations are autonomous with regard to local matters (i.e. matters related to the territory of the local association) but subject to the control of the Board with respect to regional issues, this is, issues that transcend the local area and/or involve the cooperation of other community associations in the name

⁵⁸ Call To Action, 1982

of the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition. This relationship is clearly delineated in a formal "Agreement to Cooperate" when the association joins the Coalition.⁵⁹

This "Agreement to Cooperate" has six part. First, the Coalition will, if resources permit, provide the neighborhood association with a paid organizer, whose work will be directed by the local association and supervised by the Coalition's executive director. Second, the neighborhood association has the right to "self-determination" in its positions on local issues, which may or may not be the position of the Coalition. Third, the neighborhood association agrees to participate in the standing committees of the Coalition which deal with issues affecting the entire northwest Bronx and not just the local association's area. Fourth, the neighborhood association may formally incorporate themselves into the coalition and both the coalition and the local association will conduct their business according to democratic principles and be accountable to their members. Fifth, the neighborhood association agrees to attend the annual meetings of the Coalition and pay dues to the Coalition. And, lastly, the neighborhood

⁵⁹ BWBCCC files, 1975

association is entitled to a seat on the Coalition's Board of Directors.

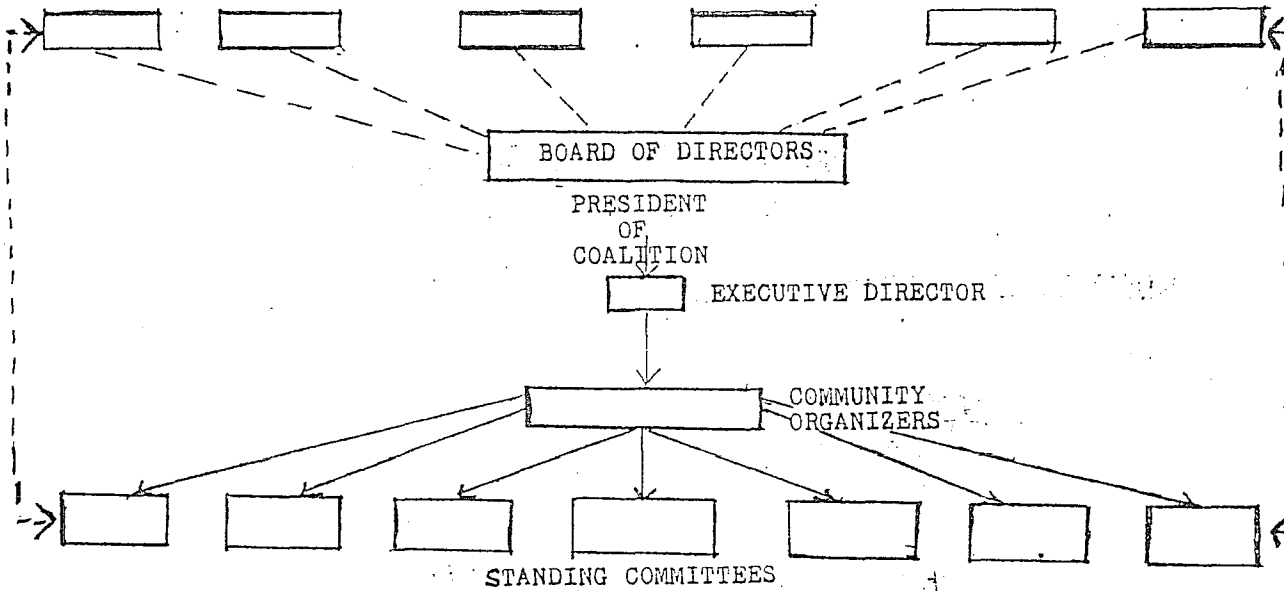
The actual structure of the organization, known as the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition consists then of a Board of Directors, neighborhood associations, and Coalition staff, most importantly community organizers and an executive director.⁶⁰ [An organizational chart of the coalition appears on page 84].

Based on the organizational structure of the Coalition two types of actions can be taken, depending on the issue involved: a Coalition action and a local association action. In general, as stated above, local actions are those activities which come from the initiative of local associations and affect only a local area. An example would be the commonplace actions of an association and its membership against a given landlord, such as taking him to court for failing to provide adequate services to a building. The other type of action, a Coalition action, or a Coalition sponsored activity, is one which usually affects the entire northwest bronx, or a substantial portion of it. In other words, it is an

⁶⁰ Interview with Coalition organizer Bill Fisher and Forham-Bedford Community Coalition President, Mary Ann Rheinthalder on November 8, 1975

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART OF THE COALITION

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS



— DIRECT AUTHORITY
- - - INFLUENCE

action involving the interests of more than one association and as such it is termed regional. Such activities must be approved by the Board of Directors, and typically are carried out through the initiative of one of the Coalition's Standing Committees. These Committees and the issues they deal with are established at the Coalition's Annual Meeting. As the name implies, the Annual Meeting is held once a year and each of the local associations sends representatives. It is at this meeting that Coalition policy is formally debated and where a plan of action is adopted for the coming year. The Coalition's plan of action or agenda is implemented through its system of Standing Committees with a representative from each association participating, along with a Coalition staff member, who usually coordinates and/or directs the actions of the Committee. These Committees are named for the issues which they are acting on. These issues are chosen because they are viewed as important for the welfare of the northwest Bronx. There are approximately fifteen such committee, among them Committees on Redlining/Disinvestment, Rent Control, City Services, Housing, Employment, Community Development, and Education. All the actions of the Standing Committees are Coalition actions and, as such, are subject to the approval of the Board of Directors.

In all the activities of the Coalition, both local and regional, the Coalition's paid staff plays a pivotal role. During the spring of 1982, the Coalition had fifteen full time community organizers and an executive director. These organizers work with the local associations and on the Standing Committees. On the local level, their principle tasks are to work with tenants and tenant associations, and to help in implementing the programs of the local associations. In these capacities, organizers work actively with local people and serve as coordinators, resource persons, and, occasionally, as leaders. The latter role occurs especially in actions involving city agencies and local landlords. Aside from the input of local neighborhood residents, the Coalition organizers are the backbone of the entire Coalition. While local leaders work hard to solve neighborhood problems, they typically hold full time jobs during the day and volunteer their time at night and on weekends. While such volunteerism is an essential part of every community organization, it has obvious limitations with regard to the overall effectiveness and efficiency of an organization. One obvious problem with such time constraints is that the institutions with which local associations must deal with operate full time, often only during the normal work

day, that is, from nine to five. If volunteers can only work in the evening and on weekends, it puts the association at a disadvantage in dealing with important institutions and their working personnel.

The Operation of the Coalition: Community Action

The strategy of the Coalition is based heavily on the ideas of Saul Alinsky, author of Reveille for Radicals and Rules for Radicals, and perhaps the American most associated with community organization. Saul Alinsky not only literally "wrote the book," but made community organizing almost respectable. The Coalition is an Alinsky-style organization, especially in its "modus-operandi," its general style of action. In Rules for Radicals, Alinsky wrote:

Change comes from power, and power comes from organization. In order to act, people must get together. ⁶¹
and

Organizations need action as an individual needs oxygen. The cessation of action brings death to the organization... ⁶²

From its early beginnings, the overall strategy of the Coalition has been "action." Symbolizing this

⁶¹ Saul Alinsky, Rules For Radicals (New York: Vintage Books, 1971) p.113

⁶² Ibid, p.120

position the title of its newsletter was fittingly "Call To Action," later changed to "Action."

As described above, the actions of the Coalition occur at two levels, a local level and a regional or cross-neighborhood level. Locally, affiliated community associations are continually involved in issues of concern to their constituencies or membership. At the regional level, action centers on the Coalitions' system of Standing Committees, composed of representatives from the local affiliated associations. The Standing Committees typically direct their efforts at some extra neighborhood target and/or institution. The next two sections, I and II, will describe Coalition activity as it exists at the two different levels, local and regional.

I) Action at the Local Level:

The activities of the local community associations center mainly but not exclusively on housing. Other areas of involvement include crime prevention, youth programs, arson prevention, neighborhood health, senior citizen concerns, and city services, such as sanitation, parks, police, and fire. Since community associations are autonomous with regard to local matters, all these activities, including actions on housing, are based on

the "felt" needs of the membership of the association. Since there is considerable variation in the social and economic conditions affecting each neighborhood, the focus of each community association's activities varies with these conditions. While housing is a focal concern of all the community associations, arson prevention is not, since the problem of arson is especially strong in the Coalition's more southerly neighborhoods, such as Morris Heights. Another important variable is simply the ability of a community association to mobilize enough local support for a given program. So, while crime prevention and security may be felt needs by most residents, some community associations may not be successful in permanently maintaining block security programs; some organizations are simply better organized and better run than others.

Since housing is the focal concern of all the neighborhood associations of the northwest Bronx, tenant organizing is both the goal and the means to attain goals. Tenant organizing has this dual role because it is the principal means of preserving deteriorating and neglected housing, and it is, at the same time, the means of training and recruiting community leaders by the local association. Tenant activism is thus the core activity of local associations' membership. It represents a

collective effort through which neighborhood residents with few material resources gain power. As is true of labor unions, tenant associations capitalize on the principal resource of the user of property, that is, numbers, and they use that resource in combination with others similarly situated to attain power, even parity with ownership. Thus, while tenant organizing is a means to attain concrete ends or goals, it is also an end in itself because it serves an important socializing function, that is, training new leadership, especially in the core values of tenant organizing, in the ethos of tenant organizing. Because it is at the center of local associations efforts, the description and analysis of local associations will confine itself to the area of housing.

Each month under the caption, "People Power," the Coalition's newsletter, "Action," prints the addresses of the buildings in which tenant organizations have taken action against landlords. In the January, 1982 issue thirty-one addresses are listed with brief descriptions of the types of actions taken. The following are examples of the listings:

- 1) 2789 Valentine Avenue has been purchased from the city of New York with assistance from the Fordham-Bedford a Housing Corporation. The 8 unit building is now owned by the 2789 valentine Housing Development Fund Corporation with

Hattie DeCrescenzo as president(FB)

2) The tenant Association of 3000-3018 Kingsbridge Avenue is taking action against their landlord to get heat in all the apt[s] and roof leaks repaired.(KH)

3) 2964 Perry Ave. Due to a rash of muggings and robberies, tenants have formed an association and have gone on rent strike until the landlord repairs the front door and the intercom.[BP]

4) Congratulations to 2141 Prospect Ave. Tenants received 7A Administrator Dec.2 [CCC]

5) 155-165 E.Mosholu Pkwy. Tenants have been organized for three years; after two rent strikes and countless meetings with the landlord, he finally agreed to apply for an 8A Loan, \$200,000 worth of work on building(new windows and boiler), will begin in the spring.

6) 2294-94 Grand Ave After two years of suffering at the hands of [owner] now deceased, the tenant association of this building finally won their case for the appointment of a 7A administrator. The building is not out of the woods yet, but the tenants now have heat and hot water, after seven solid months of boiling water, And their administrator, Jose Lopez, brags that he has lost 28 pounds since his appointment due to the headaches and hard work in this building!(UH)

7) 3050 Grand Concourse Although heat at the building has improved the Tenants Association will continue to withhold rent monies. If the landlord continues to act in good faith, the TA will return to him all rents.(BP)⁶³

The above actions are typical of the kinds of actions engaged in by northwest Bronx neighborhood associations and their constituent tenant associations. Since its founding the Coalition, through its neighborhood associations, has directed most of its

⁶³ Action, Jan. 1982

efforts at tenant organizing. Literally hundreds of tenant associations now operate on the northwest Bronx through the efforts of coalition personnel and local residents. The kinds of actions they engage in depends on the conditions in their buildings. While tenants mainly organize because of a lack of landlord provided services and /or maintenance, they also organize for security reasons, i.e. to form building security patrols. Ultimately, as stated above, reasons for organizing depend on the felt needs of the tenants living in the buildings.

While the formation of a tenant association can occur in a multitude of ways and follow many different paths, in most cases, the tenants organize as a result of a lack of basic services, such as insufficient heat and hot water, and/or lack of routine maintenance, such as repair of plumbing, roofs, and/or elevator. The move to organize usually occurs only after individual tenants have been unsuccessful in having their complaints attended to. As a result, tenants in the building begin to complain among themselves, informally. Some tenants in the building call local public agencies to get results. Such formal complaints may bring results, but often only to the complaining tenant, while the general pattern of abuse continues. So a complaint to the New

York City Department of Housing, Preservation, and Development about the failure of the landlord to repair a broken pipe may force the landlord to repair that pipe, but it will not stop him from continuing his pattern of not allocating sufficient monies for routine maintenance. Over time, as conditions in the building deteriorate and tenants' complaints inevitably mount existent social networks in the building begin to solidify their view of the situation and, equally important, new networks are often formed based simply on their sharing complaints against the landlord. At some point someone will raise the question of a meeting to do something about the problem. Usually, this first meeting will be small, consisting of a group of tenants, perhaps calling itself an "ad-hoc" committee. They might sit down and compare notes and for the first time realize the extent of the problem. They then might draw up a list of grievances to present to the landlord. Their next step will be a meeting with the landlord or his agent. If this is successful, action may cease. More likely, however, the pattern of landlord abuse will continue. It is after such attempts that the groundwork is laid for the next step, the actual formation a tenant association. The following newspaper story appeared in the New York Daily News, as part of a long and in depth story on the work of

the Coalition. The story documents and personalizes the process described above:

After four years, Gloria ... and her neighbors tired of burning gas stoves for heat and hot water during cold weather, of hounding the landlord for repairs and having to run to the local police station to force him to turn their electricity back on. After several fruitless meetings with the landlord the tenants began withholding their rent. Finally, with the help of Bill Frey, the Coalition's organizer in South Fordham [one of the neighborhoods within the northwest Bronx], they formed a tenant association and took their landlord to housing court, where they were told to release their rent money to allow the owner to put oil in the burner and to pay the rest of the back rent only when the landlord made other necessary repairs. "He gave us heat for about three days and that ended that." Gloria says. Gloria says, "Then he tried to soft soap the tenants individually into giving him their rent money. But we refused." Eventually the landlord abandoned the building. The tenant association returned to court and asked the court to appoint Gloria as administrator of the building."⁶⁴

Obviously then, the formation of a tenant association does not in any way insure that a building's problems will be corrected. What a tenant association does is to create organized opposition to the landlord; it empowers the people of the building; it establishes a

⁶⁴ New York News, Sunday Edition, Magazine, Nov. 28, 1976

community based on a shared need for improving their housing conditions. What was a private concern becomes a collective issue, to be dealt with in a public way, by a formally organized group established for the purpose of improving the physical condition of the community's housing. In effect, the power of the landlord is then met head-on with the power of organized tenants. In their future dealings with the landlord, and perhaps even more importantly, with those public agencies whose responsibility it is to enforce the housing codes, the existence of the tenant association gives legitimacy, respectability, and believability to tenants complaints. While an individual tenant complaint can always be dismissed as idiosyncratic or exceptional, the complaints of an organized group cannot so easily be dismissed, as they represent at least the possibility of a pattern of abuse. It is important to note that coalition tenant organizers play a critical role in the formation of tenant associations and in associations' subsequent activities with landlords and/or public agencies. The principle role of the organizer is that of technical advisor, typically operating behind the scenes, giving advice and counsel to individual tenants and tenant groups. Their counsel is usually instrumental in the process of setting up tenant associations and in the

subsequent activity leading to remedial action. While they may on occasion play a leadership role, such as addressing tenant groups, they more commonly work through the leadership of tenant groups. This is adhered to for both ideological as well as practical reasons. Ideologically, Alinsky- influenced organizations like the Coalition believe strongly in the importance of grass-roots participation. This belief in the ability of grass-roots people to govern themselves is a kind of modern day Jeffersonian bottom-up democratic ideal. The intent here is to involve as many people as possible in the governing process. This is also very practical because the greater the numbers of people involved, the greater the potential power of the organization. Related to this belief in the behind the scenes role of the organizer is the view that the smaller the public role of the organizer, the greater the opportunity for the emergence of grass-roots leadership. It is through the active participation of ordinary tenants that new leadership emerges, that previously untapped potential emerges.

On a more practical level, it is in fact more and more difficult for organizers to be actively involved in all tenant actions. Even if they were inclined to do so, there simply are not enough organizers and not enough

time to do all the work necessary to organize all the buildings in need of remedial action. Thus, since each of the Coalition's associations has an office staffed by an organizer plus clerical staff and volunteers, organizers commonly work out of these offices. Tenants in need of advice call up the office and/or visit the office to talk to organizers. While in the early stage of the Coalition's existence, organizers took the initiative in organizing buildings, now it is tenants themselves that initiate the process. This change has occurred largely because local residents are now well aware of the Coalition's member associations and so it is no longer necessary for organizers to seek out buildings to organize. In addition, as mentioned above, the task is virtually impossible for any one organizer to accomplish in his own.

At the point where a building is organized and contact has been established with a landlord, a whole series of potential scenarios exist, with each one leading to a different course of action. It is at this point that Coalition organizers are invaluable as sources of technical information to tenants groups. Due mainly to their extensive experience, organizers are in a position to advise tenants with regard to options available at each step on the way to remedying a building's problems.

The following represents a description of the various types of common scenarios that may confront a tenant organization as it attempts to deal with a building's landlord.

Scenario One; The landlord makes needed repairs, thus satisfying the tenants' demands. Tenant action will then typically cease until there is another problem.

Scenario Two: The landlord refuses to meet with the tenants, resulting in an "HP Complaint," i.e. a formal complaint by the tenants to the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development. This may result in legal action because HPD will investigate the tenants' complaints and, if the complaints are found to be legitimate, HPD will take action. First, it will require the landlord to remedy the problem. If the landlord does not, it will take him to housing court and the court will then hear both sides and render a decision. If the tenants' complaints are found to be legitimate, the judge will order the landlord to take remedial action, such as repair a roof, or fix a boiler so the tenants can have heat and hot water. If the landlord makes the repairs action will cease. But, if the landlord does not correct the problem, other options exist. One thing that is always a possibility is the landlord deciding to abandon his building, in which case HPD would take over the

building and the city would be responsible for providing needed services.

Scenario Three: [This last scenario is particular interest because it is informative with regard to the attitude of the Coalition toward local landlords. While the Coalition organizes tenants to fight landlords, to use the power of organization against the power of private property, the Coalition does not consider itself to be anti-landlord, and there is little evidence to contradict this. Coalition personnel, while saying that they are not anti-landlord, will say that they are anti-slumlord, or anti-bad-landlord. As Coalition documents state, it is willing to establish alliances and working relationships with anyone who is willing to work for the improvement and preservation of the northwest Bronx, including landlords] The tenants meet with the landlord and he explains to them that he does not have sufficient financial resources (credit and/or capital) to make the necessary repairs, that he is financially strapped, that his debt structure is such that after making his mortgage payment, little is left from the collection of rents for repairs and maintenance of the building. Another possibility, perhaps even more frequent, is simply that the landlord complains that he is not making enough money to make the necessary repairs, that the rent roll is not

high enough to warrant the kind of investment demanded by the tenants. Yet another possibility is that the landlord had never intended to do even minimal maintenance, believing he could get away with little or no maintenance of the building, but he has been frightened by the tenant association and has pleaded poverty as a way of forestalling the tenants, to avoid making repairs, i.e. spending money. In any case since the "financially strapped" landlord has shown sufficient good faith to at least meet with the tenants, Coalition organizers, together with tenants, will inform the landlord of the wide variety of federal, state, and city sponsored loan and grant programs available to the landlord to assist him in making needed repairs and/or necessary maintenance of the building.* [many of these programs have since been curtailed by the federal government].

What the landlord does at this stage will be a major test of his/her good will to tenant leaders and Coalition organizers. They will explain to him/her that it is in his/her own interest to make use of one or more of these programs. If the problem is his debt structure (the payment structure of his/her mortgage), and the mortgage is from one of the local banks, Coalition personnel will intercede for the landlord and try to convince the bank

to give him more favorable terms, thus allowing him to both pay his debt and maintain the building.

In the problem is lack of capital for major improvements, like a boiler or new plumbing, they will inform the landlord of programs like the J51, CPR, POMP, et.al. all of which are loan programs to help financially strapped landlords make necessary repairs. These loan programs also allow the landlord to raise rents after the has made the repairs, thus increasing the value of the rent roll.

Also possible is Section 8 monies or subsidies. This is a federal program of rent subsidies for those tenants unable to pay market level rent. Section 8 subsidies are often used after a landlord has made repairs and raised the rents to a level beyond the affordability of many tenants. [These subsidies are scarce because of Reagan budget cuts]

The above represent the various ways in which the coalition, through its tenant associations, works with landlords. All the above programs increase the value of buildings, and their rent rolls, and thus permit greater profit for landlords, and, at the same time, help preserve buildings, keep them in habitable condition, and keep the northwest Bronx a place where people can live with decent and affordable housing.

If a landlord refuses to take advantage of these programs and the pattern of abuse remains, then the landlord is viewed as operating in "bad faith" and "milking" the building, i.e. disinvesting or collecting rents and making money without properly maintaining the property. It is only in such a situation that the Coalition will begin to fight the landlord with the tactics that have become associated with an anti-landlord stance, e.g. rent strikes and court actions. But, it must be kept in mind that the goal of the Coalition is to save the building; if Coalition staff and tenants fight landlords, it is only a last resort, to prevent the landlord from destroying the building, from milking it for all its worth.⁶⁵

II) Action at the Federation or Cross-Neighborhood Level:

While local grassroots organizing is perhaps the central endeavor of the Coalition and ultimately the cornerstone of its whole operation, its cross-neighborhood or federation level operations are more consequential in terms of broad based social, political, and economic change. It is at the federation level that the term "Coalition" takes on more than symbolic value

⁶⁵ Interviews with Coalition organizers, Marty Calavito, 3/4/82; Brenda Kollar, 3/4/82; and, Felix Rosario, 2/26/82 and 3/2/82

and embodies the joint efforts of residents of the northwest Bronx united in a cross-neighborhood effort to preserve their communities.

The Coalition's federation-level operation deals with problems what transcend local areas' immediate spheres of interest and concern, and perhaps, more importantly, its ability to resolve the problem. In other words, the problem is such that it affects all or most neighborhoods of the Coalition and the source of the problem is institutional or systemic, perhaps originating as a policy from some public agency such as the New York City Sanitation Department, or some large private institution, such as Eastern Savings Bank. Thus, whether the problem is in the public sphere or the private sphere, the critical thing is that it adversely affects the well being of all or most of the residents of the northwest Bronx and it is beyond the ability of a given neighborhood association to remedy the situation.

Another type of problem that might be dealt with at the federation level is one that affects all or most of the associations but which is not systemic, or not rooted in any way to the policies of some identifiable public agency or private institution. An example of such a problem is street crime or perhaps arson. Both of these problems affected all of the associations of the

Coalition, but neither of them was related to easily identifiable policies of a specific agency or institution. In such a situation, while local efforts would be exerted at the locally oriented agency or institution that deals with the above named problems, such as the fire department or the police department, a broad based Coalition effort might also be used to attempt a cross-neighborhood or federation-wide solution to the problem. Such an approach would involve contact between high level administrators of, for example, the fire department and a Standing Committee of the Coalition. In other words, in line with the two tier organizational approach of the Coalition, is a two tier approach to problem solving. If the problem is local, it is dealt with by the local association and its membership; if the problem is federation-wide and/or beyond the capacity of a local association to solve it, then it is dealt with by a Standing Committee of the Coalition. So to deal with the problem of crime, a local association might work closely with a local police precinct; the local association might set up a neighborhood patrol and coordinate its efforts with the local precinct commander. But, to deal with a police department decision to decrease the number of foot patrols in the northwest Bronx, a Coalition standing

Committee would be called into action and deal with Police Department personnel and the Mayor's office. It is through the activities of the Standing Committees that the Coalition has gained its reputation as an important institution representing the interests of the people of the northwest Bronx. In many ways, these Standing Committees represent the "mobile action arm" or the "strike force" of the Coalition.⁶⁶ When problems arise, it is the actions of these Committees that define the ethos of the Coalition. From organizing picket lines around "redlining" banks, to "invading" the pastoral serenity of speculation-interested suburban dwelling realtors, to lining up speakers at Chase Bank's annual shareholders' meeting to get bank support for neighborhood revitalization, the Standing Committees of the Coalition are action oriented and attention getting. These Committees are truly Alinsky-like in that they embody his words: "Organizations need action like the body needs oxygen."⁶⁷

During the course of field work, the researcher observed many meetings by various Standing Committees and

⁶⁶ In a conversation with a Coalition organizer, he told me that activists commonly refer to their actions as "hits", thus a trip to suburbia to picket the home of a Bronx landlord would be a "hit".

⁶⁷ Alinsky, loc.cit. p.120

many of the subsequent actions or "hits." During the period 1976 to 1977, and later in 1981 and 1982, elaborate and well planned and directed "hits" and other actions were taken against local savings banks, the New York City Board of Education, the Department of Parks, the Sanitation Department, Chase Bank, and a number of large realtors operating in the northwest Bronx [but living in suburban and affluent Scarsdale in Westchester County]. Other Committee actions [which I did not observe] were taken against insurance companies, the New York City Rent Board, the Exxon Corporation, local business firms, and other municipal and private institutions.

While Standing Committees consist of anywhere from approximately ten to fifteen neighborhood residents, representing interested associations of the Coalition assisted by Coalition personnel, especially organizers, the number of participants in the above actions ranged from a handful to literally hundreds of neighborhood residents. The largest Coalition action observed was one directed against the New York City Parks Department when approximately three hundred neighborhood residents attended a meeting with the city Commissioner of Parks. More typically however, "hits" were accomplished with the participation of approximately twenty residents, and

often with the same activist neighborhood residents.

Because the role of Standing Committees is so central to the Coalition's work, later chapters will focus on detailed descriptions and analyses of a number of their actions.

Tensions Associated with the Structural Characteristics of the Coalition: Problems in the Negotiation of Formal Structure

While the Coalition was established as an Alinsky-style grassroots community organization, in important ways its structure and its actual operation departed dramatically from the ideal of a grassroots operation. Furthermore, if grassroots is equated with democracy, a kind of bottom-up governing system, here again, the Coalition's mode of operation did not conform to this kind of model.

As stated above, local affiliate neighborhood associations of the coalition were understood to be autonomous with regard to "local" issues, issues affecting their own neighborhoods. Such issues had to do primarily with housing, especially problems with landlords. In addition, local affiliates also dealt with crime, including drug abuse, parks, sanitation, etc.; issues having to do with what might be called the

"quality of life." But, going beyond the local or community level, to the cross neighborhood or federation level, there it was that the Coalition and its Board of Directors exercised control, through its power of review. And, of course, Board of Director control also meant clergy control, especially in the early years of the Coalition when clergy had a clear numerical majority on the Board of Directors. [More recently, the clergy have ceased having a numerical majority, but they continue to exercise significant influence through their religious status; both Bishop Ahern and Monseigneur Mccarthy continue as members of the Board of Directors].

Such control by the clergy- dominated Board of Directors was exercised both directly and indirectly. Directly, it existed because all Coalition Standing Committees had to have their actions approved by the Board. The Board wanted to know what the Committees were doing and had the power to veto actions that it did not agree with. In addition, of course, a full time organizer was assigned to each Standing Committee, and organizers had to answer to the Coalition's Executive Director, who in turn, reported to the President of the Coalition, who presided over the Board of Directors! Thus, centralized authority was exercised in a two fold process, with each Standing Committee having to report to

the Board for approval of its actions and through the paid organizer, who was supervised by the Executive Director of the Coalition, who kept the Board abreast of all Committee actions.

In addition, control was exercised indirectly, especially over the local affiliated community associations. While ostensibly and formally autonomous with regard to local issues, because members of local associations were volunteers, with work and family responsibility, local associations had to depend on the "output" of the Coalition's paid, full time organizer assigned to the community. If the Board or even the organizer himself disagreed with an action of a local association, support could be withheld and it would then become difficult to carry out the action. In effect, the Board of Directors exercised indirect control over the local affiliates by controlling one of their most important resources, the paid organizer. Because the organizer was paid staff of the Coalition, ultimately, his actions were reviewed by the Board, and not the affiliate. Furthermore, while affiliates had their own budgets, most resources were concentrate at the federation level, again, by the Board of Directors. So, all contributions, such as foundation, corporate, and government grants or donations, went to the Coalition,

or, in effect, the Board of Directors. With the monies it controlled the Coalition paid its staff, published its newsletter, hired consultants, paid traveling expenses for staff to attend conferences, financed its own conferences, and, in general, did all that it deemed necessary to further the interests of the organization.

Another reason for Board control of the local associations was the fact that most of the associations affiliated with the Coalition were in fact set up by Coalition personnel. Though called a coalition, with the implication being a union of previously independent entities, in fact, the majority of the affiliates never existed as independent associations. The word coalition more aptly applies to the merger of clergymen and community, and not strictly speaking, to the merger of the local associations. So, here again, local affiliates are beholden to the coalition not only for resources [both human and financial], but also for their very existence. In effect, the "culture" of the local affiliates is intimately tied to that of the coalition.

One further point associated with centralized control is the nature of the local affiliates. While each of them had names associated with the geographical/political areas in which they were located, e.g. Fordham-Bedford Community Coalition, The South

Fordham Organization, the United Associations of Bedford Park, the Mosholu-Woodlawn South Community Coalition, in fact, practically all of them, as organizations were intimately tied to local parish Catholic Churches and their community facilities, especially their "centers" or meeting halls. Coalition organizers worked out of such centers, their offices were located there and all community meetings were held in such centers.

Thus, while the Coalition was formally a kind of umbrella group, composed of a number of autonomous affiliated community associations, united under the auspices of a central board, in fact, it was more like one large centralized and hierarchical organization composed of a number of sub-organizations or perhaps subsidiaries, and dominated by a clergy-controlled Board of Directors, that exercised continual supervisory power over the activities of the whole organization.⁶⁸

While centralized authority and hierarchy are general characteristics of institutions of advanced Capitalism, especially corporate and governmental institutions, it is important to note that the Coalition identified itself as a grassroots organization. Clearly, there is a contradiction here. Put simply, because a

⁶⁸ Not surprisingly, its structure was similar to that of the Catholic Church itself and its parish structure.

voluntary organization's membership is derived mainly from the citizenry at large, that is, the people of a community, does not in itself make it grassroots, nor for that matter, does this make it democratic. The term "grassroots democracy" is often used in political discourse to refer to government by the people, in a non-elitist manner, from the bottom-up, rather than from the top-down. "Grassroots democracy" is often contrasted with elitist/oligarchic rule, which is typically top-down rule, as commonly exists even in so called democratic institutions. The Democratic Party is an example of a supposedly democratic institution with top-down rule rather than "grassroots" participation. The structure of the Coalition was not that of a bottom-up democratically run organization. While some centralization and some hierarchy is to be expected, and may even be desirable, perhaps for purposes of coordination and efficiency, the power that the Coalition's Board of Directors exercised certainly went beyond that desirable level. Furthermore, since the Board was not controlled by grassroots people, but instead by an elite minority, i.e. the Catholic clergymen, this was a highly undemocratic structure; in fact it was elitist. Thus, to reiterate, the fact that there was grassroots participation in the activities of the Coalition does not

in itself make the Coalition a grassroots organization, especially if grassroots is to be equated with bottom-up democracy. More important than simple participation is control, and the evidence indicates that the Coalition was not democratically run.

Grassroots Democracy versus Board of Director/Clergy Control

The first example of Board control came from one of the Coalition's paid organizers, Bill F. who related an account of an experience of another organizer:

...[He] wanted to picket a dinner affair, protesting the actions of one of the guests [a landlord] with his community group. The coalition, especially the clergy, told him not to do this. He disobeyed and picketed anyway and he was fired ...⁶⁹

The same organizer said that on another occasion a community association was involved in an action against a realtor/landlord named S.; they were picketing his office in Westchester County [an affluent suburb north of the Bronx and New York City] The landlord, S., called Bishop Ahern and other Board members to tell them he would cooperate and to call off the picketing. The Board members agreed, but the community association and its tenants did not and they continued to picket.

⁶⁹ Interview with Coalition organizer, Bill Fisher, 3/10/76

Ultimately, they were successful in getting S. to meet their demands.⁷⁰

Both examples are instructive because they indicate a high degree of both Board and clergy control. Even the second example where we see an affiliate association standing up to the Board still shows the extent of Board/clergy control, though it is expressed as mediation; the landlord tried at first to deal with clergy rather than with the community association. In effect, he preferred to deal with elites, rather than the grassroots elements. The fact that the Board agreed, and was even willing to listen indicates elitism and non-democratic control.

Another account given by the above named organizer/informant concerned the issue of rent control. He said that his community and its residents, mostly renters, wanted strong rent control legislation. They opposed all attempts to abolish rent control or its modification. He said that he had to try to moderate their stand because, as he put it, "... some landlords are barely able to meet costs ...". When asked if the Coalition would support the residents in their desire for strong rent control laws, he said it would not, stating:

⁷⁰ Interview with Coalition organizers Joe Muriano and Brendon McDonald, 6/17/76

... they can't, they have to consider the landlords; they have a broader view of the problem, more moderate than the tenants ...⁷¹

Here again, we see the impact of not only the Board, but the clergy. When the organizer says "they can't" support a strong rent control law, the "they" represents the Board of Directors. Their power of review allows their "moderate" views to subvert the view and the will of the grassroots, i.e. the tenants who are affected by the rising rents and the attempt by the landlords to abolish or at least seriously weaken New York City's rent control laws. Also significant is the subversion of the popular will in this issue, because, the organizer will presumably try to block the effort by the people of his association to get the strong legislation they want.

On March 7, 1976 the Fordham-Bedford Community Coalition, a local affiliate of the Coalition held a locally sponsored meeting regarding the issue of rent control. This meeting was attended by over 500 people [The largest community meeting I witnessed in my two years of research and this was not Coalition sponsored]. This meeting was organized by a local woman, B.K., who probably knew as much about rent control as anyone in the

⁷¹ Interview with Bill Fisher, 2/10/76

city of New York. Significantly, the Coalition was not involved in this action. As the local organizer put it:

... the Coalition did not want to get involved in this ...[dealing as it did] with the politicians ...⁷²

Here again, the Coalition was backing off from an issue which would put it in direct conflict with elites, in this case, local politicians [and presumably their landlord contributors] who were invited by the community association to hear the voices of the people, the grassroots on this issue.

One obvious implication of all this, i.e. the Board's position on Coalition involvement, is that the clergymen on the Board tread carefully when powerful interests are involved, or when local elites with economic and political power are involved, such as landlords and politicians. In those situations, where a potential conflict of interest arises between a local elite and the grassroots, it appears that the clergy dominated Board of Directors both mediates between the community and elites and moderates (or attempts to diminish) the demands of the community; it tries to soften their demands. Of course, one can also say, less charitably, that it sabotages them.

⁷² Interview with Bill Fisher, 2/10/76

Another dramatic example of Board control and power, discussed above, in Chapter three, involved the Coalition's Committee on Reinvestment. The Committee on Reinvestment was engaged in a battle with another elite institution, local savings banks. The Committee members discussed the possibility of picketing the banks and/or getting local resident-depositors to sign pledges to withdraw their savings if the banks refused to cooperate with the Committee. In this issue, Board involvement was blatant, with Father McN. visiting the Committee, Bishop A. joining it, and with Monseigneur McC, engaged in behind the scenes conversations with local bank personnel. All of this occurred much to the consternation of many of the Committee's members. Committee members openly questioned the loyalty of the clergymen, and perhaps their moral fortitude, saying, "... the clergy wants a revolution without bloodshed.⁷³

But, as was the case with the issue of rent control and the local landlords, when it came to conflict with powerful elites, representing dominant institutions, the Coalition Board of Directors and its clergymen mediated and moderated. The Board members used their power to actively involve themselves on this issue, It was almost as if they were saying that this issue of

⁷³ Research notes, January 18, 1977

disinvestment/redlining was too important and politically sensitive to be left to the Committee's members, the grassroots. The Board member clergymen used their status to moderate the relationship between the Committee and the bankers, talking behind the scenes to bankers, and in addition, through the presence of the Bishop on the Committee, mediating the Committee's relationship to the bankers.

There remains one more example of conflict and tension within the Coalition; this is again related to the issue of grassroots democracy versus Board control. As discussed above, once a year the coalition's by-laws called for an "Annual Meeting." During the Coalition's early years, 1976-1977, it was at these meetings that representatives from all the Coalition's affiliated associations came together to discuss resolutions put forth by the various associations and /or Committees. These resolutions, once discussed, voted upon, and passed by the membership would become the working agenda of the Coalition for the coming year.

The "Annual Meeting" was perhaps the most democratic component of the Coalition's structure. In some ways it was reminiscent of the old New England Town Meeting, or perhaps an old time political party convention, where there is much handshaking and back slapping, and exchange

of "war stories," but also serious discussion of issues important to the wellbeing of the citizenry.

The people who attended the "Annual Meeting" represented the activist core of the Coalition and its affiliated associations. For the December, 1975 meeting approximately 130 people attended, in December, 1976, close to 250 people attended, and in April, 1983, approximately 150 people were in attendance. When these meetings reached the "Resolution" part of the agenda, where each community association read, discussed, and voted to approve, amend, or reject them, there was real excitement and even tension in the meeting hall. There was no question that this aspect of the Coalition's structure represented grassroots participation in an activity that was consequential, because they were establishing the working agenda for the Coalition. The grassroots were here exercising control over their own destiny; this was participatory democracy.

The above notwithstanding, there were certain obvious shortcomings to the proceedings, most notably the caucuses did not have enough time to seriously discuss each resolution. Most resolutions had to be passed with little or no discussion in order to have at least some time for the most consequential ones. The following notes taken during the "Resolution" phase of the "Annual

Meeting" captures the feverish pace, the enthusiasm, but also the problem of insufficient time:

In the Kingsbridge Heights caucus only five minutes was given for each resolution. Most were treated quickly with no discussion. The group was composed of nine women and eleven men. It was mixed age-wise, and its racial was white with one exception, a black women. Two of the community organizers sat in for a while saying little except to give background information on various resolutions. Because of the talking in other groups, it was difficult to hear all the discussion in the caucus. A woman walked from group to group getting people to sign up for the Standing Committees. As each group caucused the center[meeting hall] was literally bustling with activity, reaching an almost feverish pace as the time limit approached. Messengers went from one group to another exchanging information, getting clarifications, agreeing, and disagreeing on wording, policy, or other pertinent questions.⁷⁴

The other shortcoming was the manner in which the meeting was chaired. The President of the Board of Directors, Monseigneur McC., one of the original founders of the Coalition, chaired the meeting. In the view of the two researcher-observers, the most apt word to characterize his chairman ship is "autocratic." While part of the problem was the previously discussed time limitation, Monseigneur McC. almost literally ramrodded the agenda through, no matter the objection. No one

⁷⁴ Research notes, December 4, 1976

openly challenged Monseigneur McC, but there was much grumbling. There is clearly an irony in this; on the one hand the meeting represented a truly democratic forum, but, on the other hand, the problem of Board and clergy domination again arises, in this case appearing as an autocratic leadership style, one quite common within the hierarchical and obedience oriented Catholic Church. A more democratic style of leadership would have been expected of an organization purporting to be a grassroots organization. Furthermore, why was a clergyman chairing the meeting of a grassroots organization?

But, here again, the Coalition did not live up to its promise; clergy domination and influence was not on the side of democracy; it was on the side of order. And the meeting was indeed orderly, frenzied, but orderly. Undoubtedly this was Monseigneur McC.'s concern, that there be discussion, but not too much; excesses were to be frowned upon.

Perhaps, because of the emphasis on order and expeditiousness, noteworthy and significant changes have since occurred in the overall format of the Annual Meeting. These changes are in the direction of greater centralization, hierarchy, and elitism. The sociological literature on organizations is replete with examples of Michels' so called "Iron Law of Oligarchy." Though no

such "law" exists, it is clear that under certain social and historical conditions, there is a tendency on organizations toward centralization and therefore less and less participation by the membership and therefore oligarchy. In the case of the Coalition, the organization was never truly democratic, having been founded by a small group of Catholic clergymen, with the willing assistance of idealistic and hardworking college students, college graduates, and, most importantly, neighborhood residents, intent on improving their condition. But, while it was never a truly democratic organization, its early "Annual Meeting" certainly represented a democratic structural element. Such a democratic element could have served as a kind of catalyst leading to increased democracy. For example, as a democratic forum, it could have led to demands for greater levels of participation in the decision making process, for greater levels of community involvement in the Board of Directors.

In fact, what did happen is that a change occurred in the "Annual Meeting" which involved a clear step away from greater democracy and toward greater centralization and elitist control. While the "Annual Meetings" of 1975 and 1976 centered on the discussion of "Resolutions," by 1983, the format of the meeting had changed radically.

In the 1983 version of the meeting, there was no longer an item on the agenda called "Resolutions," no caucus period, and no voting on the resolutions. By 1983, the membership no longer publicly reviewed the working agenda of the Coalition for the coming year; that aspect of the Coalition's agenda had presumably moved behind the scenes, accomplished quietly and efficiently in Committee.

The "Annual Meeting" became a public relations show, almost a media show. At the 1983 meeting, there was a slide show on the work of the Coalition during the previous year. There was also what was called a "Flashback and Update on Previous Annual Meetings." This part was reminiscent of the taped highlights of a TV sportscaster, as he reviews past victories and great plays, for the Coalition spokesperson did just that, he reviewed the past accomplishments and highlights of the Coalition's history. There was also a speech by the then Borough President of the Bronx, Stanley Simon. Clearly, something had happened between 1976 and 1983.⁷⁵ When the researcher asked one of the Coalition organizers about the change, he answered that the Resolution part of the agenda had always been too clumsy, always a problem, so

⁷⁵ The researcher also viewed a video tape of the 1980 Annual Meeting, which was a kind of media event with local bankers publicly signing an agreement with the Coalition.

it was dropped; besides, he said, this new format made more sense, it allowed the meeting to run more smoothly.

No question that the 1983 meeting ran smoothly, without a hitch. It was a celebration of the Coalition's past victories and a kind of pep rally for its present upcoming battles. Nevertheless, the noisy, messy past "Annual Meetings" represented a democratic element. The new format represented greater centralization and elitism. The tension generated within the Coalition with the old "Annual Meeting" was resolved in the direction of greater elitism and control. The potential for stimulating democracy was extinguished in favor of order, efficiency, and expeditiousness. The organizational culture established through the clergy had become even more dominant than it was previously.

Finally, with greater centralization and elite control, with less and less opportunity for ordinary people to participate in organizational decision making, the Coalition became less and less like a social movement and more and more like an interest group. As Ronald Lawson notes in his book, The Tenant Movement in New York City, 1904-1984, " The evolution of strategies ... has been transforming tenant activism from a movement

toward an interest group."⁷⁶ In the book, Social Movement of the Sixties and Seventies, editor Jo Freeman writes that:

... interest groups['] ... primary characteristic is a well-developed and stable organization often impervious to spontaneous demands from their members.

... social movements ... exhibit noticeable spontaneity and a describable structure, even if a formal organization is lacking. ... It is in the tension between spontaneity and structure that gives a social movement its peculiar flavor. When one dominates the other, what may ... once have been a social movement, is something else.⁷⁷

The evolution of the Coalition from being part of a social movement with at least elements of spontaneity, [as will be seen in its campaigns against the city sanitation and parks departments and against local banks] to being an interest group was not an inevitable development, as a Michelsian analysis might indicate. Nevertheless, the history of the Coalition with its founding by the charismatic, action oriented Paul Brant, and with a central role given to traditional and generally non-democratic Catholic clergymen certainly made it difficult to maintain even elements of democracy. Also important here is the general lack of a clearly

⁷⁶ Ronald Lawson, The Tenant Movement in New York City (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1986)p.270

⁷⁷ Jo Freeman (ed.), Social Movements of the Sixties and Seventies (New York: Longman, 1983), pp.1-2

formulated democratic ideology, one placing a strong emphasis on participation. In Brant, the orientation was not so much shared democratic participation as action, or mass protest. His emphasis was on getting the job done, on doing, and perhaps, for practical reasons, mobilizing people to do it, but he did not emphasize democratic participation in organizational decision making. The same was generally true of the men that ran the organization after Paul Brant left in 1975, within a year after its founding. Clergymen like Monseigneur McC. were well intentioned but traditional and often authoritarian. If there was an ideology it was "Alinskyism," with its emphasis on action and power. But, while emphasizing popular participation:

... the Alinsky approach ... is to organize and mobilize people "as they are," without any conscious ideology ...[therefore] the churches became the basic ally for mobilizing people ...[but] without challenging the structurally dominant interests or the institutionalized values

 he insisted that the goals, direction, and focus had to come from the people themselves⁷⁸

But, while such a view appears to be the most democratic of perspectives, in fact, it opens up and/or

⁷⁸ Manuel Castells, The City and the Grassroots(Berkley: U. of California Press,1983)p.62

allows for traditional methods of control to be used to basically steer the direction of an organization as an elite group or leadership core desires. Also, understanding the Alinsky "non-ideology" helps to understand the clergy's difficulties with the campaign against the banks and the reticence of many of them to accept the "radical" action that the Committee on Reinvestment was planning to take. By the early 1980s, evidence indicates that the seeds of oligarchic rule that had been planted at the Coalition's founding were taking root and becoming more firmly established. The Coalition was becoming more and more like an interest group, dominated by an elite core of community leaders and clergymen.

Chapter Four

The Coalition and Racial Transition

By the time the Coalition was established in late 1973, the northwest Bronx was already known as a "neighborhood in transition." In the vernacular of the period this meant that the neighborhood was changing racially and/or ethnically. The South Bronx had changed and the northwest Bronx was changing. Whites were moving out and blacks and Latinos, mostly Puerto Ricans, were moving in. While this was a racial and ethnic change in population, it was also a change in terms of social class. The whites moving out were overwhelmingly working to middle class, while the minorities moving in were overwhelmingly poor, often on public assistance, and working class. While the Coalition focused its attention on neighborhood preservation and stabilization, on saving the area's rapidly deteriorating housing stock, and on improving the delivery of needed services, underlying all of this effort was the problem of race and racial transition.

On page 131 there is a map of the northwest Bronx indicating census tracts. The heavy black line across the center of the map represents Fordham Road, the commercial hub of the northwest Bronx and the symbolic

dividing line between the still stable northern area and the rapidly deteriorating southern area. In addition, the northern area was overwhelmingly white, while the southern area was predominately black and Latino. For the purpose of examining demographic change, the shaded census tracts were selected based on the following criteria: to correspond to my field work, for a good north of Fordham Road-South of Fordham Road mixture, and to have at least one tract for each of the Coalition's neighborhood organizations. The table on page 132 is based on 1960, 1970, and 1980 federal census data for each of the selected tracts. It includes data on total population and the number of blacks and latinos living in each of the selected census tracts for each census year.

The comparative census data indicates an obvious pattern of racial and ethnic transition. During each ten year period there has been dramatic increases in the minority population for each census tract. For the tracts south of Fordham Road the dramatic changes began to occur between 1960 and 1970, and for those north of Fordham Road racial change has been most significant between 1970 and 1980. The clear trend of course was a south to north movement of blacks and especially latinos. As discussed above, they were migrating north to escape the conditions in the south Bronx. Also worth noting is

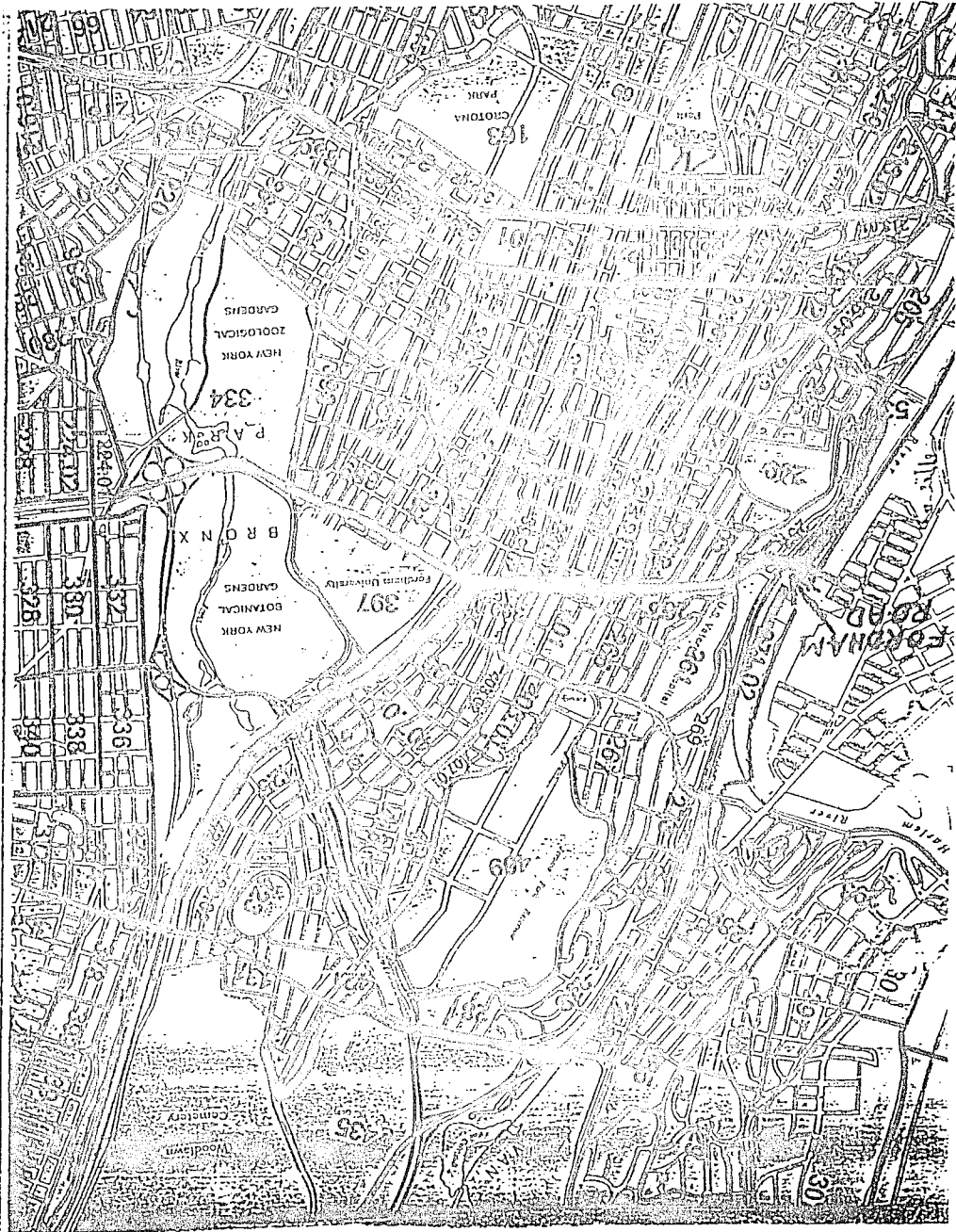
the fact that although transition was occurring north of Fordham Road, the tracts to the north were overwhelming white. Overall, the percentage of minorities living north of Fordham Road was under 25% and in some neighborhoods, it was much less than that.

Nonetheless, based on the above, it was clear that the northwest Bronx was an area that was going through the all too common urban syndrome of racial and ethnic transition. This was not of course unique to the northwest Bronx; it was a well established pattern, well documented in the sociological literature and experienced in urban areas throughout the United States during the twentieth century, but especially during the 1960s and 1970s.

Coalition personnel were well aware of the race problem. Two important members of the Coalition, one the president of a local association and the other a paid organizer, said in a 1975 interview,⁷⁹ that the central issue in the community was, at bottom, that of race. This was mainly true for the areas north of Fordham Road which, in 1975, were still predominantly white but rapidly changing.

⁷⁹ Interview with Bill Fisher, Coalition organizer, and Mary Ann Rheinhaller, President of the Fordham-Bedford Community Coalition, 11/8/75.

UNITED STATES CENSUS DATA, NORTHWEST BRONX TRACTS



		NEIGHBORHOODS AND CENSUS TRACTS									
		SOUTH OF FORDHAM ROAD			NORTH OF FORDHAM ROAD						
		MORRIS HEIGHTS			UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS	SOUTH FORDHAM	FORDHAM	BEDFORD PARK	MOSHOLU	KINGSBRIDGE HEIGHTS	
		239	245	243	255	383	405	413	423	267	279
TOTAL POPULATION	1960	7646	8376	5708	5891	9441	9678	6386	3529	9824	5707
	1970	6978	7986	6399	5125	9375	9442	6400	3238	8915	7309
	1980	7871	6987	3334	5716	9096	9397	6180	3062	8540	6635
Black POPULATION	1960	67	141	65	58	359	49	6	19	27	11
	1970	392	1461	2050	74	1776	121	8	48	59	68
	1980	1918	3480	1476	1876	3673	1855	112	147	984	408
Spanish Speaking POPULATION	1960	118	129	69	4	453	22	0	20	64	51
	1970	1114	1328	2230	126	2892	550	87	85	461	312
	1980	4967	3352	1760	2672	4905	4550	901	506	2821	958

United States Census Data: 1960, 1970, and 1980

A reporter for the New York Daily News, doing a story on the Coalition, wrote in its Sunday magazine on November 28, 1976, that the goal of the Coalition was:

... to halt the decline of neighborhoods south of Fordham Road ... where housing decay was reaching epidemic proportions and to stabilize the white-ethnic populations of the northern neighborhoods ... where conditions were still good.⁸⁰

The reporter was referring to a reality almost taken for granted by coalition personnel and local residents of the northwest Bronx in the mid 1970s. This reality was that south of Fordham Road had already changed, i.e. it was already a minority area,, and one that was physically deteriorating at a startlingly rapid pace. To white residents of the northwest Bronx, the relationship between the growing minority population and physical deterioration was a causal one, i.e. minorities came and destroyed the neighborhood.

When the two important Coalition personnel identified race as the central issue of the community, they were referring to the mainly white residents of the northwest Bronx who lived north of Fordham Road. In effect, the Coalition was operating in an area where the majority of its residents were white and where most of them perceived race as the central issue. The reporter

⁸⁰ New York Daily News loc.cit.

who wrote the Sunday Daily News story was right on target when he said the goals of the Coalition were different south of Fordham Road than they were north of Fordham Road. South of Fordham Road was minority dominant and deteriorating; north of Fordham Road was white dominant and generally stable. While these neighborhood differences within the northwest Bronx necessitated a different strategy for each area, those differences also created a tension within the coalition that was never resolved, nor openly dealt with. Ultimately, this tension was over the issue of race.

An example of how the north-south split was an underlying and divisive issue within the Coalition was exemplified in an article that appeared in the St. Philip Neri parish bulletin in 1975 [this was a parish approximately one mile north of Fordham Road]. The bulletin was issued each week by Catholic Churches in the northwest Bronx and contained announcements and information pertaining to both religious and community matters. It was normally issued to parishioners after Sunday services. In 1975, one such Sunday bulletin contained an article which read as follows:

Don't Make a Move without calling The Rectory. It would be a terrible violation of the truth to say that people are moving out of the neighborhood in great numbers. This vicious rumor must be squashed. When people move they are not

necessarily running away. There are many and varied reasons for moving ...⁸¹

Without saying so, the article was clearly about what was commonly called "white flight." Even though there was no direct reference to the problem of race or racial change, there were assuredly few people in the northwest Bronx of the 1970s who would not have understood the underlying message of the article. It would have been very clear to parishioners that the Church was trying to convince people not to move, and in the northern section of the northwest Bronx, this referred mainly to white residents. Regarding the north-south division in the northwest Bronx, reflected in different Coalition strategy for each area, it was Paul Brant himself who in 1973 wrote in a early summary statement of what the goals of the new organization would be:

The basic idea we have is to involve people who want to stay in the Bronx-- get them to make a stand -- draw an imaginary Maginot line across the strip between Burnside - 180th and Fordham Road - refuse to let deterioration advance beyond that ...fix up where it has already crossed the line ...⁸²

In the same Coalition summary Brant wrote:

⁸¹ The St. Philip Neri Parish Bulletin, 1975

⁸² NWBCCC Files, 1973

Our rhetoric will be that of community stabilization
-- not racism.....

Based on the above, it is clear that Paul Brant's idea is to focus Coalition efforts on "neighborhood stabilization" and to use a "neighborhood stabilization" rhetoric or language, and not racist language. The avoidance of racist rhetoric is Brant's way of saying that the stabilization effort is in no way a racist effort.⁸³ Nevertheless, the subject of racism arose in the first place because the issue of race was a relevant one in the northwest Bronx of the 1970s. The so called "Maginot Line" strategy itself, while naive and indicating an ignorance of both the real estate industry and free market Capitalism, is also open to question because the line separating deteriorated from non-deteriorated also separated the predominantly black and Hispanic area from the predominantly white area.

Furthermore, there were signs that the white population north of Fordham Road was developing a siege mentality, signs that the area north of Fordham Road was becoming, as Gerald Suttles described in this book, The Social Construction of Communities, a "defended neighborhood", i.e.:

⁸³ It is my view that the Coalition and Brant were not trying to hide a racist strategy by avoiding racist rhetoric. There is no evidence of this.

... one that ... seals itself off [1] through the efforts of delinquent gangs,[2] by restrictive covenants,[3] by sharp boundaries or [4] by a forbidding reputation. ⁸⁴

Suttles, thus, outlines four ways in which neighborhoods defend themselves, or keep out people the residents define as undesirable, which typically means members of minority groups, especially blacks and Latinos. Based on this definition, at least some of the white residents living north of Fordham Road were behaving in ways that would allow for the application of Suttles' term, "defended neighborhood." Furthermore, the Coalition itself was at least indirectly implicated in some of these developments.

We will proceed by showing how the northwest Bronx began to appear like a "defended neighborhood." This will be done by taking each point in the definition and examining its relation to the situation in the northwest Bronx. Following this, we will indicate how the Coalition dealt with this situation and the problems it encountered in doing so.

⁸⁴ Gerald Suttles, The Social Construction of Communities (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972)p.21

Point One: A Defended Neighborhood is One that Seals
Itself Off Through the Efforts of Delinquent Gangs

During the month of October, 1975, a murder was committed in the Fordham-Kingsbridge Heights area. The murder was widely reported in New York City newspapers, and it appeared to be a racially motivated killing. Three black youths attacked and stabbed a white youth on a crosstown bus going through the neighborhood. The white youth was of Irish descent and from the immediate neighborhood. Peter Rosenbaum, the President of the Kingsbridge Heights Neighborhood Association at that time, said of the incident:

The hideous aftermath of that was that mobs of Irish kids attacked any black whom they would see. They pulled people out of restaurants who were eating. They walked along Sedgewick Avenue and any place, any black whom they would see, any place ... where they knew the owner of the place was black, they'd stone the house ...⁸⁵

It would be a distortion to say that this one incident was characteristic of how all white youths perceived blacks, but it is indicative of real tension that existed between the two racial groups. It was very common to hear white residents, both young and old, talk in pejorative terms of the blacks and Latinos moving into

⁸⁵ Interview with Peter Rosenbaum, President of the Kingsbridge Heights Neighborhood Association, 1976

the neighborhood. Residents commonly talked of how nice the neighborhood used to be, before "they" started to move in. The violence of the white youths against "any black whom they would see " was surely viewed by those youths as justifiable revenge, but it also indicated a deep seeded racial tension, one existing long before the murder of the white youth.

Furthermore, regarding Suttles' first point in his definition of "defended neighborhood," it is clear that this kind of behavior by white youths, though not formerly gang youths, would have the effect of keeping more blacks from moving into the neighborhood. It could of course also lead to an escalation of violence, if for example blacks youths began to counter-retaliate.

The Coalition and its member association in Kingsbridge Heights, did indeed respond to this incident, in a number of ways. After the incident occurred, the local Coalition organizer related how the association planned a rally to protest the killing of local youth. Bishop Ahern, Vicar of the Northwest Bronx, and member of the Board of Directors of the Coalition (who was coincidentally housed in the parish where the incident occurred) vetoed the action because he felt there would be too much risk of violence. Bishop Ahern also went into the streets and talked to the local youths who were

attacking black kids in the streets. He and the local parish priests of Our Lady of Angels Church also used the Sunday pulpit to re-establish calm in the neighborhood.

So, did the neighborhood fit Suttles' definition of a "defended neighborhood?" While the answer cannot be given in a definitive way, it is clear that tensions between white youths and in-coming blacks ran high. Both white youths and the adult population certainly felt threatened by the influx of minorities into the neighborhood, and evidence like that given above, certainly indicates that they were capable of collective action which would have the effect of discouraging further in-migration. So, the answer to the above question would be a qualified, "yes." There was good reason to say that quasi-gang activity was present which would serve to discourage blacks from feeling comfortable in the neighborhood. The actions of the Kingsbridge Heights youth would indeed have the effect of sealing off the neighborhood from "encroachment" by minority people.

Of course, Kingsbridge Heights is not the only neighborhood in the northwest Bronx. Nevertheless, there is evidence that other neighborhoods and their youth were acting in ways similar to Kingsbridge Heights. The Belmont neighborhood area and the Villa Avenue area of Bedford Park were generally known as areas where Italian-

American youth were active in their "protecting" of their neighborhoods from minority youth. The Belmont area was known as a very safe neighborhood, but it was also a neighborhood where there was an inordinate number of racially motivated incidents, typically involving local youth and black or Hispanic passersby. Thus, in neighborhoods throughout the northwest Bronx there was activity resembling the gang activity that Suttles identified as part of what he called "the defended neighborhood."

Point Two: The Defended Neighborhood is one that Seals Itself Off by Restrictive Covenants

The term "restrictive covenant" generally refers to individual, group, or institutional efforts to restrict the entrance of unwanted individuals into a neighborhood. Since this kind of action is generally illegal (and can no longer be written into any legal document as a condition of sale or rent), such covenants are usually carried out informally, through real estate practices such as racial steering (i.e. directing minority house or apartment seekers only to minority areas) or simply the refusal of owners or their agents to rent to minorities, using various subterfuges, with the most obvious being the lie, e.g. "there are no vacant apartments," or "the apartment was just rented." While such actions can lead

to legal actions by the suspicious housing seeker, most house or apartment seekers are deterred by such simple tactics and so such informal restrictive covenants, practiced on a widespread basis, can be very effective in keeping minorities out of a neighborhood.

Based on research conducted in a sample of apartment buildings in the Fordham-Bedford area in the mid-1970s, what appeared to be happening was not the development of restrictive covenants but instead their breakdown. In other words, one reason why the northwest Bronx was for so long, practically speaking, an all white neighborhood, was that owners of buildings and their agents would not rent apartments to blacks or hispanics. In interviews of building superintendents, it was found that they were given definite orders by their employers not to rent to minorities. One super related how in the 1960s, again when the neighborhood was, as they say, "lily white," she refused an "under-the -table" payment of \$500 offered by a black woman to rent her an apartment. The super said she refused because her job was more important than the \$500 payment.⁸⁶

By the 1970s, however, significant changes had occurred in the real estate market affecting the

⁸⁶ Interviews with local building superintendents, 1975-1976

attitudes of owners toward minority rentals and sales. Perhaps foremost among the changes that had occurred in the northwest Bronx real estate market was that fewer and fewer white people wanted to live there. The original lack of "white demand" had little or nothing to do with race, because the decline in demand appears to have begun in the 1960s, along with the decline in the area's population. The majority of census tracts in the northwest Bronx, in the areas north of Fordham Road, showed a decline in population between 1960 and 1970. [and at the time there were few minorities living in this area]. With a declining population, it became more and more difficult to rent apartments to white residents. A super related how in the early 1970s, the owner of his building had to resort to advertising a vacancy in a city newspaper. Previously, advertising was unnecessary because there was always a list of people waiting for apartments. Without a list of potential renters, the owner was forced to go public. Much to the owner's chagrin however, most of the people who answered the ad were black and Latino. Thus, white demand was weak, and minority demand was strong. Minorities were moving north, out their traditional areas of heavy concentration, i.e. the South Bronx and Harlem. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, as the South Bronx began to

collapse, with increasing rates of abandonment, arson, crime, and drug addiction, thousands of black and hispanic "refugees" came north seeking decent and affordable housing. In terms of market conditions alone, the weak demand by whites, coupled with the strong demand by minorities, should have created a situation that would inevitably lead to racial transition.

In fact, however, the market was not the sole factor affecting rentals and housing sales in the northwest Bronx. If the market were the sole determinant of rentals and sales, based on the above cited research, the area would have "turned over" or changed racially much more rapidly than it did. Instead, social or non-economic factors played a key role in apartment distribution. Apartments were not rented on a first come, first serve basis; they were rented on the basis of ascription, specifically of race and ethnicity. Twenty blacks and Latinos could be waiting for an apartment, but the first white person to want it would get it. So, even in the early 1970s, when white demand for apartments in the northwest Bronx was down, restrictive covenants prevented rapid turnover of the area north of Fordham Road. What happened instead was a kind of selective turnover, one where reluctant landlord, little by little, began to yield their living space to minority tenants.

Little by little, the market was allowed to reign supreme, but only after landlords could find no whites to fill their vacant apartments. It was only then that "their hands were tied," and then that they had to yield to the market and rent to "undesirables." The first areas to go were the fringe or marginal areas of the northwest Bronx, the areas where the poorer whites had lived, the areas with the least attractive buildings and apartments. These were often pre-World War II, five story "walk-ups," buildings without elevators. And in those buildings themselves, it was usually the fourth or fifth story apartments that were the first to be rented to minority tenants, for these were the hardest to rent even in the best of times.

By the mid-1970s, minority tenancy was widespread throughout the northwest Bronx, with most of the minority tenants being hispanics, usually Puerto Ricans. The highest concentration of minorities was generally, as stated above, in the least desirable buildings and areas of the northwest Bronx, e.g. along Sedgewick, at the bottom of the hill, near Webster and Decatur, along "the el" train on Jerome, but also in old five story walk-ups, wherever they were, e.g. on the Grand Concourse, on Jerome, Webster, or Decatur Avenues.

Another factor in the transition process that relates to the market and its relation to change were the policies of the New York City Human Resources Administration [HRA], otherwise known as the Welfare Department. Because it was often difficult for HRA to find apartments for its indigent clients and its difficulties were well known to the real estate industry in New York City, HRA often paid well above market rents for its clientele. In general, HRA difficulties in placing welfare tenants were due to two factors. The first is racism, since most welfare recipients in New York City in the 1970s were minorities, and the second has to do with the clientele themselves. Though not true of most indigent clients, it was the case that some welfare families were problem ridden, and were often very destructive tenants. They were destructive in ways that often made life difficult for other tenants in their buildings, because of such behaviors as: non-supervision of their children, making too much noise, drinking or use of illegal substances, and criminal behavior. Putting a large number of welfare families into one building was a situation tailor made for problems. In a building with fifty families, even a few problem ridden households could seriously disrupt life for a large number of people.

Because of these difficulties, HRA had great difficulty in finding suitable housing for its clients. But, when HRA found a landlord who was willing to rent to welfare tenants, such buildings often became dumping grounds for welfare families since the supply of such buildings was never up to the demand. This meant that there were buildings throughout the northwest Bronx which were literally crowded with welfare tenants. There was no plan for the placement of such tenants; the whole process was dependent on the willingness of landlords to admit welfare tenants. Their incentive was of course economic, and in the northwest Bronx real estate market of the 1970s, this was a powerful incentive indeed. In fact, the economic incentive was for many landlords stronger than their desire not to rent to minorities. Thus, many landlords realized that they could no longer keep out minority tenants, so having made the decision to rent to them, for those who were more desperate or perhaps greedy, it was not difficult to realize that they could make a killing by renting to the welfare department. Thus, some buildings might have one or two welfare families, but others would be filled with them, i.e. the welfare dumping ground. Such landlords made money hand over fist.

Significant here is the way in which market forces interact with social forces to affect the pattern of demographic change. While market forces alone (e.g. supply and demand) can lead to racial transition, in the northwest Bronx, the market interacted with social forces to significantly affect, and in this case sabotage, the operation of the market. It was only when the restrictive covenants that guided the behavior of landlords in their dealings with potential clientele no longer allowed them to make sufficient profits that their hand was forced, so to speak. It was only then that they began to rent to minority tenants, and some of these landlords, perhaps the neediest or the greediest or both, deliberately sought to rent their apartments to welfare tenants because this was a lucrative endeavor. So, here we have the intersection of economics, politics [the operation of a government agency], and social forces interacting to affect the pattern of change in a neighborhood.

Summarizing, it appears that what was happening in the northwest bronx in the mid-1970s was not the development of restrictive covenants, but instead, their breakdown. In effect, while it appears to be true that northwest Bronx neighborhoods began to develop a seige mentality, that of Suttles' "defended neighborhood," the seige mentality did not result in the initiation of

restrictive covenants, but resulted from their demise. It was restrictive covenants that allowed the northwest Bronx to remain a white neighborhood in the first place. The operation of the market forced the hand of landlords, leading them to abandon their use of restrictive covenants and to pay heed to the priority of economic survival. Unfortunately, many of these same landlords were motivated by economic incentive associated with a certain type of market, one catering to greed and unscrupulous behavior. So, many of these landlords, while renting to minorities, whether through HRA or on their own, also began to neglect their buildings and, in the jargon of the times, to milk them, to collect rents but to make no repairs. This was commonly a prelude to abandonment.

Coalition Response:

While landlord initiated restrictive covenants may have been breaking down, there was open discussion within the Coalition and among significant numbers of its membership for the establishment of tenant-initiated screening programs and apartment referral services. In fact, by 1976 at least two of the associations north of Fordham Road had set up apartment referral services. Apartment referral services performed basically the same

function as real estate brokers except that no fee was charged and it was operated informally with referrals done by word of mouth. Furthermore, it was generally understood that people referred to the service were "the right kind of people." In effect, the associations which ran such services were working closely with cooperative landlords who would inform the service of a vacancy. The service would then take names from the list to fill the vacancy. The names for the list came from referrals supplied by the local tenant association membership. Of course, it was understood that it was in the self interest of tenants to recommend only good people, or people who would make good tenants and good neighbors. Important here is that the apartment referral service was also an informal screening device, a way in which a community association could have some control over "in-movers."⁸⁷

Regarding the problem of restrictive covenants, there is some evidence that at least one of the services was in fact engaging in, not landlord initiated restrictive covenants, but instead tenant or perhaps community association initiated restrictive covenants.

⁸⁷ Complete control, of course, is not possible under free market conditions. See Harvey Molotch, Managed Integration, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972)

Where the old type of restrictive covenant system was breaking down due to changing market conditions, a new system was being set up, due to those same market conditions. The new system was a kind of "white pipeline," a kind of racist underground railroad, set up to steer whites to apartments and screen-out minorities.

Of course, the referral service was not a secret endeavor, people in the neighborhood were generally aware of its existence. It was "advertised" or described as something being done to keep out destructive tenants, people who were bad for a neighborhood. If landlords complained that they didn't have time to screen prospective tenants [something landlords commonly said in response to tenant accusations that they were renting to anybody] that they had to fill the vacancies in order to keep above water in a difficult market, the community association could tell the landlord that it would supply him with good tenants to fill those vacancies. This was not a blatantly racist endeavor, but there is evidence that race was involved in the screening process. Research on this issue uncovered at least one woman with a Latino last name seeking an apartment, who was told that there were none, when in fact there were. Another case involved a Coalition organizer, who was helping a minority person find an apartment. When he asked the woman who was

running the service about an apartment for the minority person, the woman responded, "Don't you think that building has enough minorities in it already.?"⁸⁸ Clearly, race and ethnicity were being used to reject some tenants and/or place others in "service-decided locations. This of course is a type of racial steering, or perhaps a type of quota system.

The other type of measure, i.e. formal tenant screening, as would be used by some arrangement involving landlord, broker, and/or tenants or some combination of the three, was openly discussed by various associations and was actually a formal proposition at the coalition's 1976 Annual Meeting. The proposition read as follows:

Resolution #1, on Real Estate Brokers to be presented by S.E. of Forham-Bedford Community Coalition.

Whereas the State of New York has stated that "the real estate broker occupies a position of trust and confidence in his dealings with the public", and whereas real estate brokers have a legal and moral responsibility to 1) serve both tenants and landlords in order to preserve our existing housing stock, and 2) protect human rights and private property; and whereas community groups in the Fordham-Bedford and Bedford Park areas are currently negotiating with J.S., a real estate agent in the Northwest Bronx, to reach an agreement acknowledging that responsibility, Therefore, we resolve that the NWBCCC move to have all real estate brokers

⁸⁸ Informal conversation with Coalition organizer, Joe Muriano, 2/23/82

affecting the Coalition areas acknowledge and accept through written agreements their responsibility to the community, tenants and landlords. The agreements shall outline specific programs for the maintenance and preservation of integrated housing stock, and should include the following stipulations:

1) The real estate brokers will not include apartments and/or buildings with numerous or hazardous violations; 2) The real estate brokers will not work for or with landlords cited by HDA, landlord-tenant court and/or the Neighborhood Associations for not maintaining their buildings; 3) The real estate brokers will maintain or establish a tenant screening process and shall reveal the process to the NWBCCC. ⁸⁹

Twenty-seven propositions were reviewed, voted on, and passed by the Coalition membership at the 1976 Annual Meeting. All except Proposition #1, above, passed with little or no debate; Proposition #1 caused a furor!

The overall intent of the proposition was to deal with the physical deterioration of housing (stipulations #1 and #2) and undesirable, destructive tenants (stipulation #3). With stipulations one and two the Coalition was attempting (using the high moral tone of a state issued document) to directly control the actions of real estate brokers and indirectly, the actions of landlords. Put simply, the Coalition wanted brokers and landlords to be interested in more than profits, to consider more than the bottom line when renting

⁸⁹ NWBCCC files, Third Annual Meeting, 1976

apartments and/or engaging in the real estate business. The Coalition wanted both brokers and landlords to be socially responsible in their business activities; they wanted them to be responsive to the needs of the residents of the Northwest Bronx; they wanted them to have an interest in long term stability rather than a short term market killing. For the Coalition, the short term killing meant renting to anyone, simply seeking the fastest and highest return on investment (which would eventually and almost inevitably lead to physical deterioration of the building and eventual abandonment).

Stipulations one and two were apparently acceptable to all; the same could not be said of stipulation #3, which turned out to be a highly divisive issue, one that brought to the surface within the coalition the unresolved and smoldering issue of race.

At the Annual Meeting, when the proposition first came up for a vote, one of the membership requested that the vote be postponed in order to amend the resolution. Monseigneur McC., chairing the meeting, grudgingly permitted the postponement. Following a vote on Resolution #16, the Chair returned to Resolution #1 and a protracted and emotionally charged debate ensued about Stipulation #3: "The real estate brokers will maintain or

establish a tenant screening process and shall reveal that process to the NWBCCC."

The controversy centered on the nature of the screening process. The following are field notes taken during the debate:

H.S. of the Mosholu-Woodlawn South Association: "... the wording and content is not made clear ... we will not support it ... we propose that [the section] be stricken ...

S.B. of the Fordham-Bedford Community Coalition[Chairman of the Standing Committee on Housing and one of the authors of the resolution]: " we understand the confusion ... we didn't define ...[what we meant] ... now we have rewritten it ...[to read]'real estate brokers will establish a screening process that will not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, or age and will try to maintain the quality of life in the building.'"

J.M. of the Kingsbridge Heights Neighborhood Association: [Opposing even the new re-wording]: [He said he favored striking the phrase from he resolution] ... [because] the record of real estate brokers is so discriminatory ... and against people who have fought the landlord ... even

if they don't discriminate [on the basis of race] ... [still] any one who has fought their landlord can be ...[blackballed] ... [allowing them to use a screening process] ... will give people who are out to destroy our neighborhood more power ..."

D.B. of the United Associations of Bedford Park: A Co_author of the resolution and a member of the Standing Committee on Housing:

" ... we know it's controversial ... we are on the verge of reaching an agreement with one broker ... we feel that a screening process is necessary ... in terms of [weeding out] undesirable tenants and we've made it clear it isn't [a question of] race ...[that's why we put in the phrase 'a screening process that will not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, or age'] ... [but] we do not want those who have done damage or arson to buildings ... until we go on record with brokers that we want only decent people, we cannot come to grips with this problem ... we are not talking about racism ... "

Another speaker said, "... I believe are untrustworthy ... we are asking a whole coalition to put its support for this ... a tenant screening process is a problem ...[the meaning of] undesirable tenant is a problem ...

[in some sense] ... all of you are undesirable tenants ... I move we delete number three ..."

S.E. of the FBCC AND Chairman of the Standing Committee on Housing: "...we are dealing with S. he sends in people for blockbusting ... he sends in bad people deliberately ... the only way to stop it is to keep a screening process ... "90

A man from University Heights then spoke, saying that the Bronx Board of Realtors backs this. He added that there are too many "loopholes" in it and that it should first be thoroughly examined.

At that point the Chairman, Msgr. McC. asked that the concerned parties meet to discuss the issue further for the purpose of reaching some kind of agreement. Approximately ten to fifteen members got up and went to the back of the hall to attempt to come up with a new resolution acceptable to all. At this caucus the members met around a small table and , while standing up, discussed the varying points of view. A black woman from south of Fordham Road related how their building had serious problems with bad tenant. The tenant association

⁹⁰ Research notes, December 4, 1976

pressured the landlord to allow the tenants to screen prospective renters. He gave in and she said the building no longer has such problems. She favored some kind of tenant controlled screening process. In opposition, J.M. said that tenant screening, even screening without interference by brokers, was problematical because in areas and/or buildings which are not racially integrated tenants can use the screening process to discriminate against minorities. A black man who identified himself as a real estate broker said he was against allowing brokers to screen. He said that knowing the business inside and out he too felt brokers could not be trusted to do the screening process fairly and without discriminating ... S.B. and D.B. [Co-Authors of the original proposal] continued to argue for some sort of screening process . They felt that the deletion of the phrase from the resolution would weaken their position in the current negotiations with S.[the realtor]. They attempted to again, reword the resolution so as to mollify the opposition. A man from The Morris Heights Organization, T.P. felt that even with rewording the whole process was questionable and he favored deletion. Ultimately a kind of compromise was reached. It was decided to strike #3 from the resolution with the understanding that the Real Estate Committee would work

on the problem and then take their suggestions to each of the neighborhood association for their approval.⁹¹

The debate over tenant screening reflected the tensions that existed within the Coalition [and in turn, in the neighborhood] surrounding the issue of race, and it went to the heart of the contradictory tendencies within the organization.

On the one hand, the debate itself, that it even took place, in an open forum, before two hundred and fifty residents of the northwest Bronx was a tribute to the power of democracy and the ability of an organization to stimulate democratic participation.

[Unfortunately, as discussed previously in Chapter three, this sometimes raucous democratic element of the Coalition was abandoned for a less democratic, more public relations type of gathering that is now the Annual Meeting]. That ordinary residents, of all races, ethnic groups, and religious affiliation, could gather together,

⁹¹ It is important to note that the caucus was conducted with a high degree of good-will and at all times the participants, white, black, and hispanic, all tried diligently and even-handedly to resolve their differences. There was a real exchange of viewpoints, open consideration of suggestions, and virtually no hostility. While the compromise disappointed the members of the Housing/Real Estate Committee, it did not "close the door" on the possibility of some kind of screening process. In effect, the membership said that more, and perhaps less hurried discussion was necessary.

united by a common belief in working for the betterment of their communities is something that is all too rarely witnessed in the racially divided cities of our nation.

Also positive was the sincerity and genuine commitment of the participants to try to resolve an extremely difficult problem. There was no hint of racism in this debate, all the participants were struggling with the real dilemma of how a community could obtain a modicum of control over its own destiny, when such control was in the hands of people, the real estate industry, which did not share their concerns, which cared mainly about profits, which was guided by market processes and values and not by community concerns. It can be said that the participants formed a solidarity group based on community values; they were opposed by an industry that operated with a value system, i.e. the market, directly opposed to that of the community.

On the other hand, the debate revealed the tension smoldering just beneath the surface of the Coalition and the neighborhood. Race was unquestionably the most divisive issue affecting the Coalition as an organization. The race issue had the potential to destroy the Coalition, It could cause open conflict, not so much in its effect on individuals, but as it affected the member associations of the Coalition. And, it was at

the Annual Meetings where the potential for conflict was most obvious. [I believe this may be the principle reason for the change in the format of the Annual Meeting, not simply because of its messiness, but because of its potential for conflict, especially revolving around the race issue.]

The debate over tenant screening can be viewed as a debate over the formal establishment of restrictive covenants, but as was true of the previously discussed referral service, a community organization initiated screening process. However, it was one thing for the largely white membership of the Kingsbridge Heights Association to establish a referral service, on its own and discreetly, but quite another thing for the Coalition as an organization to debate the creation of a potentially discriminatory system. The public airing of the proposal and the controversy that ensued revealed the rifts in the organization, both geographical and political.

It revealed a geographical rift because the community organizations and individuals most strongly for the establishment screening were white-dominated and north of Fordham Road. S.E. of the Fordham-Bedford Community Coalition and D.B. of the United Associations of Bedford Park were white and both represented such

associations. Those opposing the tenant screening process were either minority people from associations south of Fordham Road or, interestingly, white political leftists [and living north of Fordham Road]. Two of the participants in the debate fall into this category, of holding a strongly leftist political position and living north of Fordham Road. The general pattern was for whites and white dominated associations to be for the tenant screening proposal because they saw it as a way to protect themselves from unscrupulous landlord and brokers who were willing to rent to anyone. Such landlords and brokers were often involved in "milking" their buildings, being racist in the more subtle sense that they did not care who rented the apartments any more (or never did) . Such landlords and brokers were not "color blind", but instead had written off the northwest Bronx as a long term investment and had begun to "milk" their buildings by renting to anyone and putting as little money as possible into the maintenance of these properties. They had written off these properties because they saw the northwest bronx as a "changing" neighborhood, one that would inevitably become minority dominated. Thus, the lack of concern as to who rented, and thus the concern only for getting a paying customer into the apartment.

The whites who wanted tenant screening, those who fought for it during the debate, were not motivated by racism. Their motivation is better understood as class-based rather than race-based. This does not preclude the possibility that there were indeed racist elements in the membership of the Coalition or that arguments focusing on class were often a subterfuge to hide racism. Nevertheless, there appears to be no basis for concluding that tenant screening was intended to be an exclusionary device. Much like the above quoted black woman who related how tenant controlled screening had allowed her building to deal effectively with bad tenants, to control those who rented in her building and thereby solve the problem of bad tenants, white leaders who argued for screening wanted to be able to screen out "undesirables." "Undesirables" would be defined by achievement-based criteria or behavior-based characteristics and not race or ascription-based ones; they wanted to be able to exercise control over their communities and not leave the quality of life aspects of their buildings and neighborhoods to landlords and brokers. [Why quality of life? So called bad tenants are disastrous in the close quarters of NYC apartment life; people who are noisy, late into the night, who play their music too loud, have loud parties, and perhaps too many parties, have friends

coming in and out at all hours, who don't control/supervise their children, use drugs and/or alcohol.....an apartment building with even one such tenant can radically affect the quality of life for significant numbers of people in a building].

But, while all could agree that it was important to screen out "bad" tenants, the issue they could not agree on was how to do it. And it was the how part of the "stipulation" that brought the race issue to the surface, where generally minorities and the left took one position and the whites north of Fordham Road took the other position. The implementation of screening was difficult because screening procedures had the potential to be biased. As J.M. told the above mentioned black women from south of Fordham Road who favored screening:

... tenant screening, even screening without interference by brokers was problematic because in areas and/or buildings which are not fully integrated, tenants can use the screening process to discriminate against minorities.⁹²

This lack of integration was precisely the case in the majority of buildings north of Fordham Road.

Ultimately, the caucus recommended that Stipulation Three be struck from the proposal and that "... the Real Estate/Housing Committee ... continue to work on the

⁹² Research notes, 11/4/76

problem and then take their suggestions to the neighborhood associations for their approval."⁹³ The new motion was seconded and passed. Thus, Stipulation three was tabled, put aside. The clearly divisive issue of how to deal with "undesirable" or bad/disruptive tenants could not be resolved, at least not without raising the fears and suspicions of some that race would be the basis for the screening process.

Returning now to the issue of whether the neighborhoods north of Fordham Road were using restrictive covenants, or more correctly, attempting to reestablish restrictive covenants where they had broken down, it appears that the answer is a qualified "yes." While the Coalition as an organization (of community associations) had rejected the establishment of tenant screening, at least two of its community associations north of Fordham Road had set up apartment referral services. Given this fact, there is a firm basis for saying that on this score, i.e. restrictive covenants, some northwest Bronx neighborhoods were beginning to resemble Suttle's defended neighborhood, a neighborhood developing a siege mentality.

[Of course, one finding that differs from Suttles is what may be called the time frame or the causal sequence

⁹³ Research notes, 11/4/76

of events. Suttles argues that transition threatens, and in reaction, a neighborhood defends itself through the use of restrictive covenants. My research finding is that what allows for the transition to take place in the first place is the decline or waning of restrictive covenants. In other words, Suttles' research fails to see that what often keeps neighborhoods white is on-going restrictive covenants, from day one. Transition only occurs when the market changes and people can no longer find whites to rent or sell to. So, if the history of a neighborhood is not examined carefully, it may indeed appear that restrictive covenants are new, when in fact, such devices like tenant screening or community based real estate brokering may be an attempt to reestablish restrictive covenants after the market has changed and the realtor can no longer make a profit and still be selective with sales or rentals. In effect, a changed market may lead to openings for minorities where none previously existed. This change may also lead to a reaction on the part of some residents against the newcomers; one thing they might do is attempt to reestablish the restrictive covenants. This appears to be what happened in the northwest Bronx in the mid to late 1970s. Unfortunately, this opening for minorities is not what it appears to be, nor should it be viewed as the

ultimate triumph of the free market. In fact, as explained above, when the market does open for minorities, it is already a down market, a kind of slum market, a market that is that is set aside for minorities, one that will invite a certain kind of investor, often a slumlord who wants only to make a killing, who wants only to collect rents and put nothing into the building. The other kind of investor in this kind of market is the owner with few resources, one who barely has enough to buy, one without sufficient capital; this kind of landlord becomes a slumlord not out of desire, but in the "de facto" sense of not having sufficient resources to maintain the building. In the northwest Bronx this kind of ownership was characteristic of Albanian immigrants, who lacked sufficient resources to own buildings, but who bought by getting what were called "wrap-around" mortgages, where debt structure was such that after paying his mortgage, there was little left to maintain a building; this kind of mortgage was actually a new method for old slumlords to derive benefit from marginal property while giving titular ownership to unknowing, naive unsophisticated would-be landlords, like the many Albanians who bought apartment buildings in the northwest Bronx in the 1970s.]

The third and fourth parts of Suttles' definition regarding the defended neighborhood have to do with "sharp boundaries" and "a forbidding reputation." The northwest Bronx is a very large area, encompassing many different neighborhoods. There is no question that a few of those neighborhoods did indeed have relatively sharp boundaries and a forbidding reputation, to minorities. Two of the neighborhoods that clearly fit this description were Italian-American neighborhoods, the Belmont area and the Villa Avenue area. Each was rather small, but both were quite clearly demarcated and were known as places where minorities especially teenagers, had to be careful. In one of these two areas or communities, the Belmont area, there were periodic racial incidents, involving minority teenagers passing through and being attacked by Italian-American youths. More positively, Belmont was well known as a quaint and charming community, publicly lauded as one of the safest neighborhoods in the city and one frequented by Italian food lovers.

The other point to consider regarding sharp boundaries was Paul Brant's "Maginot Line Strategy." As discussed above, Paul Brant wanted to establish Fordham Road as the boundary between the deteriorated areas of the northwest Bronx and those areas still good. Fordham

Road was to be the symbolic dividing line, and the Coalition was going to stop deterioration from spreading north of that line. [see map of northwest Bronx on page 121] with the heavy black line through the center representing Fordham Road.] Of course, Fordham Road was also the dividing line between the white-dominant neighborhoods to the north and the minority-dominant ones to the south. Brant's citing of Fordham Road as the boundary between the north and south would not have been surprising to any observant man-in-the-street Bronxite in the early 1970s. It was common knowledge that Fordham Road was a kind of boundary between the white area and the black and Latino one, between the stable areas and the deteriorated ones. Fordham Road and its cross street, the Grand Concourse were the commercial and retail hub of the northwest Bronx and one of the most active commercial areas in the entire city of New York. The neighborhoods of the northwest Bronx could be understood as surrounding the Fordham Road/Grand Concourse Hub.

While Brant's "Maginot Line" (Fordham Road) was a sharp boundary, one that clearly demarcated northern neighborhoods from southern ones, as a boundary, it was more symbolic than real. As was the case with the real Maginot Line of history, when the "enemy" went around and

through it, in the northwest Bronx of the 1970s and 1980s the "enemy" also went around and through it. Of course, the Coalition and Paul Brant never defined the enemy as minorities; for them the "enemy" was neighborhood deterioration. Nevertheless, up until the mid-1980s, neighborhood deterioration followed the minority population.

[As an aside, there was one night in 1977, July 13 to be precise (my son's birthday) when Fordham Road became more than a symbolic boundary. This was the night of New York City's second great blackout. On that night minority residents in New York city's inner city neighborhoods rioted and looted commercial establishments throughout the city. In the northwest Bronx, commercial and retail areas south of Fordham Road were hit very hard; no business north of Fordham Road was looted. Along Fordham Road which stretches from east to west all along the northwest Bronx, stores on its south side were looted, but no store on its north side was touched. Why did the looting stop at the south side of Fordham Road? Why didn't the looters simply cross the street? There were easy pickins on the north side of Fordham Road and only about a quarter mile to the north, on Kingsbridge Road, and on Jerome Avenue, north of Fordham Road. Why didn't the looters cross the street?

The answer appears to lie in the social aspects of looting. Looting is a mass phenomenon, carried out mainly by poor people who often see it as a way of "righting the scales" (of re-distributing wealth). Masses of poor people lived south of Fordham Road, while few lived north of Fordham Road. Since the looting was a neighborhood phenomenon, only those neighborhoods with masses of poor people experienced looting; those without serious poverty escaped it. The looters did not move from neighborhood to neighborhood, they looted close to home. Interestingly, even those who lived on the southern side of Fordham road did not cross Fordham Road to loot the stores on the northern side. Clearly, symbolic boundaries can affect behavior. Within certain boundaries one may feel comfortable and call the area "my neighborhood;" outside that boundary, one does not feel at home, as if in someone else's home. On the night of the looting, the invisible symbolic boundary, acting like a concrete wall and not a symbol, stopped the looters cold.]

So, following the points of Suttles' definition, it was not the case that the entire northwest Bronx was sealing itself off with sharp boundaries and a forbidding reputation. Nevertheless there certainly were neighborhoods in the northwest Bronx that were clearly

demarcated and that had developed reputations for violence against outsiders, especially minorities. Furthermore, the largely symbolic boundary of Fordham Road certainly had a real effect on people's perception of the area as one divided between whites and minorities. Also important to consider was the effect of the murder of the Irish-American boy in the Kingsbridge Heights neighborhood and its immediate result of causing marauding bands of white youths to attack black youths passing through the neighborhood. This too could contribute to the area developing a forbidding reputation.

Summarizing the above, throughout the 1970s the northwest Bronx was a neighborhood in transition and, as such, a neighborhood that was racially and ethnically divided. In the language of Park and Burgess and the Chicago School, the area was undergoing the classic "invasion-succession" process of social change. The Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition was established during this period to help stabilize the changing neighborhood. Its goal was not to stop racial and ethnic transition, but to stop the physical deterioration of the neighborhoods of the northwest Bronx that accompanied the transition process. But accompanying the racial and ethnic change was a kind of

white backlash, a reaction by significant numbers of northwest Bronx residents against the newcomers. They believed that the newcomers were the cause of the deterioration that was beginning to appear in the northwest Bronx. Based on the above it appears that the reaction by white residents against the arriving minorities was sufficiently strong to warrant the use of Suttles' term "defended neighborhood."⁹⁴

We also examined how the Coalition, itself, as an organization, was at least indirectly implicated in the "defense" of the neighborhood, through its apparent acceptance of the establishment of "apartment referral services" that operated in a discriminatory manner and its willingness as an organization to accept "tenant screening" as a legitimate way of stabilizing buildings and neighborhoods.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Perhaps rather than stating categorically whether a neighborhood is defended or not, it is more appropriate to use a continuum, and to evaluate the extent to which a neighborhood is defended or not

⁹⁵ Regarding this last point, of the Coalition's "willingness as an organization to accept "tenant screening" as a legitimate way of stabilizing buildings and neighborhoods," if this was in fact rejected by the Coalition, why am I saying this? The answer is because I believe that if it were not for Jon Moscow and "the other fellow" at the annual meeting, if it were not for their leadership, it would have passed. I believe that the clergy and the organizers were perfectly willing to accept this. Doesn't this implicate the Coalition as an organization actively engaged in "defending" the

Perhaps it should be said of the Coalition that, it was formally non-racist, and informally anti-racist, at least among the leadership. The researcher never heard any racist talk among Coalition personnel, not in conversation and not at public meetings. But, it is also true that the Coalition was not formally anti-racist, meaning that it did not publicly declare itself to be anti-racist, nor publicly state that one of its goals was to combat racism. People, like Ann Devenney (Chairwoman of the Standing Committee on City Services and later President of the Coalition) did publicly make references to the racial and ethnic pluralism of the organization, saying such things as, "we are all in this together, black, white , and brown" or "united we stand, divided we fall, all together", but that is not the same thing as being formally anti-racist. Thus, while in no way being a racist organization, the Coalition never took a strong stand against racism. The Coalition encouraged and supported a multi-racial effort, but it didn't openly attack racism.

But significantly there were racist tendencies in the organization, perhaps a kind of institutional racism, implicit in the policies of the Coalition, at least in

neighborhood, with this defense having racist overtones? I believe so.

the 1970s, when the area was still in transition. This was perhaps rooted in the organization's genuine lack of a minority perspective among the Coalition's leadership; its Board of Directors was dominated by white, Irish-Catholic clergymen. Even its personnel, up until the early 1980s, were overwhelmingly white and Irish-Catholic. While they were clearly people with a social consciousness, guided by the highest moral principles, they also appeared to lack a genuine understanding and sympathy for the plight of poor black and Hispanic people. Put differently, the Coalition's overall strategy, while not racist, or no longer racist, appears to be, or has become class-based.

Why class-based? The Coalition's goal of neighborhood stabilization meant that its strategy was oriented toward an "re-upgrading" of the neighborhood's housing and municipal services, back to the way it had been when the northwest Bronx was a stable working to middle class area of the city. While this strategy put the coalition on a collision course with landlords, brokers, banks, and city agencies that were treating the northwest Bronx as a new ghetto, i.e. the lower end of the market and a lost cause, it also put the Coalition on a collision course with poor minorities who came or drifted to the northwest Bronx as "refugees" from the

south Bronx. They were often on welfare or some other form of public assistance, and in desperate need of housing, and not terribly discriminating with regard to the state of the building or apartment they were renting. They oftentimes embodied values opposite those admired by solidly middle class and prosperous Americans, e.g. apathy, fatalism, alienation, in addition to certain troubling behavioral differences, such as different tastes in music, food, a different language or dialect, different standards of child rearing and noise tolerance, etc, etc, . In addition, some of them were classic "undesirable," problem families that nobody wanted, that would surely bring down the neighborhood. In 1982, when Coalition organizer was asked for his views on the future of the neighborhood, he replied quite optimistically that things were looking good. He said, "... a lot of rehabilitation work was being done ... rents were going up and that will force the poor people out and the number of welfare people in the area will stabilize ... the poor will not be able to live here ... the area will become more middle class ..." When he was asked, "But where will the poor go?," he replied, "That's their problem, I'm only interested in my neighborhood."⁹⁶ Of particular

⁹⁶ Interview with Coalition organizer, Felix Rosario, 2/26/82

significance was that the organizer himself was a Latino man. Since he was a Latino man and by 1982, a significant proportion, if not a majority, of the population in the neighborhood were Latinos and blacks, it cannot be said that the intent of the Coalition's strategy of upgrading the housing stock was racist. It was clear that this man was not equating poor with minority. What he was doing was articulating a class-based strategy, one that involved a weeding-out process. This weeding-out process meant that as the housing stock was upgraded and rents went up, poor people would no longer be able to live there. It is perfectly acceptable in American society to discriminate on the basis of social class. In fact, the exclusion of people on the basis of class is not even viewed as discrimination. This is because it is a well institutionalized, culturally-embedded belief that if you can't pay the price, then you are not entitled to the commodity or whatever you happen to be buying, including living space. In effect, as is true of so many aspects of American society, the market sets the price and those who have the money are free to buy the product and those who do not, can't. Of course, this makes the market the most discriminatory mechanism in American society, but because the basis for discrimination is economic and not social,

based on race, sex, age, or even physical handicap, it is not defined as discrimination. In other words, class is an acceptable basis for the allocation of even such an essential resource as housing; since housing is a commodity in American society, treated like any other commodity, only those who can pay the price are entitled to the product, or "to each according to the size of his or her pocketbook."

Thus, if a neighborhood's housing is upgraded, and rents go up, that will mean that fewer people can now afford the rents, and those who cannot will be forced to look elsewhere. Now, regarding the housing in the northwest Bronx, if rents move from a level that the poor can afford to higher levels, the poor will be locked out of the neighborhood, they would have been "weeded-out," not by breaking the law, as in deliberately discriminating on the basis of race, as a restrictive covenant would do, but instead, and this is somewhat ironic, by making things better, by improving the neighborhood. This would be a kind of gentrification process, not as carried out in Park Slope in Brooklyn, but in a more modest way, a kind of moderate gentrification, not up to upper-middle class levels, but as befits a formerly working to middle class area, gentrification to solidly working class levels.

So, by the 1980s, coalition strategy is apparently not, or perhaps more accurately, is no longer institutionally racist, because it is not geared to keeping out minorities but instead geared to keeping out poor minorities, with the emphasis on poor and not on minorities. There is not much question about racial transition; it has happened. The northwest Bronx is today a predominantly Latino and black neighborhood. The issue is now to stabilize along class lines, to attract stable minorities, and to keep out the poor and those on public assistance. As one of the Coalition organizers told me (one that became its Director): "what we want [now] is for the northwest Bronx to become a stable working class neighborhood"⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Informal conversation with Coalition organizer, Joe Muriana, 2/23/82

Chapter Five

Race and Education

There was a major issue which was directly related to the issue of race, but also tied the issue of race to that of class; this was the issue of education. Class and race were interconnected as social factors because in the northwest Bronx of the 1970s, it appeared that it was not simply a matter of the middle class whites of the Coalition being upset about integrated education, but that their principle concern was quality education. Whites generally believed that quality education could not exist where minorities were numerically dominant. This meant that the Coalition leadership had to walk a tightrope on this issue, arguing that the issue was one of quality education [class], and not race, while fighting for schools that were less integrated, and white dominant.

It is generally recognized that one of the things most highly valued by middle class people is education. Prospective homebuyers and renters, especially those with young children, will want to know about the quality of the local school district or as is true of city dwellers, the neighborhood school, before they buy or rent an apartment. In cities throughout America, including New

York City, whites also want to know about the racial mixture of the school. In short, whether moving in or already a resident, middle class people are greatly concerned about the quality of schools and often its racial mixture.

In 1975-1976, Coalition personnel, concerned as they were about "white flight," became involved in a controversial issue regarding the redistricting of a local high school, John F. Kennedy High School. In 1975, the New York City Central Board of Education announced plans to rezone Bronx high schools, with pressure to rezone based mainly on the state's formal goal of maintaining a racially integrated school system. Kennedy High School, since its opening in 1972, had drawn approximately 40% of its student population from Manhattan and 60% from the Bronx. Those from Manhattan were predominantly minorities, while those from the Bronx (drawn mainly from the northern sections of the Bronx, i.e. the northwest Bronx neighborhoods of Kingsbridge, Kingsbridge Heights, parts of University Heights, and Riverdale) were predominantly white.

In fact, the principle reason why Manhattan was part of the JFK zone was because back in the 1960s when the plans for the high school were drawn up, District 10 in the Bronx was practically all white, and students from

Manhattan were included in the plan so that the new high school would be racially integrated. By the mid 1970s, however, the demographics of the Bronx zone had changed, so that in 1975, the majority of the public school students in District 10 in the Bronx were minority, approximately 70% of them, with only 30% being white. Those figures do not mean that seven of ten District 10 school age children were minority because those figures do not take into account the hundreds of predominantly white school age children that attended parochial, especially Catholic grade schools and high schools. Every parish in the northwest Bronx had a local grade school and the students were predominantly white, especially north of Fordham Road. In addition, there were Catholic boys and girls high schools throughout the Bronx and Manhattan that were attended by significant numbers of northwest Bronx teenagers.

So what was the nature of the Coalition's involvement? Since the JFK zone was going to be changed, what the Coalition wanted was an all District 10 JFK zone. In other words, the Coalition's position was that the high school should be reserved only for District 10 students and that Manhattan should be excluded from the high school.

A local newspaper, The Journal News , reported that the motivation for the Coalition's involvement in this issue was:

... because of recent tuition increases in parochial high schools which has forced more Catholic students to seek admission into the public school system.⁹⁸

At the Board of Education hearings on this issue a staff member from the JFK Consultation Center reported that while the high school expected some parochial school students in the fall of 1975 (those graduating from Catholic grade schools and going to public high school) the school actually got 200 more than it expected. So, there is no question that it was in the Coalition's interest to fight for a JFK zone that would permit more of its school age children within its boundaries to attend JFK high School. Toward this end, at the Coalition's Annual Meeting of 1975, Proposition #15 read as follows:

Whereas, there is a John F. Kennedy High school complex located within our area, with students attending from various parts of the Bronx, and other boroughs, and
Whereas, many students from our local communities are zoned out of the area utilizing this local high school and are forced to commute long distances to attend schools in other areas of the Bronx,

⁹⁸ The Journal News, 1976

Therefore, we resolve to form a standing committee to seek to have the boundaries of the Kennedy High School district modified so that local residents and students can utilize the service of the complex as an educational resource.⁹⁹

With some opposition from minority members from south of Fordham Road, who wanted the zoning to remain as it was and not modified to include more of the white areas north of Fordham Road and west of the present boundary, the proposition passed. [See map of School District 10 on page 174; Arrow #1 represents the boundaries demanded by the Coalition for the JFK district and Arrow #2 represents the already existent boundary of the JFK district.]

Peter Rosenbaum, chairman of the Coalition's Standing Committee on Education, and members of the committee, then prepared to put pressure on the Board of Education to modify the JFK zone to favor a majority of northwest Bronx residents living within the Coalition's boundaries, especially its middle class white residents living north of Fordham Road. As stated above, the Coalition wanted an all Bronx JFK district so that it would draw all its students from District 10, all of which was in the northwest Bronx. This would result in Manhattan students being excluded from JFK. The

⁹⁹ NWBCCC files, 1975

Coalition argued that the reasons for originally including Manhattan, i.e. to achieve a racially integrated high school, no longer existed since the District 10 population was already sufficiently integrated so as to guarantee that JFK would be an integrated high school.

Much to the chagrin of Coalition personnel, however, the Board of Education's initial proposal called for less seats for the Bronx than had been allocated under the old zoning plan. Instead of the Bronx getting 60% of the seats and Manhattan 40%, the new plan called for a 50-50 split between the Bronx and Manhattan. Instead of the new boundary being moved west, to include more Coalition neighborhoods, more white-dominant areas, the Central Board moved the boundary east, excluding even Kingsbridge Heights, an area that had previously been included in the JFK zone. Coalition personnel were irate over this and quickly began to mobilize all the support they could muster, especially religious and political leaders. In the last two hearings held by the Central Board, the Coalition lined up literally scores of witnesses to lobby in support of its proposal for an all Bronx JFK zone.

One question that may arise is why the Central Board would in its initial proposal allocate less seats to the Bronx than previously. After all, District 10 was the fastest growing school district in New York City (with

growth coming mainly from South Bronx "refugees" moving north, almost all of whom were minorities, seeking decent housing) and it was a district with an increasing number of high school age students as compared to Manhattan (Districts 5 and 6 which were the feeder districts to JFK) which was losing population. So why did the Central Board give Manhattan more seats, and take seats from District 10? The answer appears to lie in the goal of the Board's rezoning plan and the underlying reason for the restructuring which was to achieve racial integration in as many high schools as possible. While this was certainly becoming more and more elusive a goal, given the demographic trends in New York city [growing minority population, declining white population], the Board was under pressure from the state to achieve as much integration as possible. Thus, the Board's rationale appears to have been to limit access to JFK by the predominantly white population in District 10, and to "force" the whites in the northwest Bronx to attend the minority-segregated high schools within District 10, e.g. Theodore Roosevelt, or the one nearby, in District 11, Evander Childs, another minority-segregated high school. In this way, the Board would achieve some level of integration for the three high schools: JFK, Theodore

Roosevelt, and Evander Childs (instead of just one high school, JFK).

The hearings on this issue, held first at Walton High School in the heart of the northwest Bronx, and then at JFK High School, were "stormy" ones. The one at Walton High School not only brought out Coalition people but also people from other districts who, though having no direct interest in the redistricting of JFK, were interested in overall Central Board policy regarding redistricting and racial integration. A contingent of approximately 100 white people from District 11 [northeast Bronx] came to the meeting to lobby for a return to the "old idea" of the neighborhood high school, which in the case of their local high school, Christopher Columbus, would guarantee a practically all white high school. Another group from the South Bronx, composed entirely of Latinos and blacks, came to lobby for a completely "open school system," in which students could choose to attend any school in the city that they wanted, no matter where they lived. This, of course, would in their view end the segregated and inferior education that children in the South Bronx were receiving.

The views of the whites from District 11 were diametrically opposite those of the Blacks and Latinos from the South Bronx, or District 9. Not surprisingly,

given the vehemence of people's views on this issue, the two groups actually came to blows at this meeting. Briefly but dramatically, people were pushed and fists were thrown between the whites favoring the neighborhood high school and the minorities favoring an open system. Police quickly intervened and the melee was over in a matter of minutes.

The third group of people present at the Walton High School meeting were those from District 10, most of whom were there to voice the Coalition's position. Ironically, these people were seated in the middle of the auditorium, with District 11 on one side, the right, and District 9 people on the other side, the left. At this meeting, only Coalition people directly addressed the issue of the redistricting of JFK. Peter Rosenbaum the President of the Kingsbridge Heights Neighborhood Association and the Chairman of the Coalition's Standing Committee on Education read a prepared statement, expressing the Coalition's position. It stated:

The people of our northwest Bronx neighborhoods have long been silent about the type and quality of education which is offered to our kids. It is time for us to speak up and fight for our schools. The children of the northwest Bronx do not have any comprehensive high school available to them. In addition they must travel long and awkward distances to attend the schools to which they are arbitrarily assigned by the Board of Education.

This is outrageous! John F. Kennedy was originally promised to all the people of the northwest Bronx, It is essential for the continuing vitality of our neighborhoods that families know that their children can obtain quality education in this city.

We lose more families every as they seek out better educational programs outside of New York City. Such educational opportunities are available in the city, but the Northwest Bronx is presently zoned out of them. The many young families who leave our community further erode the city's urgently needed tax base as well as the stability and vitality of our neighborhoods.

In the light of these fact we demand that the Kennedy zone be extended to include all the children in school District #10. They adopted this stand on Monday March 29th. This would insure a racially balanced school since the present makeup of the district is approximately 70% minority and 30% white. This would allow Kennedy to serve all our northwest Bronx neighborhood children.,

If a priority zone must be set up to alleviate massive overcrowding, we demand that it at least include the area bounded by Burnside Avenue on the South, Webster Avenue on the East, and Gunhill Road extending along VanCortlandt Park South on the North. This area in addition to the present Zone in the Bronx would produce a racially balanced high school without gerrymandering neighborhoods, Any thing less than this would be unacceptable to our neighborhoods and would force us to take further action with the Board of Education. 100

Along with Peter Rosenbaum, the Coalition mobilized other people, all of whom echoed and so reinforced Rosenbaum's and the Coalition's position. Most of these

people were leaders of local community associations, politicians or their representatives, and religious leaders. Prominent among these people were Congressman Bingham (representative), Sister Pat Conner, S. B., President of the Fordham Bedford Community Coalition, Assemblyman Oliver Koppel, Sister _____ of the St. John's School, A. R. Of the FBCC. Father McN. of University Heights, and most curious, a representative of Bishop Ahern, who stated:

... the Catholic Church is for integrated education ... equal education for all ... the neighborhood of the northwest Bronx represents all racial and ethnic groups ... the lack of good education facilities hurts our neighborhoods ... our goal is to keep people in, not keep people out ... I, Bishop Ahern, endorse the position of the NWBCCC ...¹⁰¹

This last endorsement was most curious because of the phrase, "... I, Bishop Ahern, endorse the position of the NWBCCC ... " Since the position of the NWBCCC, as formulated by the Coalition's Education Committee, was in all likelihood approved by the Coalition's Board of Directors, of which the Bishop was an active member, it was somewhat deceptive for the Bishop to publicly endorse a position which he at least indirectly helped formulate, Clearly, the Coalition was trying to show that there was

¹⁰¹ Research notes, 4/1/76

broad support for its position, without indicating that the broad support was Coalition mobilized and orchestrated. In point of fact, the Coalition's argument was a strong one, and there was no direct opposition to it, at least not at the Walton Meeting. Also, important, was that the Coalition's argument did not overtly appeal to racism, though it did contain some subtle references to "white flight," e.g. "We lose more families every year as they seek better educational programs outside of New York City ..." and "The many young families who leave our community further erode the city's urgently needed tax base as well as the stability and vitality of our neighborhoods." A final point in its favor was what might be called "the comparative factor," i.e. compared to the extreme and strident positions of the whites from District 11 and the minorities from District 9, the Coalition's position and the calm presentation of its views made it appear eminently reasonable.

No decision was made by the Central Board following the Walton meeting. Instead a second meeting was called for April 28, to be held at JFK High School itself. This meeting was called because of the objections by Manhattan residents to the possibility of their being squeezed out of JFK if the Central Board accepted the argument of the Coalition and the District 10 School Board. This meeting

directly pitted upper Manhattan residents, almost all black and Latino, against northwest Bronx residents and Coalition membership and personnel, racially mixed but predominantly white. Like the Walton meeting, this one was also stormy, even ugly, to use Peter Rosenbaum's description, as the Coalition and its people were openly accused of racism and racial exclusion by Manhattan residents. The meeting also brought into the fray two New York City political "big-wigs," Manhattan Borough President, Percy Sutton, a well known black politician, and Bronx Borough President Robert "Bobby" Abrams. Percy Sutton was actually present at the meeting, while Abrams sent a representative with a lengthy and well documented statement, thus indicating that both men considered the issue an important one and/or the amount of pressure put on the two politicians by their constituencies. Unlike at the Walton meeting, where most speakers were from the Coalition, here speakers were evenly divided between Manhattan and the Bronx. They repeated the same arguments they had made at Walton High School. The following represent excerpts from speeches made at the JFK meeting touching on the important/salient points made:

BISHOP AHERN: (represented by A.R. , of
the FBCC): ... the NWBCCC is an

organization consisting of sixteen neighborhood associations ... its goal is preservation and stabilization of communities ... [we are] not here to fight or polarize as happened at the last meeting [at Walton High School] ... some say this is a Manhattan versus Bronx fight ... this is not so ... District 10 has had a 130% increase in school population ... [yet] the Board wants rezoning to exclude the Bronx, except for Riverdale and the area west of Broadway [representing only a small part of District 10] ... [a recent newspaper article said that the Bronx is now 50% minority] ... many people are moving into the north Bronx ... what is to become of the city? the Bronx has a unique problem of transportation ... it is difficult for Manhattanites to understand ... east to west transportation is difficult ... valuable energy is lost [in traveling] ... we are all here for the same cause ... what's best for all our children ... not all Bronx students want to go to JFK ... [we] ask for a choice of several schools ... if we are zoned out of JFK there is no choice only one ever-crowded school to another ... our conclusion is [to propose] a workable plan with Manhattan to be presented ... a start to work together for all our children ... they deserve the best in education ...¹⁰²

REPRESENTATIVE OF A LOCAL COMMUNITY PLANNING BOARD IN THE NORTHWEST BRONX:

... with a 50-50 split between the Bronx and Manhattan JFK is overcrowded ... and Manhattan has other schools ... we oppose the limit on the Bronx of 550 seats ... the number of seats [for the Bronx] must be revised upward

LOCAL NORTHWEST BRONX CITY COUNCILMAN STANLEY SIMON:

¹⁰² This and all subsequent quotations are research notes from the meeting at JFK High School, 4/28/76

... [in District 10 schools] children are bursting at the seams while there under-utilized schools in Manhattan ...

[Jeering from Manhattan people in the audience]

A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE FORDHAM-BEDFORD COMMUNITY COALITION:

... I represent the FBCC, a coalition of 12 block associations ... whose goals are neighborhood stabilization and preservation ... we are second class citizens ... in 1974 we were zoned out [of JFK] ... why must we take two buses [to get to Theodore Roosevelt High School or to Evander Childs High School] when one bus is all that is necessary to get to JFK ... if we can't attend JFK the people will move out and the community will be lost ... we are a racially balanced [neighborhood] ...

Mr. _____ District 10. Bronx

... a grave injustice [is being done] by the Board of Education when JFK was planned District 10 was mainly white so students were taken from Districts 5 and 6 in Manhattan ... today District 10 schools are integrated and overcrowded ... additional seats ought to be given to District 10

The longest and probably the most informative testimony was given by the representative of Borough President Robert Abrams, although she was forced to stop her presentation as she approached the end of it because of jeering from Manhattan residents, (though copies of the speech were handed out to the audience). Abrams' statement focused on the same basic points that others had emphasized, though unlike others, he did call for a

compromise, wherein Manhattan would not be excluded from the JFK zone. The following represent the core of his position:

... District 10 has seen a significant increase in population and a rapid increase in high school age young people the City Planning Commission's five year projection ... predicts that the student population in District 10 will rise by more than 3,000 students by 1979. Most of Manhattan, on the other hand, has experienced a decline in high school students, and this trend is predicted to continue into the future. This is particularly true in District 5 which ... is expected to have a decrease in enrollment of more than 3,500 by 1979. An even more significant factor affecting the situation in Manhattan was the opening last year of the new Martin Luther King High School. This beautiful, well equipped facility provides a logical alternative for many current JFK students who actually live closer to King than JFK. All these trends seem to lead to one compelling conclusion : that more Manhattan students can be shifted to M.L.King to make room for the increasing numbers of Bronx students in JFK.

[AT THIS POINT LOUD AND OBVIOUS GRUMBLING IS HEARD FROM THE MANHATTAN SIDE OF THE AUDIENCE]

However, the zoning proposed by the Board of Education does precisely the opposite . Instead of increasing the proportion of Bronx students from the previous 60% level, it actually cuts that figure to 50%. Instead of filling the seats of M.L.King, this proposal deliberately keeps occupancy at less than 1,200 while King was built for nearly 3,700

One particular group of Bronx students will suffer especially severely if this proposed

zoning plan goes through. These are students living south of Fordham Road who attend Junior High Schools 141 and 143

Both of these Junior High Schools are healthy, well integrated schools, and it would be a shame to break up the bonds of friendship and good feeling among those students simply because some artificial dividing line separates them from one another.

At this point in the speech loud jeering erupted from among the Manhattan residents, an almost sarcastic, cynical kind of cat-calling was heard. Manhattan people mimicked Abrams' words aloud, saying, "What a shame to break up bonds of friendship" and " a healthy, well integrated schools." It was clear what their feelings were; they believed Mr. Abrams was being disingenuous with his concerns; they believed that he was not sincere about integrated education; they believed that what the northwest Bronx's residents wanted was less integrated education, and that this would be achieved if their children were excluded from JFK High School.

The final paragraph in Abrams' speech was where the compromise proposal was located:

In short, I believe a revision of this zoning proposal can be achieved which will serve students from both Manhattan and the Bronx well. Many Manhattan students can be zoned into the excellent new facility at M.L. King, while we expand the size of the JFK zone in the Bronx. Overcrowding can be eased; students from the same community and the same Junior High Schools can stay

together; and I believe the education climate can be improved for all.

Manhattan residents, all of whom were black and Latino, clearly viewed much of the testimony of the Coalition and its religious and political allies as a kind of "window dressing" or a phoney facade, covering a rejection by white residents of integrated education. In short, they perceived all of the talk as veiled racism. The following excerpts from Manhattanites' testimony represent their overall view of the Coalition's position.

[I have listened to the] ... cold language of speaker ... the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition is for preservation and stability of communities ... what does that mean? ... let the Bronx people go to the under-utilized schools in Manhattan ... white folks can do that ... if they are genuinely interested in integration ... whites ran to the northwest Bronx ... the area is growing because its one of the last bastions of white people ... one of the last bastion's of Carter's "ethnic purity" ... we have tried to behave ourselves in a rational manner ... but if necessary ... we will take to the streets ...

and

... our concern is qualitative [quality] education ... JFK has a curriculum content second to none ... we have children whose brain power is going to waste

I want us to think about the fact of our talk of equal education ... avoid hate and contempt ... act to poison the minds of youth about other ethnic groups.... sit down and break bread ...

and

... integration is related to power ...
 bus District 10 youngsters to M.L. King
 High School ... white flight doesn't
 bother me ... I look at my check and
 wonder what they are talking about ...
 the city will survive ... [we want]
 equity ...

And representing the people of Manhattan, Borough
 President of Manhattan, Percy Sutton, offered the
 following very conciliatory words [of note was that when
 he entered the auditorium and was spotted, he was given
 an immediate standing ovation by the Manhattanites in the
 audience]:

I represent all the people of Manhattan,
 black and white ... we are a society of
 many people ... its better we learn to
 live with each other ... we must live
 together first in the schools ... but
 because we are a city of poverty we fight
 [over] crumbs ... we get angry with each
 other ... we want the same things ... we
 want the best education possible for our
 children ... I have to work with Bobby
 Abrams ... if you expected me to be
 partisan I won't be ... I'm here to see
 an equitable distribution of seats in JFK

On June 19, 1976 the Education Committee of the
 Coalition met and announced that a decision had been
 reached by the Board of Education regarding the rezoning
 of JFK High School. Instead of adopting the previously
 announced plan involving a 50-50 Bronx-Manhattan division
 of the available seats, the Bronx would get 300 more
 seats than Manhattan. This meant that the previously

existent status quo involving a 60-40 split between the Bronx and Manhattan had been reverted to, the same arrangement that existed before the rezoning meetings began. Put differently, JFK High School was originally set up for a utilization level of 1100 students per year. That utilization level was changed to 1500 students, and 75% of those extra four hundred seats were allocated to District 10 in the Bronx and 25% were allocated to Manhattan. Thus, a compromise had been reached, the Bronx and its principal lobbying organization, the Coalition, did not get an all District 10 JFK zone, nor did it get the western part of the Fordham-Bedford area included in the JFK zone, but it did get a more westerly boundary and the continued access of Kingsbridge Heights (or more properly, a return to the boundary that existed before the Board's first rezoning proposal). In addition, more seats were allocated to the Bronx, thus allowing parochial school graduates from the northwest Bronx easier access to JFK High School.

Manhattan, on the other hand, did not get excluded from the JFK zone. In the face of great political pressure from the Bronx and its residents, it was able to maintain its share of seats from JFK and even add 100 more, albeit less than the number of seats it originally got under the tentative plan first put out by the Central

Board. Thus, though it got less than it had under the first plan, Manhattan still came out with more seats in the high school and continued access to JFK.

At the Coalition's Annual Meeting, held December 4, 1976, six months after the Board of Education decision, Peter Rosenbaum gave his Committee's report to the assembled membership saying:

... our calm and rational manner made an impression on Bertha Gordon [of the Board of Education] ... the result was that 300 additional seats were given to the Bronx ... it was a victory for the Bronx. We hope in the future that more seats will be given [to us in District 10].

In fact, as stated above, what Peter Rosenbaum called a victory was at best a return to the status quo. Yes, the Coalition had succeeded in defeating the Central Board's proposed 50-50 plan for Bronx and Manhattan, but it had failed to convince the Board to create an all Bronx zone for JFK. Furthermore, it had failed to convince the Board to expand the eastern boundary of the JFK zone, to include the Fordham-Bedford and Norwood areas. The reasons for its failure probably lie in the countervailing power of Manhattan residents and perhaps in the Board's suspicions about the Coalition's motives. Ultimately, one of its community associations, Kingsbridge Heights, [Peter Rosenbaum's area of residence] was able to continue within the JFK zone, but

residents of Fordham-Bedford and Norwood had to send their children to one of two segregated high schools, Theodore Roosevelt or Evander Childs. In effect, the Board prevailed over residents of those neighborhoods so that they were forced to send their children to minority dominated schools, both of which had bad reputations.

The problem of race was the "Achilles Heel" of the Coalition and its program, one that united people together, while at the same time divided them. In Weber's formulation of the term, status is the basis for coming together, status groups are communities, sharing a level of social honor or prestige. Status groups form communities on the basis of religion, ethnicity, race, or other shared style of life. Shared status, community ties, culturally based solidarity was the basis for the strength of the Coalition. The core leadership group of the Coalition and most of the neighborhood activists of the Coalition shared a real sense of "we-ness," and the bases for the "we-ness" were multiple: religion, for most of them were Catholic; ethnicity, for most were of Irish descent, and race, most of them were white. The other basis for solidarity were that the very core of the leadership were clergy, i.e. yet another status group, but one that shared ascribed characteristics with the majority of other activists and residents. The final

basis for unity among the core leadership group and the neighborhood activists of the Coalition was that most of them were working to middle class, with the clergy and college educated organizers and neighborhood activists, holding the highest levels of status. The majority of neighborhood people, including activists, were working class to lower middle class people. Thus, on multiple bases, status was the key to understanding the solidarity of the Coalition.

However, status was at the same time the basis for division, both in the Coalition and in the neighborhood. In fact, the divisions in the Coalition simply reflected already existent divisions in the neighborhood. While status was the basis for unity in the Coalition, it was also the basis for divisions within the organization, especially as they existed between the minority dominated associations from south of Fordham Road and the white dominant ones north of Fordham Road. The majority of neighborhood residents south of Fordham Road were not Irish, but Latino and black; many were Catholic, but many were also Protestant, and of the Catholics, many were not comfortable with the Catholic style of the Irish clergy; and finally few of them were white. While there was little or no overt conflict within the organization, it was the case that "grumbling" existed on the part

minorities, e.g. at Annual Meetings, but even more importantly, on issues like of the rezoning of JFK High School and tenant screening, minority participation was virtually non-existent.

The re-zoning of JFK High School brought to the surface the divisive issue of race. While it did not lead to overt hostility within the organization, it did lead to hostility between the Coalition and the minority residents of Manhattan. The dilemma for the Coalition was how to satisfy the desire of its mostly white membership, especially north of Fordham Road, for quality education and at the same time not be racist in the pursuit of that goal, for to be so would not only have been wrong to most of the leadership, but also would alienate the growing minority membership in the organization and of course the neighborhoods of the northwest Bronx. The Coalition knew that one of the keys to holding on to and even increasing its white middle class population was satisfying their desire for quality education. Since quality education in segregated New York City was only possible by sending children to schools dominated by middle class people, and middle class people in the Bronx and Manhattan of the 1970s were mostly white, the Coalition chose to fight for the right of its constituency to attend a mostly middle class

school, that was well integrated, but as everyone knew, was still white dominant. The argument it used in its campaign was not racist, but race was an underlying dynamic, for the whites of the northwest Bronx would not send their children to minority dominant high schools; they would move before they did that.

Of course, it would be a mistake to argue that the Coalition had no choice but to pursue the course it did. Yes, it is true that the campaign to get more seats in JFK was the practical one, perhaps the correct one, perhaps the expedient one. However, it is not the case that it was the only one open to the Coalition. One other possibility would have been to pursue a long and vigorous campaign for quality education in its local grade schools, junior high schools, and high schools. That it did not do this is related to the powerful divisions that existed among northwest Bronx residents, reflecting long standing divisions that continue to plague not only New York City, but the entire country. The next two chapters continue to deal with issue of divisions in the northwest Bronx as well as American society. But, chapter six deals with the divisiveness of class and chapter seven with action that helps to bring class solidarity and even rudimentary class consciousness.

Chapter Six

Coalition Struggle Against New York City in Fiscal Crisis

From the time of its establishment as an organization the Coalition engaged in struggle, or, put simply, in action directed against both public and private sphere institutions, agencies, and individuals. The common thread in all these actions taken by the Coalition was that some individual, agency, or institution was perceived by the Coalition as adversely affecting the interests of the neighborhood. More concretely, some important resource or necessary service delivered to the northwest Bronx, such as housing, sanitation, police protection, or park maintenance, was threatened. In the public sphere the power behind the delivery of services was city government, specifically, New York City. In the private sphere, power was multifocal, but in the economic environment of the 1970s and 1980s, the most important centers of power over neighborhoods were banks and landlords. While the public and private spheres are by definition distinct, from the point of view of the Coalition what they had in common was their control over vital neighborhood resources; whether in the public domain or in the private domain what the municipal government and the local savings bank had in common was

control over vital neighborhood resources and therefore each exercised power over the neighborhoods and communities of the northwest Bronx.

Thus, both the public and the private spheres were in a position to make decisions regarding the allocation of resources to the northwest Bronx; while this of course is a normal state of affairs in American society, it can become problematic when the neighborhood, or at least important segments of it, decide that how those resources are allocated is unfair, unjust, and/or detrimental to the wellbeing of the neighborhood. This is precisely what the Coalition did. The Coalition came into being because people like Paul Brant felt that the Bronx was being treated unfairly with regard to the delivery of services, that the Bronx was "getting shafted." He was able to find many others who felt as he did, i.e. that something had to be done to stop the downhill slide of the Bronx. The others he was able to convince were especially Catholic clergymen who formed the critical core or nucleus of the organization. But, in addition, there were countless other people, typically residents of the neighborhoods of the northwest Bronx, who felt that some important aspect of their lives was threatened and that something had to be done and that something could be done.

When the Coalition and its membership engaged in action against those individuals, agencies, or institutions whose actions or policies were defined as threatening to their interests, an important element of its attack on any of the above involved the perception not only of threat but also of injustice. When the Coalition waged battle with the New York City Department of Parks, it argued that its policies were detrimental to the wellbeing of the neighborhood, but also unfair because the people of the northwest Bronx were good tax-paying citizens who did not deserve such shabby treatment. When the Coalition fought the local savings banks it argued that bank policy was helping to destroy the housing stock of the northwest Bronx and that the banks were being unfair to the people of the neighborhood, for wasn't it these same people who had helped make the banks the prosperous institutions that they had become? So, whether fighting the Parks Department or a local savings bank, the Coalition engaged in actions against powerful institutions that controlled an important resources affecting the lives of the people of the northwest Bronx.

These actions taken by the Coalition and its membership are best understood as class struggle, in the

Marxian sense. As the British historian E.P Thompson writes:

... people find themselves in a society structured in determined ways (crucially, but not exclusively, in productive relations), they experience exploitation ... they identify points of antagonistic interest, they commence to struggle around these issues and in the process of struggling they discover themselves as classes, they come to know this discovery as class consciousness¹⁰⁴

The above quotation certainly applies to the Coalition and its membership, but not without explanation. First, it is a class struggle because it involves an economic issue and the allocation of scarce resources. The actions of the Coalition and its membership represent a clash between the economic interests of the neighborhood and its people versus the interests of capital, either directly as in the case of the banks, or indirectly, as in the case with New York City public agencies. Second, since the conflict takes place in the neighborhood and not the workplace, this is a case where the structure of exploitation is derivative of production relations, but not directly in productive relations. Local Savings Banks' refusal to invest depositors' money in local housing and their decision to invest it at higher returns

¹⁰⁴E.P.Thompson, "Eighteenth-Century Society: Class Struggle Without Class?," Social History (May, 1978), p.149

outside the Bronx involves the banks' gaining at the expense of neighborhood residents, and was thus a clear cut case of exploitation. The City's decision to cut services to the northwest Bronx was the consequence of austerity imposed on the city by the financial community with the cooperation of local and state political leaders. Here again, with austerity, private interests gained at the expense of the citizenry, and so, this too counts as exploitation.¹⁰⁴

And thirdly, the nature of the class consciousness developed by Coalition activists is certainly not of the classic type [if there ever was such a thing] where those who struggle begin to perceive themselves as a proletariat engaged in a struggle to overthrow Capitalism. As will be described below, their class consciousness is of a different order, but is nonetheless a type of class consciousness, one involving a recognition of antagonistic interests, shared interests, and a need to struggle to attain desired goals.

In this chapter, we will examine the nature of the struggle engaged in by the residents of the northwest

¹⁰⁴ Erik Olin Wright. Classes (London: Verso Editions, 1985), pp.64-98. Wright's analysis of exploitation is based heavily on the work of John Roemer, especially, A General Theory of Exploitation and Class. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982)

Bronx. We will focus on the Coalition's campaigns in the public sphere, waged against the New York City Department of Sanitation and the Department of Parks [The Coalition's private sphere campaign, waged against local savings banks, will be examined in the subsequent chapter]. The focus of this description and analysis will be on the nature of the struggle, its symbolic aspects, as well as its action component. Following this, we will analyze the relationship between the struggle and the characteristics of the Coalition as organization, focusing particularly on its leadership core and its Alinsky-like ideology.

At its Annual Meeting, held on December 6, 1975, the coalition membership passed a total of twenty-two resolutions. These resolutions became the working agenda for the Coalition during the subsequent year. While these resolutions dealt with a broad variety of neighborhood issues, most of them focused on the need to improve public sector delivery of services, including police protection, inspection of buildings to ensure delivery of heat and hot water, recognition of tenant groups by housing court, better maintenance of local parks by the New York City Parks Department, increased service by the New York City Sanitation Department, a change in the boundaries of a regional high school to

allow northwest Bronx teenagers to attend, stopping the city from closing a local municipal hospital, and the use of new guidelines by the city's Human Resources Administration for the placement of welfare tenants in northwest Bronx buildings. Of the twenty-two resolutions only one dealt directly with the private sphere, Resolution, #19 on "Redlining and Disinvestment" This issue would not however be confronted head on until the following year. Thus, the Coalition in its first full year of operation directed most of its resources at the public sphere, attempting to improve the delivery of desperately needed services.

The background for this attempt at improving the delivery of services was the New York City fiscal crisis [already discussed in chapter one], a period when New York City found itself near bankruptcy and, as a result, cutting back on its delivery of services due to lack of sufficient revenue and mandatory cuts in its budget. Thus, while the Coalition was pressing for increased delivery of services, the city's government and the heads of its many departments and agencies were "crying poverty."

THE FIRST CAMPAIGN: THE COALITION CITY SERVICES COMMITTEE
VERSUS
THE NEW YORK CITY SANITATION DEPARTMENT

Acting on the resolution passed at its Annual Meeting, the City Services Committee began a campaign directed against the New York City Sanitation Department. The Committee's first public meeting was held on March 2, 1976. A formal, written invitation was extended to the then Commissioner of Sanitation, Vaccarello. The letter read as follows:

Commissioner Vaccarello:

The Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition's City Services committee is composed of representatives of eight Neighborhood Association's(sic) ... We have been trying to improve the sanitation conditions on our streets.

The entire thrust of our Coalition's activities is aimed at the preservation and stabilization of our communities. The City services Committee, the Coalition's Board of Directors, and Bishop Patrick Ahern, Episcopal Vicar of the Bronx, all feel that poor sanitation seriously affects a neighborhood's vitality and morale. The Communities of the northwest Bronx watched recently as collection schedules became non-existent, street sweepers all but disappeared and our streets filled with broken glass and trash. Abandoned cars remain as eyesores for months and stray dogs, cats, and even rats feed from the uncovered and uncollected garbage which waits days and even weeks to be picked up. We expect this situation to be corrected.

The NWBCCC City Services Committee is holding a meeting on Tuesday, March 2, 1976 on the issue of Sanitation. The meeting will be held in the Parish Center at St. Philip Neri (202nd Street and the Grand Concourse) at 8:00 PM. The Committee and our communities hope you will be able to attend to discuss these problems and arrive at some solutions.

Thank You.

Ann Devenney, Chairperson
NWBCCC City Services Committee

Of particular interest in the formal invitation is the "name dropping" to lend clout and an air of legitimacy to the then fledgling organization. Not only are the names of clergymen printed on the letter head, but also among those requesting the Commissioner's presence is "Bishop Patrick Ahern, the Episcopal Vicar of the Bronx." Furthermore, the Committee made it clear that copies were sent to the Mayor of the City of New York, Abraham Beame, and his first deputy mayor, John Zucotti. Of interest also is the site of the meeting, the Parish Center of St. Philip Neri Church, certainly not a neutral location, but one vested with the aura of the Catholic Church. All of these "moves" clearly represent an attempt by the Committee to send a message to the Sanitation Department. They represent cues or significant symbols directed at getting the attention of a bureaucracy which it is hoped will be politically sensitive to a potentially influential organization. At this point the Coalition was an unknown organization, unheard of by municipal agencies or the mayor. The Coalition wanted to impress its invited guests, to get them to come and to get them to do something about the condition of their neighborhood.

On March 2, seventy-five residents representing all of the Coalition community associations attended the meeting. Though Commissioner Vaccarello did not attend the meeting,, he did send his Assistant Commissioner and Director of Community Services Wootie McNeil and Bronx Borough Superintendent Hartnett. The meeting began with an opening statement by Bishop Ahern:

[This meeting is] ... dedicated to the principle that the "squeaky wheel" gets most of the attention ...[this] is a beautiful area of the city ... the country in the city ... [our] problem is the South Bronx ... [it looks like] London after the air raids ... [we have] a magnificent housing stock ...[but] deterioration scares us ... [we have] a problem of lack of cleanliness [we want to] restore the maxim, 'cleanliness is next to godliness ... a clean neighborhood is important for morale ...[it] gets people to stay and raise their children, their children's ... one of our great realities is [the need for] sanitation ... we have gone eleven days without a garbage collection ...[there have been] ... no sweepers ... we ask,beg for, and even clamor for some promises ... a schedule held to ...[There are] more abandoned cars than owned cars ... [we want] promises ... not a one shot deal ... we want to establish a strong voluntary effort up here ... [we will do] anything reasonable, for example, one big spectacular clean up in the spring and then an on-going program ... a collaborative effort by your department ... let's talk turkey ...¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵all quotations from this meeting are from research notes, 1976.

After the Bishop spoke Mrs, Devenney, the Chairperson of the City Services Committee took the floor and talked about how the city "used to be" and finished, saying "... please God it will come back the way it was ... " Upon finishing she introduced Monseigneur Mc Carthy, the President of the Coalition. He reiterated what the Bishop had said, but added:

... we feel ignored ... we want to work with you, we want to do our part .. we want it apparent that the northwest Bronx is alive, well, and kicking.

Mrs. Devenney then turned to Assistant Commissioner McNeil and said: "We will now put the gentleman on the hot seat, but we will be nice about it."

Mr. McNeil began by stating that the Inspection Division of the Sanitation Department had been out by fifty percent due to the fiscal crisis; he then proceeded to discuss a new program of civilian sanitation patrols to monitor illegal and unsanitary health conditions. He requested the names of fifteen to twenty volunteers to sign up for this civilian patrol.

As the meeting proceeded, following a pattern of resident complaints and responses by Mr. McNeil, it became clear that the problem revolved around the residents' basic view that the neighborhood was getting inadequate service and the Sanitation Department's basic response was that it did not have the necessary resources

to do the job. The Sanitation Department's answer to the fiscal crisis cutbacks was to develop a number of community self-help programs to fill the resource gap. At one point Assistant Commissioner McNeil said: " ... we need cooperation from the community ... we were cut from 10,600 to 8,000 men ... and we aren't getting an eleventh hour reprieve [from the state] ... [there is] ... no more money to help the department ... "

But as the dialogue continued, a number of residents became impatient with the Assistant Commissioner's explanation for why the Bronx was getting inadequate service from the Sanitation Department. A man from the audience got up and blurted out :

... this area is the most neglected of the best areas in the city ... people in this area are entitled to as good service as any other and I'm not blaming you people, the problem existed before you ...

Then, Monseigneur Mccarthy, the President of the Coalition got up and with obvious indignation said:

Cooperation, as you said, is necessary, and we will cooperate; we know what has not been done, we want to know what will be done. The (Borough) Superintendent has received complaints ,[yet] he said the problem is not enough complaints ... we want to know what will be done!

The Monseigneur's words obviously had pressed the right buttons because the audience gave him spontaneous

and sustained applause. Following Monseigneur McCarthy, speaker after speaker expressed in emotional, often angry terms the frustration that these neighborhood residents felt in trying to get the New York City Sanitation Department to do its job. One woman from the Kingsbridge Heights area said that the civilian patrol solution would not work, that superintendents would just ignore them. Another man, from Mosholu Park, said he did not believe that putting grievances on index cards would do any good; he felt strongly that nothing would get done. A woman said that the sanitation workers were not doing their jobs, that half of them should be salaried by performance, ".... if you don't perform, you don't get an increase in salary, like businesses and corporations [do]." A man said that this very day at 12:30 PM he saw three sanitation trucks parked at _____ and _____ Avenues; he said he wondered if the men were ".... shooting the breeze or having lunch."

The Assistant Commissioner responded to these complaints, saying that he would: "... act on them item by item ...". He also added that: "... I'm not a miracle worker ... the problems of the city do not just belong on the back of the Sanitation Department ... [they belong] ... on all those of the city." The meeting

concluded with a decision to maintain an on-going dialogue between the Sanitation Department and a Coalition representative. They also agreed to meet again in two weeks to evaluate what progress, if any, had been made with regard to the residents' complaints.

On Monday, March 22, 1976, there was an interim meeting between the City Services Committee and northwest Bronx Sanitation Department administrators. Stemming directly from the previous meeting with Assistant Commissioner McNeil, the purpose of this meeting was to establish contact with local officials and to open the channels of communication between the Coalition and the Sanitation Department. Present at this meeting were four Sanitation Department District Superintendents, thus covering all the neighborhood associations of the Coalition. The City Services Committee was represented by Ann Devenney, the Chairperson, as well as John Riley, the Coalition organizer assigned to the Committee, and representatives from all the affiliated associations of the Coalition.

The meeting was noteworthy not so much for what was accomplished by the session as the general attitude of the four superintendents toward the Committee and the Coalition. This was a lesson in "community organization process" and perhaps could have been entitled," notes on

the nature of struggle against an entrenched bureaucracy." As the meeting began, one of the first things that Superintendent B. wanted to know was, "How big is your organization?" Told about the general structure of the Coalition, he then began to "instruct" the Committee on the value of following proper bureaucratic procedures with regard to registering complaints. He explained that they should not have dealt with the Commissioner's Office but instead with a local neighborhood-based office, i.e. ONS or Office of Neighborhood Services.¹⁰⁶

Members of the Committee were simply not interested in this type of instruction. In fact, the Committee membership was well aware of proper procedure; one of the more common complaints voiced during the meeting with Assistant Commissioner McNeil was that the Sanitation Department did not respond to the residents' complaints. Thus, the Committee had chosen to deal with the more politically sensitive central administration; the Committee chose to deal with the center of power rather

¹⁰⁶ ONS was established during the administration of Mayor Lindsay; it was created to decentralize the delivery of municipal services so as to make municipal government more responsive to the people. ONS offices were supposed to act as "little city halls". Unfortunately, in the view of some observers, instead of making municipal government more responsive to the people, it simply created another layer of bureaucracy, further separating centers of power from the people.

than the periphery. Following proper bureaucratic procedure had led the Committee and the residents of the northwest Bronx down a blind alley, where their complaints got no satisfaction. Going straight to the top may have been violating proper procedure, but it also got results. It appears that "the name dropping" used by the Committee in its letter of invitation to the Commissioner had been right on target in its obvious ploy to impress the powers that be about the clout of the new organization. Based on the behavior of these four superintendents, the Department was indeed impressed by names and further impressed by the potential clout of the size of the Coalition. The lesson in proper procedure was a blatant attempt on the part of normally well insulated bureaucrats to keep the people away from the center of power and to protect their own positions. If they could convince the Committee to follow procedure, then they could protect themselves from an irate Commissioner who might demand that his district supervisors keep the people off his back. These men were shaken because the Commissioner's Office had apparently taken them to task and told them to deal with the Coalition's complaints. Where previously, they could ignore the complaints of the neighborhood's residents,

with the entrance into the picture of a new and local center of power, i.e. the Coalition, they had to listen.

The Committee members dismissed the lesson in proper procedure and quickly moved to a discussion of complaints about filthy streets, inconsistent garbage pick-ups, and the lack of enforcement by Sanitation Marshals of New York City ordinances regarding such things as store owners obligation to keep their sidewalks clean and building superintendents' obligation to place garbage curbside on the day of sanitation pick-ups.

The Sanitation Department officials responded to these complaints by citing budget cuts and a general lack of adequate funding to properly do the job. The Committee would have none of that and asked rather pointedly why areas like the Lower East Side [a well known poverty area in Manhattan] got so much attention and the northwest Bronx so little. Committee members also attacked the integrity of the Sanitation Department's workers, asking how many of the men were "moonlighting" and then sleeping on the job.

While the dialogue did at times get heated, with charges leveled at the department and counter charges thrown back at the Committee [e.g. "we don't dirty the streets, people do!"], they did succeed in reaching a level of agreement with regard to a procedure for future

complaints. John Riley asked, "Is there one person to whom the Northwest Bronx community and Clergy Coalition can give complaints?" One of the officials suggested rather off-handedly, "Givem Tony." and it was decided that Coalition complaints would be channeled through "Tony," the West Bronx Clerk, and if that didn't work, then they should contact Day Commissioner Hartnett.

Toward the end of the meeting a Mr.M., one of the four District Superintendents, described to the Committee the serious problem faced by the Sanitation Department of rapidly deteriorating equipment. A Committee member from Fordham-Bedford then asked, "What can we do to get you new trucks?" Mr. M. answered, "Push the powers that be, like the Mayor ... "

Finally, at the end of the meeting, with the participants having developed a certain rapport [like two boxers after a difficult bout], one official said:

You are at the [high] end of a continuum, from super clean to dirty ... you get more because you are vocal ... others say nothing ... I'm not trying to break you up [say things that might lead to you disbanding] but how about ONS? You have to work with someone ...

Thus, here was one last attempt by the administrators to convince the Committee to follow proper procedure. Ironically, the result of this meeting was to demonstrate to the Committee that going to the top was a far more effective way of getting things done than

following proper procedure. The Committee learned that the best way to shake things up, to light a fire under people, was to go to the center of power. While the operation of bureaucracy is supposed to be based on universalistic principles, even on rationality, clearly there is much about bureaucracy that has little or nothing to do with principles or rationality and much about it that has a lot to do with entrenched power and the use of that power to either get things done or protect one's position.

On Thursday, March 25, at 8 PM, the planned follow-up meeting between Assistant Commissioner McNeil and the City Services Committee took place. Mr. McNeil came alone and the Committee had all of its association representatives present and some additional neighborhood residents, totaling about fifteen people. None of the clergymen were present at this meeting, nor were they present at the previous interim meeting.

The mood of this meeting was friendly, informal, and even relaxed. There was much pre-meeting banter between Committee members and Mr. McNeil. When the small talk ended, the actual meeting began and it dealt with the specific issues regarding the neighborhood and the Sanitation Department. Committee members asked for information on neighborhood clean ups and how to set up a

civilian patrol to monitor the sanitary conditions in the neighborhood, especially the commercial areas. Mr. McNeil supplied the information in a competent and authoritative manner. He emphasized that the only way for the Committee to get things done was to continue to put pressure on city officials. At one point in the meeting, a committee member asked: "Isn't the Bronx losing out [on its fair share of services]? [If this keeps up] ... the people are gonna get violent ..." Mr. McNeil responded, saying:

I'm here in an official capacity ... I advocate people power ... I can't say anything [more] ... the reasons the Bronx doesn't have what it needs ... those around here know why ... I'm trying to give you a message ... I'm saying things to you that I really shouldn't say ... the reason I'm here is because you made a good step ... you got an Assistant Commissioner [to come to your neighborhood] ... you united four districts ... you've gotten [District Superintendent] B. going ... that you couldn't do before [you were organized] ... things happen when people ask ...

Both John Riley and Anne Devenney responded indicating that they had seen results in the area. Mrs. Devenney added, "It took us years to get you ... dealing with local people [we] got no where."

On July 22, 1976 the City Service Committee issued an "Information Sheet" to all the member associations of

the coalition. Regarding the Sanitation Department, the sheet read:

We have been working with Assistant Commissioner McNeil and his Community Service Office. He and his office have been helpful in resolving many problems we have with local Sanitation Officials and assisting volunteer efforts. For complaints such as missed pick-ups, spillage, dirty streets, etc. call the District Office and Borough Office first. If there is no response call McNeil's Office.

The "Information Sheet" then listed the names and telephone numbers of all District Superintendents, the Borough Superintendent, the Assistant Commissioner [McNeil], the local ONS worker, and the Self Help Office.

Thus, in its first campaign, the Coalition's City Services Committee was successful in its struggle against the New York City Department of Sanitation. It had taken action against a public agency whose decision about resource allocation had adversely affected the welfare of northwest Bronx neighborhoods and its residents. Their success involved a kind of standing up and being counted type of action; the Committee became the "squeaky wheel" that got the oil. In an environment of austerity, of scarce and even dwindling resources, the Committee had succeeded in getting the attention of an important service delivery agency of New York City government and

in opening up a permanent line of communication between it and the agency. The Committee had also achieved a victory by democratizing the resource allocation process; by opening up a line of communication between the neighborhood and a city agency, it gave the people of the northwest Bronx greater input into the way in which city resources are allocated to neighborhoods (or at least those that went to the northwest Bronx). They had succeeded in making an important branch of municipal government more responsive to the needs of the people and in that sense more democratic. They did this not by following proper procedure but by ignoring it and going to the center of power. They achieved results not by dealing with the bureaucracy but instead by dealing with elected and/or high level appointed officials.

SECOND CAMPAIGN: CITY SERVICE COMMITTEE VERSUS NEW YORK CITY PARKS DEPARTMENT

The City Service Committee's campaign against the New York City Parks Department began on June 16, 1976, and lasted until September 22, 1976, culminating in a meeting with the then Deputy Mayor of New York City [and boss of the Bronx Democratic Party apparatus] Stanley Friedman. The campaign involved two public meetings with Parks Department officials, including the Commissioner of Parks, two private meetings between the Committee and the Parks Department, and at least five Committee planning

sessions. The Committees's goal in this campaign had been stated in writing at the Coalition's Annual Meeting, held the previous December. The Resolution dealing with the Parks Department read as follows:

We ... resolve that the NWBCCC shall establish and staff a committee representing any agreeable neighborhood associations to attempt to get the NYC Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs Department to respond to the community's request for regular maintenance schedules, emergency repairs for rapidly deteriorating facilities and some long range commitments for future rehabilitation. The committee could provide much needed community input into the Parks Department by pinpointing particular community problems. It could also help to coordinate any local voluntary programs and help create more community concern and interest for the Parks of the Northwest Bronx.¹⁰⁷

On June 16, 1976 the Committee held its first public meeting with representatives of the New York City Parks Department. As was true of the Committees's meetings with the Sanitation Department, the site chosen for the meeting was a parish center, but this time it was the parish center of St. Nicholas of Tolentine Church. Approximately thirty community residents, five Coalition organizers, and two activist Catholic clerics, a nun and a priest, attended the meeting. The Parks Department was represented by an Assistant Parks Commissioner Jethwani,

¹⁰⁷ NWBCCC files, 1975

the Director of Maintenance and Operations, Clyde Jones, and four other lesser officials. The meeting was again chaired by the Chairperson of the City Services Committee, Anne Deveney.

All of the invited officials as well as the chairperson were seated on a large table in the front of the room. Dominating the table, as a clear visual prop, was a four foot tall stalk of weeds (recently pulled from one of the parks in the northwest Bronx). There was a lot of pre-meeting snickering by the audience as they entered the room and laid eyes on the stalk of weeds.

The meeting began with the distribution of a written statement by the Committee detailing the position of the Coalition. The statement read as follows:

These demands are presented on behalf of the residents of the Northwest Bronx by our committee which represents 8 neighborhood associations. Our purpose is quite simple: Save Our Parks. Our groups have attended meeting after meeting and have had enough. The present policies of deterioration must be thrown out. We want firm written agreements that the problems presented today will be acted upon. We cannot and will not take no for an answer. We will not accept budget cuts as a blanket excuse.

Immediately following the above statement, there was a list of demands. The demands were as follows:

- 1) We want schedules of various park services
...
- 2) We want to know exactly what kind of support we will receive from Parks for clean ups.

- 3) We want dates established when Parks officials and community residents can tour local parks to pinpoint problems.
- 4) We want Action Now on the specific complaints to be presented today by the individual local groups on parks in their neighborhoods.
- 5) We want the Parks Department to intercede with the Police Department to obtain a special effort to improve Enforcement of the law in our parks.
- 6) We want our Proportional Share of All Parks Dept. manpower and equipment for the Northwest Bronx.
- 7) We want a firm commitment that supervisory staff will be instructed to increase productivity in the parks and to act on community complaints

The final paragraph of the statement was short but very important, stating:

It is our intention to follow-up on all these agreements to see that they are faithfully carried out and that the Parks and Recreational facilities of the Northwest Bronx are saved.

After each of the demands was written:

AGREED? Yes _____ NO _____ 108

Mrs. Devenney opened the meeting with a statement.

Her words summed up the Committee's perspective :

... The Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition ... [represents] approximately 800,000 people ... serving as an umbrella organization ... Individually we can do nothing so we play the numbers game or else City Hall does nothing ... united we stand, divided we fall ... we want commitments, not words ...

we know of the pressures downtown ...[but] we want a slice of the pie.¹⁰⁹

Following Mrs. Devenney's statement Assistant Commissioner Jethwani took the floor and began by asserting his agreement with the Chairperson's analysis of the situation regarding city government:

[Mrs. Devenney is] ... right about downtown [City Hall] ... [they do play] ... the numbers game ...[and] ... all they say is cut Washington is not helping ... all we do is listen to the Emergency Financial Control Board ...[while] ... the public should be our only bosses ...

At that point, Mr. Jethwani was interrupted by a member of the Committee and told quite pointedly that the community did not want to hear of budget cuts and that it would not accept the cuts as an excuse for deteriorating parks, The motion was that Mr. Jethwani move immediately to the first demand.

The motion was passed almost unanimously by the people in attendance and the next hour or so consisted of often heated exchanges between Parks Department officials and the residents in attendance. Neighborhood leaders representing each of the eight associations of the Coalition voiced specific complaints regarding the lack of adequate maintenance and upkeep of their local parks and recreation areas. Though told that the community did

¹⁰⁹ This quotation and all subsequent ones in this section are research from the same meeting, 6/16/76

not want to hear of budget cuts, the Parks Department officials constantly fell back on the cuts as the reason for their inability to maintain the parks in proper condition. The general attitude of the people in attendance was anger and frustration, coupled with an obvious willingness to cooperate in any way possible to help in getting the parks cleaned up. Three statements by the residents symbolically capture the prevailing mood

The first was by a woman from the immediate area of University Heights who said:

The community has had two recent clean-ups... we will do our part as volunteers but we want your help.

A local priest made a rather impassioned statement, saying:

we will supervise your workers ... give us your work schedules; its our city, our money, our parks ... we will work with you ...

His words were followed by loud and spontaneous applause . His emotional statement clearly echoed the sentiments of the other residents. Finally, toward the close of the meeting, a neatly dressed middle-aged woman, obviously frustrated and upset, stood up and said:

We talk about the city as if it were a god ... people have to take control .. we're going to have a second American Revolution and I'm no revolutionary ... the whole city is going bad ... we're all acting like Paul Revere is saying 'the

British are coming' and everyone ignores him.

In the face of this strong outpouring of neighborhood anger and frustration, Mr. Jethwani over and over again tried to convince the people that the problem was that his staff had been cut, cut from a high of 6,000 employees to 3,000. In the end, Mr. Jethwani acceded to all the demands except number six, which called for a "... proportional share of all Parks Department manpower and equipment for the northwest Bronx". He said that this was not possible because of the different needs of each borough. At the request of the Committee, the Assistant Commissioner signed a written statement agreeing to meet the Committee's demands. When asked by Mrs. Deveney , "... can we depend on your commitment ...?" Mr. Jethwani replied, "If I don't [meet your demands], you can get me fired ..."

In his book, Primitive Rebels, Eric Hobsbawm describes and analyzes the struggle of people against domination and exploitation. The people he writes about are aware of their own suffering but they lack the conceptual tools to properly analyze their situation. Instead of interpreting in political or even general systemic terms, they concretize; they see events as related to the policies of an individual or simply

corruption.¹¹⁰ What is significant though is that in their own way they do indeed oppose attempts to inflict harm on them; they are not passive in the face of oppression or exploitation. To some extent the residents of the northwest Bronx struggle like Hobsbawm's "primitive rebels." The residents who gathered in the St. Nicholas of Tolentine parish center were angry and frustrated at what was happening to the parks in their neighborhoods. They were painfully aware of the terrible conditions that existed in their children's play areas, in the lack of adequate maintenance of parks and recreational facilities, and in the almost complete lack of adequate response by the city to what was occurring. While they do not use terms like "exploitation," "oppression," "alienation," or "bureaucratic control," they do talk in symbolic terms about similar processes. People saying things like "Its our city, our money, our parks ..." and "We talk about the city as if it were a god ... people have to take control ... " clearly mean that they are aware of the control being exercised over them by outside forces, even alien forces. They are aware of the antagonistic interests that make decisions affecting their lives based on different criteria than they would use. Even the Assistant Commissioner of Parks

¹¹⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels (New York: Norton, 1955)

acknowledges that all the city does is "listen to the Emergency Financial Control Board ", which operates on the basis of a bottom line mentality rather than one that has the needs of the people uppermost in mind.

Sociologists have often portrayed the working classes as fatalistic, and generally accepting of governmental and corporate authority; here we see working class people struggling against governmental bureaucratic authority, against a government that appears unresponsive to their needs, against a government that "listens to the Emergency Financial Control Board" more than it listens to its people. It's no wonder that these "primitive rebels" begin to talk about "revolution" when they are the furthest things from revolutionaries.¹¹¹

On June 28 the Committee met to discuss whether there was any change in the condition of the parks in each of the Coalition association neighborhoods. The Committee members were in agreement that little or nothing had been done by the Parks Department in the two weeks since the meeting with Assistant Parks Commissioner Jethwani. The Committee decided that their next move would be an unannounced, "surprise" visit to the headquarters of the Parks Department. Located in New York

¹¹¹ More recent sociological literature has corrected this glaring error, e.g. the work of people like Susser, Katznelson, DiFazio, Kornblum, and Castells.

City's famous Central Park, it was called "The Arsenal." The Committee members said that they would try to get as many people as possible to go and that they would notify local elected officials of their plans. Toward the close of the meeting, Ann Devenney was musing aloud about the condition of the parks and said, "... its our fault, we let it happen ...[now] ... lets let the 'high ' boys know what we are doing ... the politicians need our votes ... we are consumers now, and this is consumers' action." She went on to tell a story about her grandson who asked her if she was going to the Democratic Convention [which was being held in New York City in 1976]. She said that she told him she was going but "... I may not go inside but outside I'm thinking of picketing ... with a sign for the out-of-staters [to see] ...

"I'm From The Bronx, No One Knows Us" ... won't that embarrass the city democrats!"

Mrs. Devenney had a unique way of capturing the ethos of the Committee and its membership. This was a sixty year old, working class grandmother, long time resident of the northwest Bronx, devout Catholic, of Irish-American heritage, who, to quote one observer, "... had already been uprooted from one apartment by Robert Moses and his George Washington Bridge [ramp], and had no

intention of being dislodged again because her neighborhood was being allowed to fall apart."¹¹² Most noteworthy was the way in which she understood the struggle of the Committee against the Parks Department. Using the symbols of what might be called "received political culture" she saw the struggle as "consumers' action." Instead of seeing the Committee as a working class, as a proletariat, or even an oppressed minority, [the committee was mixed racially, but mainly white working class] Mrs. Devenney described the struggle in politically acceptable terminology, the terminology of a consumer society. She then echoed the classic dictum of laissez-faire capitalism; while she doesn't say "caveat emptor," she does say, "Its our fault, we let it happen." While her words and actions all indicate struggle, struggle against opposing forces and antagonistic interests, her language is that of the market place.

But, the relationship between the government and its people is not supposed to be like a market relation, with the "buyer being weary", nor for that matter is it supposed to involve antagonistic interests, for in a democracy government is by the people and for the people. Mrs. Devenney's reconciliation of the contradiction

¹¹² Jonnes, loc.cit.p,355

between her ideas about democracy and the reality that surrounds her of an unresponsive government is to subtly modify the definition of democracy from a form of government that represents the interests of the people to one that operates through a market system in which the people become consumers in a marketplace and presumably where market power reigns supreme. If you get a raw deal, its your own fault. While Mrs. Devenney's analysis of the situation is quite appropriate in terms of contemporary political culture, it is certainly a departure from the democratic ideal of government with the consent of the governed, even government by the people, and not the interests of the Emergency Financial Control Board. Mrs. Devenney's final anecdote on the Democratic Convention is indeed ironic, in that she seems to feel that her place is more on the outside than on the inside; she feels that as a Bronxite she is ignored. While Mrs. Devenney is indeed a Bronxite, is it possible that Bronxites exist all over the land but what they lack is an understanding that being a Bronxite is not related to geography but instead to a state of mind and a place in society?

On the morning of July 1, ten Committee members went to Parks Department headquarters to speak to Commissioner Lang. Arriving at 9:30 AM Mrs. Devenney told the Commissioner's secretary that they wanted to

speak to Mr. Lang. Asked if the group had an appointment, Mrs. Devenney replied that they did not. The secretary then responded that they could not see the Commissioner without an appointment and that they could not just walk in "en masse" as they had done. Mrs. Devenney told her that the Committee had requested such a meeting several times and had not received any response. As the exchange between the Committee members and the secretary became somewhat heated the secretary suggested that the group "was unruly". Mrs. Devenney retorted saying, "... we are responsible citizens and taxpayers and we have a right to see our commissioner" The secretary then asked the group to wait outside in the hallway. At approximately 10:15 AM Commissioner Lang walked in and members of the Committee politely asked if they could have five minutes with him. Taking their letter and the list of complaints, Mr. Lang said that he would see if he could arrange a few minutes with them. At 10:40 AM after having waited for an hour and ten minutes, the Committee entered his office and the meeting with Commissioner Lang began.

The following represents an abbreviated summary of the meeting, touching on the principal issues and most important dialogue of the session. Present at the meeting were members of the Committee, Commissioner Lang,

Assistant Commissioner Jethwani, Director of Operations and Maintenance Jones, and Bronx Parks Manager Glavey:

Com.Lang. : I walked through the Bronx a few weeks ago; its true, you're not getting your fair share.

Di. Jones: The northwest Bronx is getting shafted, but the facts are that we are trying to do something that has not been done in years; we are trying to run this department with one-half the manpower of last summer. Last July we had 12,400 men; today we have 6,700. Last year we had \$3,700,000, now we have \$400,000. The city's fiscal crisis has reduced all its services, but the Parks Department is low man on the totem pole. As far as better service to the northwest Bronx this summer, there really cannot be any compromise because the beaches come first, they have to have lifeguards.

C.M.[Committee Member]: How come there is no broken glass around

The Arsenal? Why can't the northwest Bronx be that way?

Com. Lang: I can't position people there. I know your complaints are legitimate; I have people from other neighborhoods coming in with the same complaints.

Right now we are doing our best to "spread the scarcity". This productivity issue is a lot of bull. If there is a problem with the men, its that they've been affected by the layoffs. They feel very apprehensive.

C.M. The problem is that government workers can't be fired, even when they are unproductive. If you have no manpower, can productivity be increased?

Com.Lang There is one solution; we need more volunteers. Do you know that there have been three threats against my life because of these layoffs?

C.M. If you have such a serious financial problem, why is it that your officials came to the last

meeting in chauffeur driven limousines? Why is money spent on this?

getting We are paying for services and we are not getting them.

In April and May of this year when the beaches were not open we still had no services. We are not talking about a manpower shortage, we have never had a proportional share. And to top it off, you people go around in chauffeured limousines.

At the June 16 meeting Parks officials agreed to meet our demands but nothing has yet been done; all we are asking is that work crews come around periodically; we have a very active community with a lot of volunteers; we even patrol our own streets at night. We will cooperate with your department but we want to know what you will do about specific complaints

Com. Lang. I cannot give any assurance that any of these specific demands will be met. All I can do is cooperate with your volunteer groups.

C.M. We are one of the few taxpaying areas left in the Bronx; we deserve better treatment.

Com.Lang. I will do this; I will review this with Mr. Glavey and I will work with Mrs. Devenney and Mr. Glavey.

Meeting Ends at 11:35 AM¹¹³

In a press release issued by the Committee after the meeting, Committee member Harvey Simon was quoted as saying: "The Commissioner told us he is working for the survival of our parks. What he's doing is not working, because they are not surviving." The last paragraph of the press release read: "The Committee plans to continue to pressure the Department to do the job it is being paid

to do and will also contact elected officials concerning their responsibility to the people and parks of the Northwest Bronx."

On July 22, approximately three weeks after the meeting with Commissioner Lang, the City Services committee met to discuss whether there was any visible change in the condition of northwest Bronx parks and recreation areas. During the time before the actual meeting began there was much informal conversation among the Committee members as they exchanged accounts of their recent experiences with the Parks Department. The representative from Kingsbridge Heights, Pat B. gave the following account of her experience:

Last Saturday we [The Kingsbridge Heights Neighborhood Association] had a community clean-up of Fort Four Park; all we got from the Parks Department was broken promises. A few weeks ago when we told them about our project they promised us a truck, twenty-five rakes, and fifty pounds of grass seed. A week later they called and said they could only give us the trucks, five rakes, and five pounds of grass seed. Then last week they called again saying they could not spare a truck. The day before the clean-up we had not heard a thing from them so we sent a telegram to Lang. On the day of the clean-up, four Parks people showed up, four men to supervise five rakes! They did nothing else, they just hung around. And, Mr. Pinkus, the supervisor, came over to me and said, "Only twenty-five people for the clean-up? I thought you would have a lot more." That is all he could say. Imagine, they

don't help us at all and they have the nerve to criticize!¹¹⁴

Committee members were upset about Pat's account. Nevertheless, it seemed to further confirm their beliefs about the Parks Department. Joe Muriano, a Coalition organizer from the Kingsbridge Heights area, also had a "horror story". He said that the other day he saw a Parks Department truck parked by Marian and Mosholu Parkway and the three men in the truck were all sleeping. To Committee members, these accounts did not represent aberrations; the fact that there were so many such stories only proved to Committee members that the Parks Department was unproductive and basically inept.

The formal meeting began with eleven members in attendance, including three Coalition organizers, John Riley, Joe Muriano, and Carlos _____. The focus of the meeting was on what to do next. They agreed that they needed more publicity, over and above local newspapers like the Bronx Press Review and the Journal News [two low circulation county or neighborhood newspapers, with the former circulating in Bronx county and the later only in the Riverdale and Kingsbridge areas]. They felt that they had to do something to dramatize the problem. People were

¹¹⁴ This and subsequent quotations from this meeting are based on research, 7/22/76

dissatisfied with Commissioner's response to their complaints. Everyone agreed that Lang had, in effect, told them that either they do voluntary clean-ups or they get nothing. A group of Hispanic young men from the South Fordham Organization [in the southern part of the Coalition's area, bordering on the South Bronx], said that they had actually "taken over" the care and maintenance of their local park. They said that what they do now is "... bring brooms to them[the park employees] and tell them to clean."

Like the previous "horror" stories, this one further indicated to the Committee that something out of the ordinary had to be done. Carlos, the organizer from the South Fordham neighborhood, said that he had a group forty volunteers cleaning the park. He said, "... why should park people be paid [if they're not doing the work] ; these kids could earn \$50 a week [and] ... at least they are working." John Riley agreed and added that "... we've had thirty clean-ups in the area and thousands of kids ... [could be earning money]." Ann Deveney suggested that the Committee meet with Borough President Abrams to discuss their ideas. The Committee members disagreed, feeling that he has nothing to do with the problem, nor can he be of any help. The Committee then decided to make a list of the number of volunteers from

each of the member associations who have helped clean-up local parks. The intent was to publicize through a press release that the work in local parks was being done by community groups, and not by the Parks Department. After compiling the list John Riley asked the Committee: "Has any group gotten any help from Parks?" The spontaneous and unanimous answer was, "No."

John Riley then suggested that a press release read: "Phase Out Parks Department: Use Money for Better Purposes." Agreeing on Riley's proposal for a press release, Pat Burns added : "If we are going to fire the Parks Department, we have to do something dramatic because other boroughs have the same problem".

Jumping quickly on Pat's statement, Mrs. McG. said: "I like that, "Fire the Parks Department" ..." The Committee was at this point visibly excited at the prospect of "Firing the Parks Department". That phrase seemed to be the answer to the "dramatic-something" that they had been groping for. Feeling emotional about the idea, but with some trepidation, Pat B. said, "... this shouldn't be done just by us ... the whole Coalition should be involved." John Riley responded, reminding her that " This is the Coalition ... we represent the Coalition I'll contact Father McCarthy [the President of the Coalition and Chairman of its Board of Directors] and get

his support." Having settled on the theme of their action, the Committee continued to wrestle with a plan of action. Pat suggested that they ask their elected officials not to allot money to the Parks Department. She said that their incompetence was not due to the budget cuts, that this was not a new problem but one that has existed since before the cuts. Mrs. McG. suggested that they meet with a union representative. She argued that since the problem was productivity, why not discuss it with the union itself? Committee members did not feel this was a good tactic. John Riley, somewhat rhetorically asked, "Do you really feel that we can get the unions to change?" Abandoning Mrs. McG.'s suggestion, Mrs. Devenney and John Riley agreed that given the limited resources of the Parks Department the problem was the proper allocation of money, for example less for recreation and more for clean-ups. Summing up, Ann Devenney asked, "What is the specific thing John should do ... we have the press release, "Fire Them" ... Issue pink slips ... what else?"

Mrs. Mc G. said, "If we can get rid of the Methadone center, we can do this." Another committee member said, "Yes, in unity there is strength!" Summing up, Ann Devenney said, "Our young children have never seen a clean park; they think its supposed to have broken bottles and

filth. None of the comfort stations [washrooms] work women have to go to bars for their children to go to the bathroom."

The Committee met again on July 27 to further discuss their plans. Like the previous meeting, it was held at the St. Philip Neri Parish Center. Approximately fifteen people attended the meeting. The discussion centered on the specifics of a public meeting in which the Committee would "Fire the Parks Department". As to the focus of the meeting, three basic points were discussed: 1) that nothing was done before the budget crisis and nothing has been done since, 2) that they were going to "fire" the Parks Department and meet with politicians to discuss alternate ways of caring for the parks, and 3) that the crucial issue was maintenance. They agreed to meet one more time before the big public meeting.

On August 12, the Committee met one last time before the public meeting. Sixteen Committee members attended. A copy of the public meeting's agenda was handed out as well as the letter sent to invited guests, i.e. politicians. The meeting was informal and relaxed. There was little of the give and take of previous sessions. This was due to the fact that the strategy had already been decided. The purpose of the meeting was to

inform Committee members about the general format of the public meeting. After the information was given the session became quite "chatty". One woman reiterated a previously voiced theme, saying "... its a shame that the kids today didn't have the benefit of clean parks ... they can't even go to French Charlies [a neighborhood baseball field] because of the muggers ..." Mrs. Devenney then commented that, "... the clock swings [back and forth] ... we want our fair share ... this part of the Bronx has been neglected ... the whole Bronx [has been neglected]."

Two days before the public meeting it was decided that an attempt would be made to convince Commissioner Lang to attend the meeting. It seems that he had called and informed the Committee that he could not attend. Though the Committee had not previously counted on his attendance, a change of plans occurred. John Riley called up Committee members and asked them to call Commissioner Lang and complain that he was not going to attend. Thus a kind of neighborhood telephone fan-out was organized in which a large number of neighborhood residents called the Commissioner's office with the same complaint. The pressure tactic worked, for the next day the Commissioner informed the Committee that he would indeed attend the public meeting.

On the night of August 17, 1976 approximately 300 neighborhood residents showed up for the public meeting with Commissioner Lang. The St. Philip Neri Parish Center was divided into three sections: a dais in the front for invited guests, a middle section for each of the Coalition association's local park committees, seated on ten different tables, one for each of the parks in the northwest Bronx, and a large section, using most of the hall, for the neighborhood residents. The dais and the middle sections were bedecked with signs and placards. Above the dais were signs identifying the eight associations of the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition . On each of the tables in the middle section was a sign identifying the local park: Williamsbridge Oval, Fort four, Cedar Park, Mosholu Park, Aqueduct Park, Poe and St. James Parks, Echo Park, Belmont Park, Rose Hill Park, and Harris Field. In addition there were four large placards pasted on columns in the forward area of the hall, visible for all to see, reading:

COMMISSIONER: WHEN DO WE GET OUT FAIR SHARE?

SAVE OUR PARKS

REMEMBER THE BRONX? WE'RE STILL HERE!

WE PAY THE TAXES, WE WANT SERVICES!

To inform residents about the issues involved in the

public meeting, an open letter was given to every resident as he/she entered. The letter read as follows:

The issue is very clear. Our Parks are a mess. We have spoken to Parks Department officials for months and years and still our parks get worse. It's not a new problem and it's not due to "budget cuts." Our parks and recreational facilities have been going steadily downhill and now Parks has a wonderful excuse for not doing the job it hasn't done for years; we have no men, we have no equipment, we have no money.

Well, there is something left. The problem is it is not being used effectively. Even when local groups asked for support for all volunteer cleanups and summer youth programs to work in the parks we were given a run around and turned away. We are now doing more in the Parks than the people WE PAY to maintain them. WE are sweeping, raking and painting and we are doing it all on our own.

We have given the Commissioner lists of specific complaints to act on. We want our fair share of manpower and equipment. We need mechanics to keep equipment moving and "spruce-up" contracts to make routine repairs. Neighborhood Parks, not pet projects and special events must be top priority. We DEMAND that Parks make an honest effort to do its job.

The Committee, representing 8 Neighborhood Associations and over a dozen parks, has asked for these things time and time again. The response from Parks has been we can't do it. Its time to hold them accountable. If they can't do their job then there is no reason to go on paying them!

Feel free to speak out about your park tonight. We hope you will continue to support our efforts to same pour parks and neighborhoods.¹¹⁵

Besides neighborhood residents, a large number of Coalition community organizers and other paid staff were present, including the Coalition's Executive Director, Jim Mitchell. A Channel 2 news team was also

¹¹⁵ NWBCCC files, 8/17/76

conspicuously present, filming and interviewing. Right before the meeting was about to begin Monseigneur Shannon, Pastor of St. Philip Neri Church [and a cleric who once had the honor of leading the prayer for the opening of a session of the United States Congress] passed through and informally wished the residents of the neighborhood and staff of the Coalition "good luck."

As had become the custom, the City Services Chairperson, Ann Devenney, opened the meeting, saying:

... glad to see so many people interested in our parks ...[this is the] ... Bicentennial Year ... united we stand, divided we fall ...[there are] little children ...[who have]...never seen a clean park, a park not vandalized .. a clean sand box ... [they] look like glass boxes... [we are] grateful to Commissioner Lang [and] to members of the City administration [who have] ... come to us[tonight] ... [I am]... also glad to see the clean-ups of parks by the kids ... as tax payers of New York City we ride dirty, filthy subways ... [we] at least want clean parks ... I bring my grandchildren to the parks, but they are a mess ... all of them are a mess, Echo, Mosholu, ... all of them.

Now again [in this Bicentennial Year] history repeats itself ...[we are] united: black, white, and Hispanic ... together City Hall will take notice when a bunch of us get together ... no longer do we go to the mountain, the mountain comes to us! [Applause]

Budget cuts? I know about it ... my dollar has shrunk ... but [there were no] budget cuts five years ago [when we were not getting attention either] ... Central Park gets programs ... we get nothing ... [I am] grateful to all the people for coming out ... 116

116 This quotation and subsequent ones in this section are from research notes from the meeting of 8/17/76

Mrs. Devenney then acknowledged the presence or absence of invited local politicians. Seven local New York City Councilmen and State representatives were present. Notably absent were two invited Bronx Congressmen, Biaggi and Bingham. Also absent was Bronx Borough President Abrams. Noting especially Abrams' absence, Mrs. Devenney said, "I feel bad about that." The audience echoed her sentiments by booing.

Mrs. Devenney then gave the floor to the representatives from each of the local park committees. One by one they gave brief oral reports on the condition of their respective parks and/or their experiences with the Parks Department. Most of the accounts were much like those heard at the City Service Committee meetings. But, some were particularly notable, such as the following:

Harris Field: ... the field presents a great opportunity for learning, for example a biology class in biodegradable objects such as the deer carcass we found on the field ... or perhaps a course in auto mechanics since the perimeter of the field is littered with old tires and other auto parts ... with budget cuts or not there has been no change in the field for the past nine years. [applause]

St. James Park: ... the counselors [from a recreation program] have cleared St. James Park ... a boy fell and cut himself and the Parks Department had no band-aids ... volunteers are raking ... doing something ... getting cooperation [from neighborhood people] ... what is the problem? ... garbage cans are full and the parkees don't pick them up ... we got

aggravated and poured [dumped] them in front of the parks station ... if Mohammed doesn't go to the mountain, garbage will go to the parkees! [Applause] ... if we don't get this cancer we will become a slum ... look at the tennis courts, people pay thirty dollars a year to use them [and look what a mess they are in] ... we have to unite ... people are scarred to walk in the park ... we go around with the kids ... we offer lemonade to the elderly ... we need the community to take care of each other ... we need a park gang ... vigilantes ... we don't want racism ... [when we told people to help keep the park clean] ... people said 'go over to the "Spics" over there", or " Go over to the Whites" ... No, we have to work together ... the Parks Department said it would help, instead they burn the cans of garbage ... What do we do? We are all for the same cause ... Why can't people who are paid to work do it? [Applause]

After the park representatives had spoken, Mrs. Devenney asked Commissioner Lang to respond. He began by congratulating the group for the large turn-out. He then said:

... a black group in Bedford-Stuyvesant[Brooklyn] recently accused me of favoring the Bronx ... I used to live on Andrews Avenue[in University Heights] ... I've been in the Parks Department for seven and a half months ...[its been] a shattering experience ... Mayor Beame called me in ... from the Sanitation Department ... I'm not a politician, I'm not running for anything ... I'm learning something everyday and here also ... many of your accusations are true ...[but] ... I've got to give you numbers ... our capital budget was twenty-four million dollars; its now five million dollars .. the Parks Department used to double its strength every summer ... last year in the summer of 1975 we had approximately 12,600 men in the field, now we have 6,000 ... last year my predecessor had [for the spring and summer months] five million dollars, I have spent five-hundred thousand

dollars ... my predictions [as to what would happen to the parks with the budget cuts] were correct about the problem... my priority was to the beaches and pools ... so the interior parks suffered ... when Deputy Commissioner Davidson ... talked of what to close, I said none of them ... I told the Mayor that this has to be the year of volunteers ... like the example of Mr. Martinez from Belmont Park ... the average age of my employees is fifty-four years old ...

At that point someone from the audience yelled out, "They act like it!" Others joined in and jeered at the Commissioner. When the shouting subsided the Commissioner continued:

... we appealed for volunteers ... and somehow we got them ... thanks to you. I took my brightest guy from my office and sent him to the Bronx, Mr. Glavey; I have to hustle for money ... I went to Albany ...for money I took them [representatives from state government] to Crotona Park ... I got two million dollars [to fix it up] ... Aqueduct Park will get money ... the Feds are now responding to the problem ... [They had to be shown] that a handball court in the South Bronx is as important as a "portage " trail in Michigan ...

At that point the Commissioner was again interrupted. One of the City Services Committee's members, Harvey Simon, said, " Why can't the parkees take up a broom and sweep the god-damned parks?" A woman said: "I want to know their [park employees] duties." Another said, " Give the money back to the communities ... let us do it!" At that point many in the audience began to shout at the Commissioner. "What are their duties?" was shouted again. Lang responded, "If the

parkees didn't clean, we would be neck deep in garbage." Someone countered with, "We are neck deep in garbage!" As the jeering and shouting became louder and louder, Ann Devenney asked the audience to allow the Commissioner to finish and the people cooperated. The Commissioner continued:

... the city should be happy, even with your indignation, [I won't give you a con job] ... we are trying to spend money as best as we can ... there are one and a half million people in the Bronx and only one hundred and ninety-three men ...

As he finished, Ann Devenney called on Pat Burns, of the City Services Committee, to read a written statement. As she spoke , the following statement was distributed to the audience

NOTICE OF TERMINATION

The City Services Committee of the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, as residents and representatives of local neighborhoods, feels the Parks Department should be terminated.

We have dealt with them as a unified committee this summer and as individual groups for several years and find their lack of response to be nearly total. We are now cleaning the parks, We are now purchasing equipment and WE, as taxpayers, feel the Parks Department is not doing the job.

The committee urges our City Council members and Borough President to vote down any future Parks Department budget allocations until we are assured that the money spent is being used to maintain our parks. We call on our elected officials to support our efforts to obtain an innovative and responsive Parks Department for

the City of New York and help us to preserve our Parks and Neighborhoods.

After the statement was read, Ann Devenney and other members of the Committee met informally with the elected officials and got a verbal promise of cooperation for their effort to "straighten out" the Parks Department.

On August 25th, eight days after the big public meeting, the Committee held a follow-up session at Our Lady of Refuge parish center. Only seven Committee members attended the session. Both Ann Devenney and John Riley were present.

Ann Devenney said she saw improvement in her neighborhood park; Pat Burns said there had been no change. In fact, she added, during the past week a water fountain had broken and it took the Parks Department four days to send someone just to turn it off. The only improvement she noticed was that two park benches at Sedgewick Avenue and Kingsbridge Road were repaired. Someone else mentioned that he had seen two parkers cleaning Harris Field, something which he had never seen before.

John Riley then announced that he had spoken to Councilwoman Ryan, Assemblyman Koppel, and an aide to Borough President Abrams regarding the possibility of meeting with Deputy Mayor Friedman. He said all of them promised to help in arranging such a meeting. John

Riley also interjected that he thought that the Coalition was developing a reputation in view of the fact that the Committee was able to convince Commissioner Lang to come to the last meeting. He also said that the feeling was that going to City Hall was the next step, especially since they had "fired" the Parks Department. One advantage in seeing Deputy Mayor Friedman, he said, was that Friedman was from the Bronx. John then reiterated that what the Committee wanted was "our fair share." Mildly disagreeing, Pat Burns asked, "Don't we want the Parks men to do their job?" John said, "We want both." Sounding very pessimistic, Pat Burns seemed to doubt whether anything could be done. Ann Devenney told her to "... juxtapose the ability of a Wootie McNeil of the Sanitation Department to tell his workers what to do ...now we have to get the Parks Department to act [to do the same thing]." She added that there was already some change based on the improvement she had seen in her neighborhood park. Pat Burns retorted saying, "Yea, but will it continue or is it just temporary?" Ann Devenney said, "We have to continually put pressure ... [on them]..." Somewhat cynically Pat Burns laughed, saying, "What do we have to do? Have a meeting like last week's once a month?" Not surprisingly Ann Devenney retorted, "If

that is what it takes!" And to that, Pat said, "You can't sustain interest like that"

At that point John intervened and suggested they make an outline for a plan regarding the meeting with Deputy Mayor Friedman. John suggested that one item on such an agenda could be that the Committee recommend that the Parks Department have some sort of management plan. He said that at the meeting with Commissioner Lang at the Arsenal, Lang pulled out a chart and said that it was the first time that the Parks Department had ever developed a plan regarding use of man-hours. Another item for the agenda, he said, could be the fact that "... if money is spent for Crotona Park, St. Mary's Park, and Coney Island ...why can't we get part of this money? [This kind of "outside" money] can go a long way toward restoring our parks."

After a lengthy discussion of the possibility of getting funding from sources outside of the city (such as the federal government's Department of Agriculture), through the assistance of local politicians, especially Congressmen Biaggi, John Riley then wrote down a tentative agenda for the meeting with Deputy Mayor Friedman. The items were as follows:

- 1) The fact that Parks Department workers don't do their jobs,

- 2) That no money is spent on maintenance, and
- 3) The possibility of getting outside money for local parks

John Riley added that he felt that an important point would be that the Coalition wants a say in how this outside money would be allocated. He also said that while the focus would be on the first two points, the third point would be used by the Committee to counter any argument about the lack of money due to budget cuts.

As the meeting closed, one of the Committee members passed around a newspaper article cut from the New York Daily News. The article was about the August 17th public meeting with Commissioner Lang. The caption read: "Civic Group Rakes Parks Department." The members of the Committee were obviously pleased with the article and the bit of notoriety that the Committee had obtained for itself.

On September 22, more than three months after its first public meeting with Assistant Commissioner Jethwani, the Committee met with a man from the very top of the entire municipal political hierarchy, Deputy Mayor Friedman. Approximately twenty members of the Committee were present at the meeting. After Ann Devenney opened the meeting, Mr. Friedman responded to her remarks by singing the praises of Parks Commissioner Lang. As he

was speaking, Commissioner Lang walked in and immediately addressed the Committee, telling them that Mr. Friedman was their champion and that he:

... had fought with me to fix the parks ... He went over every item in the budget with me and it was a bitter pill for both of us to find that the bucks were not there. One third of my employees are CETA people. Many of them are no good ... I've fired 400 of the permanent civil service workers I had last summer; of 6,500, there are now 3,400. I want to screen any new CETA people ... also I am bringing up people for disciplinary action. I went out on unannounced inspection trips and found that many of the charges made by Coalition people were true. The allegations were correct, so there will be disciplining of supervisors and hopefully firing of the right people ... all of it to help maintain what you have ...

Mr. Friedman then asked the group, "Is there anything that we can do visibly, to show we are there ... out of this list ... perhaps we should not be painting the stands in Van Cortlandt Park? " John Riley suggested that Mr. Friedman should return to the agenda. One of the Committee's members said "... at the end of the last meeting we fired the Parks Department ... we are totally frustrated; we want a budget to maintain the parks ... " After some give and take between the Committee and the two city officials, Harvey Simon raised the issue of the \$600,000 grant to renew Mosholu Park. He said, "... we do not want to concrete it over with basketball courts and destroy the greenery and landscaping we have done ... " Commissioner Lang

responded saying, "There is no money for this [anyway], most of it is for Crotona Park, but call me on this."

Mr. Friedman then turned to the Commissioner and pointed out that, "They have a shopping list, is there any way you can look at it and see ...?" The Commissioner told him he would do what he could, adding that , "I don't want conditions to deteriorate ..."

Mr. Friedman then turned to the group, saying, "You want to see some activity, you want to see your tax dollars used ?... Lang will go to his office and assign the list to someone and in a short time he will tell me that in the next few months we can do this and this ..." Commissioner Lang then told the Deputy Mayor that he ".... would need a new manager in the Bronx, ... [that the present one] ...has gotten an ulcer over this ... the employees he has fired have threatened to bomb him ...[and regarding the specific complaints, the shopping list] I've got a bench-repairing group that I use in a concentrated area

As they hammered out the details of how the Parks Department would work with the Committee, a member of the Committee rather obligingly said, " It took years for the parks to get this way, and we don't expect miracles ... " Mr. Friedman said in response, "This is the last middle class area in the Bronx; if the Bronx is going to survive

...[certainly your area will have to be one of the areas to make it].

As the meeting wound down, a Committee member told Mr. Friedman, "We are putting pressure on you because you will put pressure on the men [i.e. the park employees] ... In support of of this, John Riley said, "... if people are trying to preserve their neighborhood and they look out and see abandoned cars in the park ...[it will set back our efforts] ... " On a somewhat pessimistic note, Commissioner Lang responded, saying, "There are 700 such parks in bad shape; these parks [in your area] really compare favorably with other areas I'm sad to say."

A Committee member invited Mr. Friedman to come up to the Bronx to see some of the good things that the neighborhood residents have accomplished. The Deputy Mayor said he would go, "... when this is settled." After the meeting adjourned one Committee member said informally, "It's a moral question; they [Parks Department employees] are paid and should work. I like the area and have my roots there and I don't want to leave."

As discussed above, the actions of the Committee are best understood as class struggle. The members of the

Committee and the activist neighborhood residents that assisted them were people who found themselves in the same situation with regard to the conditions of their everyday lives. These were activist people who were willing and able to struggle against what they considered to be injustice. They joined with others who faced the same situation and who shared the same attitude or definition of the situation or mode of consciousness toward this situation or condition. The condition which they shared is related to their class situation because it was imposed on them as a class and was therefore differentially shared on the basis of class. When the fiscal crisis hit New York and Municipal Assistance Corporation and the Emergency Financial Control Board [New York's banking and financial community] imposed austerity on the people of New York City, the negative consequences of austerity were experienced differently by people depending on their class situation. While the overwhelming majority of New York's population were hard hit by the budget cuts, how the budget cuts affected them was strongly related to their class situation. Certainly the poor, inhabiting areas like the South Bronx and Bedford-Stuyvesant, were affected differently than were the upper middle class living in areas like Jamaica Estates or Riverdale. For example, as a direct result of

budget cuts the City of New York closed one of its major public hospitals, Fordham Hospital in the central Bronx. This meant that those New Yorkers living in the central Bronx now had to journey greater distances to get to a public hospital, either Lincoln Hospital in the south Bronx or Morrisania Hospital in the central Bronx, but for sure, both of these hospitals would take longer to get to and/or be more crowded as a result of the closing of Fordham Hospital. Since public hospitals are more likely to be used by the poor or working class people, to understand the impact of the above budget cut one looks at class as the best explanatory category or concept.

Thus, the northwest Bronx and its residents were "in class ways" affected by the New York City budget cuts and they reacted in class ways to those cuts. The subjective state of the northwest Bronx residents and members of the City Services Committee was like that of Hobsbawn's "primitive rebels" or perhaps, at the level of meaning, a kind of interest group consciousness. Thus, in examining the actions of the Committee against the two New York City public agencies, we have, on the one hand, class struggle, but on the other hand, a kind of interest group or a "squeaky wheel gets the oil" political consciousness. In Marxian terms, this represents a contradiction between activity and ideology, but it is in

the contradiction between these two elements that we can begin to understand or explain some of the actions and symbolism used by the Committee in its two campaigns.

In his book, Classes, Erik Olin Wright argues that:
 " Class structure imposes limits on class formation, class consciousness, and class struggle.¹¹⁷ In explaining this he goes on to state the following:

... The argument that the class structure imposes the basic limits on class formation, class consciousness and class struggle is essentially a claim that it constitutes the basic mechanism for distributing access to resources in a society, and thus distributing capacities to act. Class consciousness, in these terms, is above all, the conscious understanding of these mechanisms: the realization by subordinate classes that it is necessary to transform the class structure if there are to be any basic changes in their capacities to act, and the realization by dominant classes that the reproduction of their power depends upon the reproduction of the class structure. Class formation, on the other hand, is the process by which individual capacities are organizationally linked together in order to generate a collective capacity to act, a capacity which can potentially be directed at the class structure itself. Given that the class structure defines the access of these individuals to the pivotal resources that have the potential to be mobilized collectively, it imposes the basic limits on the possibilities for the formation of such collectively organized capacities.¹¹⁸

Following Wright, it can be argued that the interest group political consciousness of the City Services Committee is

¹¹⁷ Wright, loc. cit. p.27

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p.28

indeed a form of class consciousness but one which displays the limits established by the class structure. It is further limited by the type of class formation involved in this particular struggle, i.e. the Coalition as organization.

Thus, rather than engaging in the common and often trivial question of whether a group struggle really involved class consciousness, whether the group or organization had really become a "class-for-itself" (as opposed to a "class-in-itself"), it seems more fruitful to examine an organization's political consciousness as one which is historically conditioned by the very class structure within which it operates. In the case of the City Service Committee, we know that this is a struggle over resources, over interests, over the capacity to act; therefore, it is a class issue. We also know that individuals have been linked together in order to engage in this struggle, thus the Coalition was formed, representing a class formation. And of course, there is struggle, a battle waged against the city involving the allocation of resources. The only questions that arises is over class consciousness.

There was no question that the Committee's language and symbolism, i.e. the way in which it understood its difficulties, its definition of reality, was most like interest group politics. The Committee and its members, especially Mrs. Devenney, but the others too, saw themselves as "taxpayers,"

"consumers," and "responsible citizens." As such, said the Committee members, "we want a slice of the pie," and "we want our fair share." Then, at the public meeting with the Parks Commissioner, Mrs. Devenney invoked the symbolism of the "Bicentennial Year," saying, "united we stand, divided we fall," thus paying tribute to the importance of joint action to accomplish goals, and the example of our founding fathers who acted jointly in their struggle against injustice, and for independence. While a political ideology can be a complex belief system, the politics of the Committee was fairly simple and its essence was rooted in the above slogans, dictums, and adages. It was a kind of American "down-home-man-in-the-street" politics."

This, of course, relates directly to the beliefs of Saul Alinsky, whose political views were the basis for the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition's whole effort at community preservation and stabilization, for the "... Alinsky approach ... is to organize and mobilize people "as they are" without any conscious ideology."¹¹⁹ But, while the Committee's ideology may not be sophisticated or systematic, what they do possess is sufficient to permit them to feel outrage, to unite them into a significant assemblage, and to be willing and able to fight for themselves and their fellow citizens against an a governmental institution that they

¹¹⁹ Castells, loc.cit.p.62

perceive as engaging in policies injurious to their interests, or more specifically and concretely, their neighborhood, their families, their loved ones. Perhaps most importantly, their joint efforts had the effect of modifying, albeit in a small way, the overall distribution of resources for they were able to get the city to modify its plan for the allocation of these needed resources or services. In effect, the committee's action, its class struggle, is also a form of empowerment; the very success of the City Services Committee can have ramifications for further future struggles and the further development of their consciousness.

In an article entitled, "Proletariat into a Class: The Process of Class Formation", Adam Przeworski writes:

... classes are formed in the course of struggles, that these struggles are structured by economic, political, and ideological conditions under which they take place, and that these objective conditions - simultaneously economic, political, and ideological - mold the practice of movements that seek to organize workers into a class.
120

Przeworski also views "... the process of class formation ... [as] a perpetual one: classes are continually organized, disorganized, and reorganized." ¹²¹ Finally, Przeworski, after making reference to the work of Rosa Luxemburg, writes:

¹²⁰ Adam Przeworski. Capitalism and Social Democracy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.69.

¹²¹ Ibid. p. 71.

... a class becomes formed as more than one collectivity-in-struggle, in this case as unions and electoral parties, but conceivably as cooperatives, clubs, intellectual circles, neighborhood associations, and so on. These collectivities-in-struggle constitute forms of insertion of occupants of places within the system of production in the "bourgeois state," that is, in a particular system of political and ideological relations. The manner in which these multiple collectivities-in-struggle are formed is molded by the structure of the bourgeois state, that is, precisely by the manner in which political and ideological relations are organized in a capitalist society. 122

Przeworski's formulation of class structure and its relationship to class consciousness, class struggle, and class formation is one which allows for a more fruitful understanding of the whole problematic of social change and more specifically, a class analysis of change. While clearly indebted to Marx for the core of his formulation, Przeworski's analysis takes into consideration, perhaps more than others, the dynamism of capitalism and how that dynamism affects class structure and related class issues, and vice-versa. While more rigid class analyses would perhaps argue that the City Services Committee did not develop class consciousness, Przeworski's formulation leaves room for the view that the committee's ideological perspective on its own activity was adequate for achieving its purpose and, perhaps, most importantly, leaves open the possibility that its rather simplistic ideology may

122 Ibid. p.72

ultimately give way to the development of a more sophisticated and more thoroughly class-based analysis of its endeavors.

As Przeworski further states: "Classes are not given uniquely by any objective positions because they constitute effects of struggles, and these struggles are not determined uniquely by the relations of production." ¹²³ Thus, according to Przeworski, classes and their characteristics are always unique, related to "... a particular stage of capitalist development. We must understand the struggles and the development in their concrete historical articulation, as a process." ¹²⁴

Nevertheless, while realizing the relationship between class structure and how it influences and/or limits class consciousness, class struggle, and class formation, it is still important to document empirically as much as possible the way in which these variables affect one another. Thus, the question may legitimately be posed as to why the City Services Committee developed the kind of ideology that it had. In what specific ways did existent, historically specific social structure influence the specific type of class consciousness, as well as class formation, and the type of class struggle engaged in by the City Services Committee as the research was conducted?

¹²³ Ibid. p.66

¹²⁴ Ibid. p. 67

The first limiting factor was that of race and/or ethnicity. While the activist members of the Committee and the Coalition in general came together because of shared class interests, there were competing bases for their solidarity, i.e. the overwhelming majority of the City Services Committee membership was white, and most of them were Irish-Catholic. In addition, most of the leadership was also Irish-Catholic and white, and finally, the core leadership group of the Coalition, itself, included mostly Irish-Catholic clergymen. These white and mostly Irish Catholics identified strongly with each other, and they saw themselves: a) in a fight against the policies of a bureaucratic governmental agency that was uncaring, b) against politicians who did nothing to represent their interests, and c) as responsible citizens not getting their fair share. They did not identify nor relate to the people of other New York City or even Bronx neighborhoods who might have been experiencing the same difficulties. In fact, they tended to see other neighborhoods as getting more than they deserved, especially minority neighborhoods. Thus, the common references to city money going to Crotona Park and St. Mary's Park, both in minority, mostly Latino areas, in the South Bronx, or to Coney Island, a mostly black area. The feeling of injustice was related to their view of themselves as "one of the last middle class areas of New York City, and a taxpaying area. As it was often used by the Committee, the term "middle class" had

a double meaning: economic position, on the one hand, but in the social environment of predominantly white New York City neighborhoods in the 1970s and 1980s, it also had racial connotations, i.e. middle class was a code word for white.

Thus, the basis for class formation was not simply class interest, but instead it also involved what Weber called status-based factors. While they were conscious of themselves as sharing a common fate at the hands of a city governmental agency which controlled the allocation of a resource necessary for their wellbeing, a competing basis for their solidarity was ethnicity and race. In addition, many of the Coalition activists viewed minorities negatively, and developed an "us" against "them" kind of attitude. This division of course limited the ability of the Committee and the Coalition in general to deal effectively with their class situation. It limited their ability to achieve neighborhood solidarity, and their ability to make alliances with other neighborhoods experiences similar difficulties.

A second way in which existent class structure affected the activity of the Coalition was in the ideology utilized by the Committee to legitimize their struggle, or put differently, in the form of class consciousness the Committee developed. As described above, the Committee legitimated its struggle through the use of a simple "down-home-man-in-the-street"

ideology, or perhaps "squeaky wheel" or interest group politics. Ann Deveney even called it a kind of "consumerism." Each of the above politics or proto-ideologies represent what might be called "received political culture." It is the politics of democracy as it exists in advanced capitalism. It is a politics with its roots in the marketplace, in possessive individualism, and perhaps in the romance of the frontier democracy or the New England town meeting. While it served to advance the interests and class struggle of the Committee, it was an almost inherently conservative solution to a neighborhood's problems because it inhibited any identification with other people of the city, with other neighborhood residents outside the northwest Bronx who might also be suffering from the budget cuts of the fiscal crisis. While it may be true that "the squeaky wheel" gets the oil, what happens to those who do not squeak? Or squawk? Has the system of government become more democratic and/or responsive to the people if one noisy neighborhood and its residents succeed in getting more resources allocated in its direction? Isn't that what the affluent have been doing since the invention of agriculture? Thus, the people may develop a form of class consciousness which is effective in bringing people together, in achieving a class formation, but it may inhibit it from achieving other kinds of desirable aims. It may even close off alternatives simply because it is a form of consciousness that

imparts a market orientation to political struggle, i.e. every neighborhood for itself. One of the Committee's targets at the meeting with Park's Department officials was employees of the department, whom the Committee considered lazy or incompetent. They argued that the problem of poorly maintained parks was related to lazy workers. Even the Commissioner of Parks defended his workers by reference to the impact of layoffs on their morale. While there was indeed ample proof that many Park's Department employees were not doing their jobs, thus giving legitimacy to the indignation of Committee members, especially in the face of the rapidly deteriorating conditions in neighborhood parks, nevertheless, one question that arises is whether the problem of lazy and/or incompetent park employees be understood or analyzed in other ways? Was it possible to understand the northwest Bronx's problems in other ways than was done by the Committee? Attacking fellow working people is at least in part related to the Committee's limited view of the ways in which contemporary capitalism affects class structure. The attack on fellow working people certainly precluded any possibility of the Committee even considering contact with the public employee's union which was also suffering under the burden of budget cuts. At a planning session when a member of the committee suggested such a thing, the suggestion was quickly rejected. Clearly, the ideology or class consciousness of the members of the Committee was very

narrow and almost parochial in its focus, and as such, it limited the possibility of alliances with other working people which might have strengthened the hand of the Coalition as well as that of the employees of the Parks Department.

The next section will describe and analyze the efforts of a different Coalition committee, the Reinvestment Committee. The issue of bank red-lining was a more directly class issue, and it will be instructive to see how this issue and its obvious class-relatedness affected the type of class consciousness this committee developed, plus the other important factors of class formation and class struggle.

Chapter Seven

The Coalition Reinvestment Committee vs Local Savings Banks

While initially focusing its attention mainly on private sphere landlords and city government and its delivery of services, within a year or so after its founding, the Coalition began to concentrate its efforts on the issue of reinvestment, commonly known as "redlining." "Redlining" is generally defined as a practice engaged in by various investment and lending institutions, especially banks and insurers, whereby entire neighborhoods are "written off" for investment regardless of the merit of the individual mortgage applicant. The impetus behind the Coalition's campaign against local banks lay in two revealing studies done by two of the Coalition's own community organizers, Joe Muriano and Bill Frey.¹²⁶

The first study, entitled "Neighborhood Preservation Planning Project," examined existing conditions in the northwest Bronx, and proposed various remedies to alleviate those conditions deemed problematic. The section on banks, called "Work Item Number Seven:

¹²⁶The money for the research came from a political contact, the then New York Secretary of State, and present Governor, Mario Cuomo.

Involvement of Financial Institutions," was a description of the lending patterns of local banks over the most recent ten year period, i.e. 1965 to 1975. The study concluded that:

The Northwest Bronx has been hit by disinvestment over the last ten years financial institutions have been abandoning the housing market in the northwest Bronx... . . . virtually all bankers are saying ... that they are giving no new mortgages for multi-family dwellings in the Northwest Bronx at the same time, financial institutions are restricting refinancing and consolidation The option ... is to go to the non-institutional or private mortgage lender[s] [who are] ... considered to be shysters, rip-off artist and will grab a building if a payment is a day late. The conditions they place on new mortgages or refinancing can often make a building's financial situation unviable (sic) for the owner. This can lead to reduced maintenance and eventual abandonment. Perhaps the worst effect of this "disinvestment" by financial institutions is the psychology ... of 'no future hope' that it has caused. This psychology is reflected in increasing withdrawal from the real estate market in the northwest Bronx adding on to the spiral of disinvestment.¹²⁷

The second study, done by Bill Frey, discovered some startling data on bank redlining. Through the use of the then recently passed Home Mortgage Disclosure Act of 1975, Frey found a pattern of disinvestment by three of the dominant banks in the northwest Bronx. In 1965, 298 new mortgages were negotiated in the northwest Bronx, ten

¹²⁷NWBCCC FILES, 1976

years later, in 1975, only ten new mortgages were granted. In 1965, Eastern Savings granted 59 mortgages and refinanced 63; ten years later the figures were one new mortgage and two refinanced. North Side, with almost \$300 million in deposits, two-thirds of which was from northwest Bronx depositors, gave one new mortgage in 1975 for \$34,000. Dollar Savings, the largest savings bank in the Bronx and, at that time, the fifth largest in America, with deposits of \$2.4 billion gave only 26 mortgages in the northwest Bronx for 1975, for a total of \$2.2 million.¹²⁸

It was based on the data from these studies that the Coalition membership, at its Annual Meeting of December 4, 1976, passed three resolutions dealing with the issue of redlining or bank disinvestment. The first resolution simply called for meetings between local banks and the Coalition's Reinvestment Committee, but also stated, "... that the NWBCCC is prepared to institute strong corrective measures in the case of any bank which fails to cooperate" The second resolution was more specific; entitled "Enforcement of the Good Repair Clause," the so called, "good repair clause" is a commonly used clause in conventional, multi-family

¹²⁸Jonnes, loc.cit. Pp. 356-357

mortgages which states that one condition for which the mortgagor can foreclose on the landlord is for not keeping the building violation-free, meaning free of violations of the New York City building code. The Coalition resolution stated that, "... whereas it is imperative that the Banks holding mortgages on buildings in the northwest Bronx be more accountable to the residents and depositors living in those buildings, Be It Resolved :

1) That if a Coalition affiliated organization presents the bank (mortgagor) with documentation of a certain number of violations on the building, and if the landlord has already been informed of the violations by the tenant association, then the bank will meet with the organization and the landlord to enforce the "good repair clause" that the bank will give the landlord the opportunity to sign a repair agreement which will allow him/her to clear up all violations of any consequence on the building and accompany the tenants, associations in seeing whether the landlord is complying with the agreement;

2) The local community organization will monitor all repair contracts between the bank and landlords;

3) Any landlord who has been called in to the bank due to violations on the building must open up the books on the finances of the building;

4) That if the landlord has demonstrated that there are not sufficient funds to do the needed repairs on the building and the landlord has agreed to work in the best interests of the tenants then the bank should be willing to extend one of the following:

- a) a debt moratorium on the mortgage payments until repairs can be made, or
- a) Refinancing of the mortgage , or the offer of a mini-loan

5) That if the landlord has been given sufficient time to clear up any violations and does not do the needed repairs, or is not complying with the schedule, then the bank will begin foreclosure proceedings, and appoint a receiver who is acceptable to the local organization during foreclosure.

The last resolution was called, "Disclosure [of data on] Mortgage Lending." It stated that:

... the financial commitment of depository institutions to our northwest Bronx neighborhoods has declined dramatically over the last five years, causing a great deal of deterioration in the housing of our communities, and whereas this "Redlining" policy of many banks has created disinvestment and disinterest on the part of prospective owners or present owners and whereas much of the money which these banks claim as their assets in fact come from depositors who reside in the Northwest Bronx which most banks rate as a poor risk area ...

BE IT RESOLVED that in order to facilitate reinvestment in our local neighborhoods the NWBCCC obtain commitments from the depository institutions of the following items:

- 1) That all banks will disclose which properties they hold mortgages on in the northwest Bronx;
- 2) That all banks will disclose the amount of deposits by residents according to census tract of zip code;
- 3) That all banks will allow Coalition affiliated organizations to review all mortgage, improvement and small business loan transactions on a quarterly basis.
- 4) That the mortgage/loan terms, including the interest rate and down payment, must not be such as to discourage legitimate investments ...
- 5) That the NWBCCC will recommend to the banks for special consideration landlords and community groups with good reputations in our neighborhoods and prospective homeowners who are known to us as good risks; and that reports will be given to NWBCCC as to the results of any of these requests for mortgages/loans, and a reason given if they are rejected;

- 6) That a list of landlords and mortgage speculators who have poorly managed buildings or have exhibited negligence in our neighborhoods will also be submitted to the banks ; and that the banks accept our recommendation that no transactions transpire between the banks and these individuals or corporations;
- 7) That the banks will contact local community Groups when they have a mortgage which they consider as a poor risk in order to consider alternatives to selling; and that After consulting with the local group, if no alternative can be arrived at, the bank will provide the name of any potential buyer of the mortgage and will examine his/her past management record along with the community group;
- 8) That the banks will issue mortgages/loans in the Northwest Bronx in the same proportion as their deposits in the Northwest Bronx; that the banks will cooperate with thee NWBCCC to help advertise the availability of mortgage/loan money and push to see that the money is used;
- 9) That the banks will establish a mortgage pool for the northwest Bronx to help reduce the risk for lending institutions.....¹²⁹

For the Coalition, the above resolutions constituted a practical solution to the northwest Bronx's problem with local savings banks. It was a way for the Coalition to deal with the problem of bank control over both the destiny of northwest Bronx housing and its future as a viable working to middle class neighborhood. But, while simply practical measures to Coalition personnel, these resolution were political and economic dynamite to others. The acceptance of these resolutions by the banks would mean neighborhood or community input into an

¹²⁹NWBCCC files, 12/4/76

important aspect of the banking business, i.e. its investment decisions. On the economic level, it would mean that banking decisions would not be based on bottom-line factors alone, but instead the needs of the community would now have to be a consideration. Thus, it would entail a rather drastic modification of the so-called free market, and in this case, it would not be done by the state, but by a local neighborhood association. Would this be greater democracy, or an illegal abridgement of free enterprise? Thus, the issue was also important politically because it was related to the overall economic structure of American society, and the rules of the free enterprise or Capitalist system. Did the Coalition have a right to interfere in the banking business? Who decides such things? Should a bank have the power to make or break a neighborhood, involving the lives of thousands, even hundreds of thousands of people? In a democracy, should a small number of non-elected officials [bankers] be allowed to have such a drastic impact on the lives countless thousands of people? Should a small though significant number of neighborhood residents [the membership of the Coalition] purporting to represent thousands of people, be able to interfere with one of the most important institutions in American society? In its campaign

against red-lining, these were the kinds of questions that the Coalition was wrestling with.

Before going further with a description of the campaign, it is important now to examine the theoretical implications of the Coalition's campaign against the banks because it relates directly to the issue of class struggle. The Coalition's campaign against the banks is different from the one against the city government and its service delivery bureaucracy because it is more directly class-based. Interpreting the class relation between corporate capitalism, fiscal crisis, budget cuts, and the cutting of vital services to the neighborhood is somewhat complex and to the person in the street, often unconvincing, since there is often a fatalism about the behavior of banks and the rich, e.g. "What do you expect?" Interpreting the relation of a bank to a neighborhood is different; while it too is indirect, and not like the relation of an employer to a worker, it is a more direct class relation than that of neighborhood to city government. Once the connection is realized between a local bank and the condition of the neighborhood in which it does business, then the very visibility of its concrete structure [the building that houses the bank] helps people to understand and properly interpret its role. The physical structure of the bank becomes much

like the physical presence of an employer in the workplace, and thus its class relation is easier to grasp.

Also important in understanding the more class related -ness of redlining is that it contains two important aspects. First, it is often called geographic discrimination because entire geographic areas of a city are excluded or written off for investment purposes so that banks will not give loans to anyone who lives or wants to live in such an area. But, the geographic areas that are written off are commonly areas that are poor to working class and/or in transition, which means changing racially and/or ethnically. Thus, the terms redlining and geographic discrimination are really akin to euphemisms in a society that does not recognize the existence or validity of class discrimination as a violation of law or even ethical conduct. In fact, they are both examples of class discrimination, meaning that banks do not like to make loans to poor people or to people who live in poor neighborhoods.

This brings up the other aspect of redlining, its racial aspect and the interrelatedness between race and class. While it is usually poor or working class areas in transition that are redlined, the key to understanding it in the New York City of the 1970s and early 1980s is

the impact of race on bank decisions to invest. The only reason redlining became an issue was not so much because it was a class-based issue, but because it was a racial issue. In other words, bank decisions based on class were perfectly legitimate and legal, but bank decisions based on race were not. The accusations against banks were lodged by individuals who because of their race or the fact that they lived in or near minority neighborhoods were not able to get mortgages, in spite of their individual qualifications for the loans. In effect, banks equated the presence or even propinquity of minorities to neighborhood deterioration, and by doing so, the argument went, areas like the northwest Bronx which had not yet experienced serious deterioration would deteriorate because of the self-fulfilling prophecy inherent in bank decisions not to invest in the area. Since the economic stability of a neighborhood is in part based on banker and investor confidence in its viability as a neighborhood, a bank's decision not to invest because it believes the area to be going bad, and/or changing racially and ethnically could cause the local building stock to lose its value and ultimately fall into disrepair and even abandonment.

Thus, redlining had a dual character; it had both class elements and racial elements. But while the two

elements were intertwined, it was not so much the poor and minorities that fought the battles against redlining as it was the white working to middle class from neighborhoods like the northwest Bronx and Flatbush in Brooklyn that did. They waged the battles focusing on the unfairness of the banking practice that stigmatized neighborhoods simply because of the presence of and/or propinquity to minorities. Not only was it unfair to racial and ethnic minorities but also to the white working and middle classes. So, in fighting the battle against the banks, the language of the struggle by whites did not focus so much on race as it did on class and economics. In spite of the issue having both class and racial elements, because it was fought more by whites and more on the level of class or economics, it appeared more as a class-based issue rather than a racial one.

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE BANKS: 1976-1980

The campaign against the banks began with a letter being sent to the three targeted banks, i.e. Dollar , Eastern, and Northside. The letter expressed a desire on the part of the Committee on Reinvestment [hence forth to be called the Committee] to meet with bank personal to discuss what the Committee termed, "matters of common concern." The letter read as follows:

Dear Sir:

The Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition has been actively working with tenant and block associations in the Northwest Bronx in order to upgrade and preserve the quality of our neighborhoods. The NWBCCC is a coalition of nine neighborhood organizations representing over 525 tenant associations, 65 block associations and various civic and religious groups. The organizations affiliated with the NWBCCC are : [the nine organizations are named]

We feel that a common concern that you as a respected financial institution and NWBCCC have is the preservation of our neighborhoods. Your institution must be interested in keeping up the neighborhoods where your depositors live and in protecting investments in housing and business in the Bronx neighborhoods. We know that our future in the Bronx depends on all of us showing that we have faith in our neighborhoods and that it is worth fighting together for their improvement.

One area of concern that we would like to speak with you about is the very serious combination of problems affecting our housing in the Northwest Bronx. Many landlords are not maintaining their buildings. and in many cases this not only affects the tenants living in these buildings, but also the investment of banks like yourself which have mortgages on these buildings. We have some suggestions as to how we can work together in forcing these derelict landlords to properly maintain their buildings and keep our homes up to the Housing Code.

We would like to discuss with you certain cases on which we believe financial rearrangements are warranted. We would like to talk about what the general plans are of your bank with regards to reinvestment in our neighborhoods.

Representatives from the nine neighborhood organizations of the NWBCCC would like to meet with you either at your main branch or at Our Lady of Mercy rectory, the first or second week of October, at 7:30 PM on a week night. Would you kindly contact Mr. R. G. at [Tel. Number] or leave work at [Tel. No.] for confirmation¹³⁰

The tone of the letter is generally conciliatory, emphasizing shared interests and a desire on the part of the Coalition to "fight together." The target in this fight is identified by the Coalition as "derelict landlords" (and not disinvesting bankers). The three banks did respond to the letter, but over a period of weeks, and it was with great difficulty that the Coalition was able to convince each of them to send a representative to talk to the Committee. While the letter was sent out in September, it was not until December that the first of the three banks sent a representative to discuss the issues raised by the Committee in its letter to the banks.

Once contact was made between the banks and the Committee (and even before they actually sent a representative[s] to talk to the Committee) a document was given to each bank, entitled "AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE NWBCCC AND [BANK'S NAME]"; this later became, "PROPOSED AGREEMENT BETWEEN" This document began with an introductory statement regarding "the good repair clause," which was then followed by a set of demands. These demands were based entirely on the resolutions passed at the Coalition's Annual Meeting. The difference between the resolutions and the demands was that where the resolutions read, "Therefore we resolve that ..."

the demands said, " THE NWBCCC REINVESTMENT COMMITTEE DEMANDS THE FOLLOWING: ... " What followed were the resolutions passed at the Annual Meeting.

Thus, what the demands focused on was a pattern of disinvestment as uncovered by the research done by Coalition staff. Based on this research, banks were clearly cutting the overall amount of mortgage money invested in the northwest Bronx. While the largest of the local savings banks, Dollar, could boast of having \$180,000,000 invested in Bronx county, as a proportion of its total investment portfolio, the amount was small and, even more importantly, steadily decreasing. An article appearing in the New York Times, on April 26, 1977, captioned, "ABRAMS SCORES BRONX INSTITUTIONS ON BOROUGH MORTGAGE 'REDLINING'", stated:

Mr. Abrams [the Bronx Borough President] said that in 1975, the last year for which there was full data, the five [previously named savings banks: Dollar, Eastern, North Side, North New York, and Tremont] wrote only 62 residential mortgages in the Bronx involving \$5 million. The \$5 million represented only 6 percent of the nearly \$78 million in total mortgages written that year by the five, and Bronx residential mortgages were only a small part of the overall assets of the five, he said.¹³¹

Based on the letter and the proposed agreement the aim of the Coalition was to establish a working agreement between it and the local savings banks. This agreement

¹³¹ New York Times April 26, 1977

would have the effect of establishing a quasi-institutional partnership between the banks and the residents of the northwest Bronx, represented by the Coalition. In the view of the Coalition, banks held the key to the survival of the northwest Bronx as a stable neighborhood; unless banks made mortgage money available to landlords and prospective home owners, the bottom would fall out of the northwest Bronx real estate market, making inevitable the re-creation of the conditions that led to the destruction of the South Bronx. In recognizing that banks held the key, Coalition personnel also held that banks were one of the two principle culprits behind the deterioration that had begun to spread throughout the northwest Bronx, especially along its southern sector, the area closest to the South Bronx.

The other culprit was unscrupulous and derelict landlords. But as the Coalition learned through experience, landlords could be dealt with, "strong armed", if you will, through the formation of tenant associations and the various tactics open to associations to pressure landlords into making necessary repairs, including the ultimate weapon, the rent strike. Clearly, however, fighting landlords was like being involved in on-going gorilla warfare, i.e. you win your little battles but the war never stops; there's always an

individual sniper (landlord) who is able to jeopardize the lives of scores of people. Also, such battles with landlords and the little victories that could be won are generally short run tactics, and do not change the underlying conditions which lead to the problem in the first place.

Thus, it did not take Coalition personnel long to conclude that most landlords were ultimately dependent on the good will, and at least tacit support of local savings banks. Landlords needed banks to supply mortgage money both for financing new mortgages and for refinancing old ones, usually on a periodic basis, e.g. once every five years. Refinancing old mortgages was also a way for landlords to borrow money to maintain buildings, especially to finance major capital improvements, such as new boilers, or changing and/or repairing old plumbing. Unless banks made this money available the value of the property would decline since value, under market conditions, is ultimately based on what an owner can get for the sale of the building. If banks do not make money available to prospective buyers, the property's value is drastically reduced. Ultimately, if a landlord holds a building that no one wants or can buy, (because no mortgage money is available) the building can become essentially worthless. [actually

without mortgage money available a different market is created and thus a different type of owner and/or speculator; there is still money that can be made based on the value of the rent role and /or depreciation allowances, and other tax deductions, but, in general, this type of ownership is associated with deterioration of the housing stock] So, obviously, landlords need the cooperation of bankers to conduct their business, and, in a good profitable market, banks will compete for landlords' business, to lend them money and profit from the interest rate they charge them. In a bad market, however, where the prevailing interest rate charged by banks to landlords yields a return on investment less than could be obtained by other investments, banks will not make money available (or it would be at prohibitive rates, as occurred during the mid-1980s).

Also, where landlords renege or are delinquent on mortgage payments, on a broad scale (as occurs in rapidly declining neighborhoods, e.g. the South Bronx in the mid-1960s to 1970s), banks will not lend money; they will see this as a bad market where investment is too risky to warrant giving mortgages.

Given the above, the Coalition was placing itself in an ambiguous situation, but, one which was in conformity with its stated goals. While in direct confrontation

with local savings banks, it was, at the same time, indirectly placing itself on the side of real estate interests, the "dreaded landlords." By pressuring banks to make more mortgage money available, it was serving as an ally of property owners or, perhaps more correctly, real estate interests; the same real estate interests that the Coalition had heretofore fought and blamed for not properly maintaining buildings in the northwest Bronx. But, as Coalition founders had stated from its inception:

... the thrust of the Coalition is to get all the "good guys" together to fend off the "bad guys". No one, by virtue of race, religion, occupation or economic status, who expresses an interest in the future well-being and vitality of the northwest Bronx is unwelcome ... ¹³²

Thus, the ambiguity is cleared up, no contradiction exists; the Coalition was never opposed to landlords, per se, but only to those landlords that sought to profit at the expense of the neighborhood; it was only against "slumlords," speculators, and "milkers." As stated above, the problem was that such landlords were at least tacitly supported by banks. In that local savings banks held the mortgages on a substantial portion of the housing in the northwest Bronx and those same banks took little or no interest in how its mortgagees maintained

¹³² NWBCCC files, 1974

their buildings, as long as the mortgagees made their monthly mortgage payments, banks were implicated in the deterioration of local housing stock. The Coalition's position was that it was within the power of banks, and even more, their responsibility to see to it that mortgagees not only made their monthly payments to the bank, but also maintained their property.

In every mortgage contract between local savings banks and owners there is a statement called "the good repair clause," which indicated that a condition for the continued involvement of the bank with the mortgagee was that the property be kept in "good repair." Furthermore, it was understood that failure to maintain the property by the mortgagee could result in foreclosure by the bank, and probably the loss of the property, unless repairs were made. In effect, the Coalition wanted the local savings banks to enforce the terms of their own contracts with landlords holding real estate in the northwest Bronx. By enforcing the "good repair clause" the savings banks would become de-facto partners with the Coalition in preserving the viability of the neighborhood's housing stock and thereby protecting, with the Coalition, the welfare of the local citizenry. Rather than dealing with landlords directly and individually, through tenant associations and the courts, by working with the banks

the Coalition felt it was getting to the root of the problem and could then deal with all landlords, at their most vulnerable point, i.e. their financial source. If bankers would work with the Coalition and stop giving tacit support to "bad" (but mortgage-paying landlords), a good proportion of the "bad" landlords would either lose their buildings to the banks or have to make repairs. This is of course precisely what the Coalition wanted, for part of their plan involved supplying banks with list of "good" landlords who would then buy or take over the mortgages of the "bad" landlord. And, if "bad" landlords saw the light and made the necessary repairs, then that was fine also, for everyone deserves a second chance, even the "bad" landlord! What the Committee wanted to fight above all was bankers foreclosing on mortgages and then selling them to known speculators, as Eastern Savings was known to have done. So, not only were they not enforcing the "good repair clause" but where a landlord had already run a building down and then stopped paying his mortgage, some banks were foreclosing, and "cutting their losses" by selling off the mortgage, even to known speculators, often at pennies to the dollar.

A very significant effect of the Coalition's plan would be a change in the mortgage market, for the

Coalition was attempting to change the system of incentives as they then existed in the northwest bronx mortgage market. The Coalition was trying to make it unprofitable for "bad" landlords to operate in the northwest Bronx; it was trying to make it too expensive for them to operate, but it could not do this by tenant organizing alone, it needed the cooperation of the banks to put the squeeze on bad landlords.

Another significant effect of the Coalition's proposed agreement between it and the local banks would be that the banks would operate with a new set of priorities. In dealing with mortgagees this would mean that instead of being solely concerned with repayment of the mortgage, they would also be concerned with the mortgagee properly maintaining his/her property. In other words, they would no longer have as their primary goal simple repayment of the loan, but "repayment plus" , i.e. their concern would no longer be profits alone, but also the welfare of the citizenry living in the buildings owned by their mortgagees. The Coalition activists hoped that bankers would be willing to work in tandem with them so that together they would oversee the quality of ownership provided by the banks' mortgagees and the quality of life provided by landlords to their tenants.

To emphasize its position as not being anti-landlord (and only anti-slumlord), the Coalition said that it did not want banks to foreclose on mortgages with building violations without first checking into the financial situation of the landlord. The Coalition recognized that some landlords were indeed hard pressed financially. What the Coalition wanted was for landlords to prove to the banks that they truly had serious financial difficulties by "opening up their books." If hardship could be proven, the Coalition wanted banks to offer a debt moratorium, until, and so that, such landlords could make repairs. In other words, instead of paying their mortgage they would take that monthly payment, or at least a part of it, and use it to make necessary repairs and/or correct violations of the building code. (or working closely with a bank, the landlord could refinance the mortgage, stretch payments over a longer period of time, and/or simply take out a loan to help get over a difficult period). Here again, the Coalition was clearly asking banks to enter into a working agreement with it, a quasi-partnership, one involving "good" landlords, the local citizenry, represented by the Coalition, and the bank. In the Coalition's definition of reality, all three groupings would benefit from this partnership: the banks would benefit because it would insure that the

neighborhood, where a good percentage of their mortgage portfolio was invested, would be preserved and thus their investments protected and continue being profitable; "good" landlords would benefit because they would be assured support from the banks, even in troubled times; and finally, the local citizenry would benefit because their housing stock would be well maintained.

Besides enforcement of the good repair clause, the other significant proposal (or demand) made by the Coalition to the banks was quite specific; the Coalition wanted the banks to reinvest money in the northwest Bronx according to a formula, i.e. to make mortgage money available to prospective home owners and landlords based on a percentage of the total amount of savings from northwest bronx depositors. In other words, if northwest bronx depositors represented 25% of Dollar Savings Bank's total deposits, then 25% of the total amount of mortgage money made available to all lenders would be allocated to the northwest Bronx.

The rationale for this proposal was simple; the banks did not own this money; it was private property owned by the local residents, and this being the case, local residents should at least have input over where their money gets invested. If local residents wanted their

money to go back into their neighborhood, then banks had an obligation to respect their wishes.

[Another way of stating this is to say that the depositors' money, while private property, could also be defined as social property. While each account is the private property of the owner of the savings account, all the deposits of local residents, their sum total, represents social property, i.e. the sum total of all the residents' private property is the social property of the community of residents that live in the northwest Bronx and deposit their private property into the local savings bank. The Coalition's position was that if local residents wanted their money to go back into their neighborhood, then banks had an obligation to respect their wishes.]

While ostensibly radical, this proposal is much less radical than it sounds. While it would be associated with a liberal, market interventionist politics, it is not radical politics, though it is easy to see its radical implications. Basically the Coalition was arguing that the community should have input and therefore some control over the use of its private property. It was not arguing for the abolishment of banks or of private property or even the socialization of

banking. It was simply using the leverage of its considerable resources to influence bank policy in a way that would be advantageous to the neighborhood and its residents. Behind this proposal was the threat of the local depositors withdrawing their money and placing it in another bank. Individually most resident-depositors have little leverage or power over bank policy, but organized, the thousands of small deposits become a huge sum of money which gives the organized collectivity clout or countervailing power over the bank. This is precisely what the Coalition wanted; it was not trying to establish socialism, but simply mobilizing the power of numbers to influence bank policy.

MEETINGS BETWEEN THE REINVESTMENT COMMITTEE AND THE BANKERS

In analyzing the data from the Reinvestment Committee's meetings on the issue of redlining, including Committee planning sessions and meetings between the Committee and local bankers, the most clearly identifiable theme that permeated most of the sessions was what might be called "bank autonomy/private property" versus "social responsibility". Conflict between the banks and the Committee revolved around the demand by the Committee that banks go about their business with the

welfare of the neighborhood in mind. Bankers argued that they represented a private institution which had not only the right but also the obligation to operate without outside community interference. They further argued that they recognized no such social responsibility as that advanced by the Committee. Thus, the battle lines between the banks and the Committee were drawn on this basis; most of the conflict revolved around this basic issue. There were certain sub-issues, involving social status and culpability for deterioration, but they were secondary.

In was in the battles over this issue that a stronger sense of class consciousness come forth from Committee members, as they began to conceptualize the problem in terms related to a class analysis of society, one involving a critique of Capitalism and its impact on society. By studying the problem of redlining and by dealing with banks they began to educate themselves and redefine the nature of the reality that surrounded and confronted them as they to struggled for greater freedom.

Of course, they were "helped" in this struggle to grasp the reality that surrounded and confronted them by the actions and attitudes of the bankers that they confronted. The bankers attitude toward the Committee's

proposals and its demands was best exemplified by the vice-president from Dollar Savings who said:

... if you use that word "demand", they'll [the Board of Directors] throw it [the proposal] in the basket ... They won't want to work with you 133

At a later date, with representatives from North Side Savings, the same issue arose, i.e. the Committee's use of the word demand. What was significant at this session was that as a result of Dollar Savings previously taking issue with the term, the Committee had decided to give in and delete the word from all subsequent correspondence with banks. As a result, no correspondence between the Committee and Northside contained the word "demand". Thus, when the Northside vice president objected to the use of the word, a Committee member interrupted, saying, "You never got that letter from us, you got it from another banker." Clearly, bank personnel from Dollar and North Side had previously discussed the Committee's proposals and its list of "demands," and perhaps even more than the content of the demands, they bitterly resented its tone, its use of the word, "demand."

After all, who were these people to "demand." During

another session between representatives from North Side and the Committee, held at the bank's office:

"... an in-house memo denigrating the Committee members surfaced in the paper shuffle. It sneered at the effrontery of Gallagher, a mere postman, or other members, a student, ... a teacher, ... a messenger. Who were they to question the bankers, and what did the clergy know either? ¹³⁴

Thus, as should be apparent, unlike the city sanitation and parks personnel, bankers were indicating in word and deed that they did not accept what might be called the legitimacy of the Committee's demands. Their behavior was akin to an employer who refuses to recognize the bargaining rights of unionized workers, as was often the case in nineteenth and early twentieth century America. Nevertheless, the obnoxious behavior displayed by the bankers at least served to anger the Committee members and perhaps forced them to examine their naive attitude toward bankers.

At a second meeting with Dollar's vice president, his opening statement, commenting on the entire proposal, was as follows:

... our attorneys ... in general [feel that these are] ... not reasonable demands ... we have a responsibility to our investors to run the bank without outside interference ...¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Jonnes, loc.cit. p. 361

¹³⁵ Research notes, 2/23/77

In fact, all three banks viewed the Committee's proposals and demands as "unreasonable", and as an "outside interference" into the banks' private business, i.e. the business of banking. In going over proposals one to four, on the issue of "the good repair clause", one banker said, "...[you are] getting into bank policy here ...[and the] bank has to decide this" A few minutes later, as the discussion reached proposal number seven, on the disclosure of information, the same banker said: "... numbers seven to twelve ... [relate to] bank policy ...[and] ... the bank has to decide this" In effect, the bank had excluded from discussion ten of the Committee's thirteen proposals, based simply on the issue of bank autonomy and the prerogatives of private property.¹³⁶

Associated with the "anti-outside interference" position, one banker expressed dismay at the behavior of a nun, Sister P. who together with a group of residents went into one of Northside's branches asking for information on a mortgage held by the bank. As the Northside executive put it:

... any building you show interest in, we'll follow up on but this thing of marching into the bank has

¹³⁶ Research notes, 3/15/77

got to be stopped ... its happened twice already
and once we didn't even hold the mortgage ... 137

Here the objection is to a particular type of outside interference, a disruption of the bank's established routines. But again, the bank resents any attempt by the community at even getting information, and it falls back on its prerogative as a private business, on its legitimate freedom from outside interference, as a way of protecting itself from the scrutiny of the community.

Related to bankers' negative view of the Committee's proposals was, what might be called their "bottom-line" mentality (or perhaps morality). During the course of the meetings between bankers and the Committee, phraseology related to "bottom-line" thinking was uttered time and time again, such as, "we will go as far as good business dictates," "its a question of economics," "...where economically feasible, OK ... " and "We will do what makes good business sense". Asked by a Committee member if banks felt a responsibility to reinvest in the northwest Bronx, one banker responded quite plainly and simply, "... banks don't have this sense of responsibility to reinvest..." Especially repugnant to the bankers was the idea of a legal requirement to reinvest, as had been proposed by a local assemblyman

from the Bronx, Oliver Koppel, as well as a "demand" to reinvest, as had been made by the Committee. The bankers response was a collective "heels-dug-in" clearly, stated, " No!, you can't make bank policy, we have a responsibility to our depositors to protect their investments, so what matters most to us is the 'bottom-line'."

The perspective of the Committee toward the banks and their policies was one that developed over time. The Committee began with the view that bank policies were contributing to the deterioration of the northwest Bronx. But they were also sincerely willing to work with banks. As stated above, these were not radical people, but instead people who sincerely wanted to arrive at practical solutions to what was visibly happening to their neighborhoods. The proposals given to the banks were just that, proposals, meant to establish a dialogue with an eye toward working together with the banks for what they thought was their joint interests.

During the month of September 1976, the Reinvestment Committee began meeting to plan its strategy for dealing with the banks. The first meetings were mainly for information gathering and planning. Among other things, there was noteworthy dialogue about the attitude of bankers toward reinvestment in the northwest Bronx. One

Committee member related the questions asked by an Eastern vice president regarding inquiries about mortgage money. He said that the Eastern vice president wanted to know how many blacks, whites, and Puerto Ricans lived in the building and how many of each attended the junior high school across the street. A Coalition organizer said that the Bowery Savings Bank "... didn't want to hear of the "good repair clause" that as long as the bank gets its money, it doesn't care about repairs." He said that the tenants of a building he had been working with went to Bowery to complain about a landlord on whom it held the mortgage; he said its been a year and a half since the visit to the bank and nothing's been done. Another Committee member, a long time resident and owner of a one family house, said she went to her bank and asked for a refinancing of her mortgage; the banker told her, "...they wouldn't put good money into [a] bad ... [neighborhood]."¹³⁸

By January 1977, long after the banks had received the letter requesting a meeting between them and the Committee, only Dollar had sent a representative. The other two banks, Eastern and Northside, had answered the letter, but had refused to meet with the Committee as a whole. As was explained in Chapter 2 what they (including

¹³⁸ Research notes, 9/23/76

Dollar) appeared to prefer was to discuss the issue with the Church hierarchy, and not deal with the Committee. Even Dollar, which had sent a vice president, was basically negative on practically all the points in the Committee's proposals, though the representative did indicate that he would "get back" to the Committee as soon as he was able to discuss the proposals with other bank personnel.

The response letter sent by Eastern's Chairman of the Board to the Chairman of the Reinvestment Committee, Richard Gallagher, is a good example of all three banks fundamental position of the Committee's proposals. The letter read as follows:

Dear Mr Gallagher:

I appreciate your concern for the very serious problems affecting the housing in the Northwest Bronx. I am sure you will agree that Eastern Savings Bank naturally is concerned with the preservation of the neighborhoods not only in Northwest Bronx but throughout the County. We have been pursuing our own plan of action which will involve first and foremost the properties and the area in which the Bank has an interest. Needless to say, a constructive discussion would prove productive for all concerned.

Your letter of October 15th seems to stress that landlords are not maintaining their buildings and that we should work together to force these derelict landlords to properly maintain their buildings within the housing code. I am sure there are some derelict landlords, but I would suggest to you that there are many good landlords who are struggling under rent control and the general discord between landlord and tenant. There is no mention in your letter of the landlord's problems

with the tenants such as non-payment of rent, general physical abuse of property, and the seemingly apathetic attitude of the courts and the political as well as regulatory agencies. As you know, when there is no bottom line or any hope of same, abandonment is the obvious result.

We believe we know the problem well. However, if you wish to meet with Mr. McIntyre, our vice president and specialist on Bronx properties, you may reach him here at the bank.

You can be sure that Eastern Savings Bank is a concerned institution and would be cooperative in attempting to solve these problems. However, I'm sure you will recognize that we ultimately must take whatever action we deem wisest to protect our depositors' funds in these areas.

Sincerely,

[signed JOHN NOSWORTHY]¹³⁹

Unfortunately, included under "action we deem wisest to protect our depositors' funds in these areas." included well documented disinvestment practices long associated with contributing to abandonment and further deterioration. As the Committee stated in a letter to the New York State Banking Commission on March 30, 1977:

To whom it may concern:

.....
 One major concern of the Reinvestment Committee is Eastern Savings Banks lack of accountability for the mortgages they presently hold in the Northwest Bronx. This "hands off" policy by Eastern seems to us to be an attempt on their part to pull out of their holdings in our neighborhoods. For example:

-According to the Bronx County records, in 1973 Eastern sold a \$70,000 mortgage on an apartment house at 2122 Valentine Avenue for \$100 to Barry Levites, a speculator. In 1973 Eastern sold a \$150,000 mortgage on 380-84 E.183rd Street for \$100 to another speculator, Daniel Platzner.

-When Eastern terminated Clearwater Management as their agent in 1700-1702 Davidson Avenue and 1806 Davidson Avenue without hiring a replacement, the buildings became abandoned and are now vacant.

-When Eastern was contacted by the tenant associations of 153,155,173,175 Father Zeiser and 2719-21 Morris Avenue, Eastern did not follow-up on the serious violation problems in these buildings ¹⁴⁰

The Reinvestment Committee believes that Eastern's lack of concern about mortgaged properties in the Bronx affects the safety of our depositors' money.

The letter goes on to discuss Eastern investment of money in so called sunbelt states, especially Florida, where a loan for \$1.4 million was foreclosed on. The Committee questioned the sagacity of Eastern making risky investments in Florida while it refused to extend loans and protect its holdings in the northwest Bronx. The Committee then requested an "immediate investigation into the lending practices of Eastern Savings Bank in order to protect the depositors of the bank and the future of our neighborhoods."

Notice that the Committee took Eastern's argument about protecting its depositors money and, in effect,

"turned it on its head" saying that it was complaining about Eastern because it was concerned about " the safety of our depositors' money."

Thus, what began to happen to the Committee members as they dealt with the banks was that anger and insult turned to a determination to teach the banks a lesson in democracy. As the Chairman of the Committee,[R.G]. put it, " ... the banks will have to be democratized ...[and they have to be] socially responsible with our money... ." During a discussion of what action to take against Eastern Savings for its refusal to cooperate, another Committee member[C.F.] said:

... we have to make our presence felt ...they will agree [with us] as long as it doesn't hurt them [their bottom-line] ... I hate to use the word but [what we are doing is] a revolutionary idea ... we want to tell them what to do with money ... fundamental change is necessary ...[we] have to go to politicians, the press, media, ...[banks] are maybe the most powerful institution in this country, more than government ... so what if they are put off by [our] demands ... the city is falling apart ... I go back to my neighborhood [and it's] falling apart ... if we don't do something, in ten to fifteen years this neighborhood will be the same [i.e.falling apart] ... I'm angry at their arrogance !

Yet another Committee member [T.P]., also upset about the attitude of the bankers said:

... banks are walking away from buildings... [this is] morally wrong ... [they are]

pulling receiverships out and abandoning buildings...[just]walking away ...let['s make] people aware of the role of banks [in neighborhood deterioration] ... people think banks are good ... let them see what banks do ...

Finally, at a negotiating session with a Dollar vice president, who was lecturing the Committee on the evil of welfare and rent control laws, another Committee member [J.M.] said:

... I'm getting angry ... you've been polite but you are saying people on welfare don't pay rent, that rent control ruins buildings,... we are saying that millions of dollars in our money is being invested outside the city and somehow its all the fault of the people..... why aren't profits reinvested?

This same Committee member, picking up on the implication that minorities are to blame for the deterioration of the neighborhood argues:

... History says change in population has always existed ... the difference is that now people are from South America and not Europe ... Blacks and Hispanics make New York City viable for all ...[I] don't worry about people leaving [the city because minorities are moving in] ... 141

As a result of the difficulties involved in just trying to discuss the proposals with the banks,

¹⁴¹ This quotation as well as the previous ones are from research notes taken at the meetings of the Reinvestment Committee from 9/23/76 to 3/15/77

especially Eastern and Northside, the Committee decided it had to take some action against the banks to show that it meant business. At the Reinvestment Committee meeting of January 18, 1977 reports were given on contacts with Eastern and Northside. Both reports were negative, with Eastern still talking about "... the tone of the original letter ..." and "... that no one makes policy for the bank ..." and with a North Side representative saying he would first like to talk to Monseigneur McCarthy, the President of the Coalition, and Chairman Gallagher, before talking to the whole Committee. Gallagher's response to that offer was, "Out of the question!"

Members of the Committee were in general agreement that the banks were in contact with one another, that they were probably trying to "isolate members " of the Committee, like Chairman Gallagher, and/or trying to "break up the Committee", "break us down," or trying to "divide and conquer." Chairman Gallagher felt that "... if we let Eastern get away with this [their refusal to discuss the proposals with the Committee] the others [the other banks] won't do anything ..." There was a lot of self doubt expressed at this meeting. Members were puzzled as to the best way to deal with the banks; they even wondered aloud whether they had bitten off more than they could chew. The following dialogue is

representative of some of the Committee members
difficulties and how they struggled with them as a group:

B.F. ... they are challenging the Committee; our policy is as we said before ... don't try to change it [now] ... [if we give in and send only two representatives to Eastern instead of insisting on a meeting with the whole Committee] Vaupel will lecture two people ...

B.S. ... maybe we started on the wrong foot ... with the richest, most powerful institution in the neighborhood

F.B. ... The Board [of Directors] said this too ... they wondered whether our language was too strong

D.S. ... I'm [a] new [member of the Committee] but I have worked in labor negotiations ... it seems to me you've started correctly.... higher than you want

R.G. [expresses agreement]

T.P.unions had a hard time [too]

B.S. ... we have to compromise ... possibly if we sweettalk them ... we have nothing to lose.

T.P. ... I haven't seem the banks compromise ... they want for us to go to them ... I think we should picket them

B.S. How many will you get with this cold weather?

T.P. ... even fifteen is OK!

[what followed this was a discussion of the extent of Board of Director support, already covered in Chapter 4]

This meeting ended with the Committee agreeing to:

1) go to the Board of Directors to get their support, 2) send a three person committee to speak to Darcy of North Side to try one last time to get them to discuss the Committee's proposals, and 3) write one last letter, a strong one, to Eastern to get them to open negotiations.

The Committee met again on February 15 ; the principle topic was the need to postpone the picketing of Eastern Savings Bank until more cooperation could be arranged

among all those involved with the Coalition. Richard Gallagher told the Committee that if they were going to picket, "... we need the cooperation of all, the Board [of Directors], the [local] organizations, Committees, etc. ... it is better for everybody if all are tuned in ... [we have to] explain it to everyone] ... why [the need for] action, why we need support Later on in the meeting, Chairman Gallagher reiterated his belief that there was a need for the Committee members to "..... be like missionaries, tell them [other community residents and activists] about what we're doing ... " C.F. agreed with Gallagher and said, "[Yes, we have to] ... be missionaries ... explain redlining ... people don't understand[it] has to be pushed ... " C.F. said:

... [we should] do this as an on-going process...letters, meetings, talks, etc. ...[we have to] explain redlining ...none of these things contradicts another ...[its] not easy to show[explain] redlining ... people aren't interested, [they] don't understand ...[a] process of education has to go on ... this doesn't say we can't picket ... Also the demonstration does not have to be a star-studded thing ... [it will be] a long process ... even twenty people are enough ...[we'll] get TV and press coverage ... numbers don't mean that much ... look at this as an on-going process

Since the bankers from Eastern Savings never did agree to discuss the proposals with the Committee:

On April 1, 1977, 150 Bronxites gathered to picket Eastern's Pelham Parkway and White Plains Road branch. The protesters were an ordinary crowd, people you might see at a parish dinner or a bingo game. The bishop and Monsignor McCarthy were there ... [The protestors] marched back and forth in front of the bank, attracting the enthusiastic approval of passerby[s], who assumed the clergy and their flock were protesting the pornographic movie theater next door. Only when they got up close did they see the signs, "Lets give up Eastern for Lent."

Flustered bank employees rushed outside. One outraged bank officer sputtered at Ann Devenney, "Lady you're a Communist." She rolled her eyeballs, "Oh, Mister." She was really enjoying this excursion. "It was fun to take on a bank and let them know - hey, the old days are over. It was like David and Goliath," she said. That same day Eastern management reassured the coalition that it was all a misunderstanding. Of course, they would meet.¹⁴²

On April 20, Eastern did meet with the Committee and in a tense and sometimes hostile atmosphere they at least began a process of hammering out an agreement. Toward the close of that meeting, the following dialogue took place:

Eastern: ... the demonstration turned me off ... you [just] went t h r o u g h a [meaningless] exercise...

R.G.: ... without the demonstration,[you wouldn't have come] it was not just an exercise ... it was good speaking to you three gentlemen ... it cleared the air ... [we can] start anew ...

Eastern: ... you were lucky, it was an orderly demonstration ...[it was] wrong ...

C.F. : ... Why were you filming the demonstration?

Eastern: ... public gatherings can be dangerous...

Eastern: ... what if someone threw a Molotov cocktail?

¹⁴² Jonnes, loc.cit. pp.358-359

M.S.: ... what about the dangers of neighborhoods falling apart?

The Coalition's campaign against the banks did not end until

all three banks had been picketed. The action against Dollar Savings included the accumulation over \$1,000,000 in pledges to withdraw savings signed by northwest Bronx depositors willing to support the Coalition in its campaign against the savings bank. Actions against Eastern Savings included complaints not only to the State Banking Commission, but also the FDIC. The complaint to the FDIC culminated in a denial by the federal regulatory agency of permission to Eastern Savings to open a branch in Hauppauge, Long Island.

Finally, in January, 1980 the Coalition signed a formal agreement with four local savings banks (Dollar, Eastern, Northside, and Anchor) plus Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company [one of the largest commercial banks in the country] and the Aetna Insurance Company. The event was reported in the New York Daily News, some of the important points of interest in the story were:

The Coalition's reinvestment committee chairman, Richard Gallagher, said, "While there has been some bad feeling in the past between the banks and the committee, we look on today as the start of a new period of cooperation, with the financial institutions working closely with

neighborhood organizations for the improvement of the over-all community."

.....
 According to the coalition, Eastern agreed to a goal of 30 investment projects over the coming year, with priority given to 21 apartment buildings on which the bank currently holds a mortgage.

.....
 Northside agreed to 50 investment projects ... Northside also agreed to allocate \$12 million to applicants in the Bronx over the coming year. Dollar Savings, the largest Bronx bank represented at the meeting, set a goal of 100 investments in the Bronx for the year.¹⁴³

All the savings banks also pledged to enforce the "good repair clause".

One especially noteworthy aspect of this campaign was that the Committee made contacts with a wide variety of other organizations involved in their own campaigns against banks. The organization that was most cooperative was National People's Action, Gail Cincotta's Chicago based neighborhood advocacy group, but there were also organizations in Philadelphia, Washington, and other cities throughout the nation that were contacted during the Coalition's struggle. In addition, the Coalition was able to get the support of many local and state politicians, most notably the then Bronx Borough

¹⁴³ New York News January 24, 1980

President Robert Abrams and State Assemblyman Oliver Koppel.

Another consequence of the campaign against the banks was that it led to another successful campaign against another redlining group of companies, insurers, who ultimately also pledged to invest millions of dollars in the northwest Bronx.

CLASS STRUGGLE AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

Before discussing the nature of the struggle engaged in by the Reinvestment Committee, there is a related issue regarding the clash between the banks and the Committee. While ostensibly a clash between two different groups, with conflicting interests, in fact, it is that and more. Two businesses competing against one another involves conflicting interests; the conflict between the banks and the Coalition was more than that. The basis of the conflict was one that has a long history, and it is a conflict between two opposed perspectives on the world, two different "weltanschauungs," two different modes of rationality. The bankers' approach emphasized goals, measureable behaviors of exchange, and detached decision making indifferent to interests. The other, the approach of the

Coalition, emphasized quality of life and demonstrable formations of use and employment, sociality, and participation. The former, instrumental rationality, is epitomized by the cost accounting or bottom-line thinking of business organizations or the market place, the logico-deductive reasoning of bureaucratic organizations, and in the formal rationalization of law, as has occurred historically in Western jurisprudence. The second, substantive rationality, is primarily oriented socially and by value considerations. Where formal rationality asks, "Is it profitable?" , substantive rationality asks, "Is it right?" and "Does it correspond to a value-directed way of life?"

It is in the struggle of real human subjects against domination and control by formally rationalized structures, such as banking, that the ultimate human irrationality of capitalism is revealed. While actions taken by bankers, such as redlining or general disinvestment, make perfect sense based on the rationality of the bottom-line, the class struggle of the Coalition against such action helped reveal how the rational is irrational as it relates to a community of people as opposed to the narrow interests of those who profit from the rational calculation of the ledger.

The struggle of the Reinvestment Committee against the bankers, in that it revealed the irrationality of the banking system, can be understood as a kind of consciousness raising struggle. In challenging the banking system and its routine operating procedures, the members of the Reinvestment Committee learned about the role of banking and its effect on the lives of the people of the neighborhood. They began to say things that people from other committees, such as the City Services Committee, did not say. There is the example of R.G. saying, "banks will have to be democratized," C.F. facing the realization that they are dealing with a revolutionary idea, "telling banks what to do with money," T.P. pointing out the immorality of "banks ... walking from buildings" and wanting to "let them [people] know what banks do," and J.M. telling the bank vice president that he was getting angry because of the banker's subtle attack on people on welfare and minorities, and then telling him that "blacks and Hispanics make New York a viable city." In addition, instead of focusing on the divisions in our society, the Reinvestment Committee appeared to reach out to others, seeking to establish cooperative links with other neighborhood groups, in the city, the state, and even across the nation. In attacking an institution whose

policies were institutionally racist, the Reinvestment Committee was establishing important links between whites and minorities, showing that fighting class-based oppression can help to lessen racial divisions. Finally, the work of the Reinvestment Committee shows how ordinary people can not only win victories over dominant institutions but equally important over the arrogance of those who wield institutional power.

Chapter Eight

CONCLUSIONS

The northwest Bronx of the 1970s and 1980s was a segment of American society that underwent dramatic social change. The changes that occurred there can best be understood as involving previously hidden divisions coming to the surface and disrupting the normal routines of everyday individual and institutional life. Put differently, this means that for long term white residents of the northwest Bronx, the 1970s and 80s was a time when the racial and class divisions of our society came to their doorsteps. Where previously they were able to maintain separate living quarters from those who were different from them, come the 70s and 80s they could no longer do this. The reason they could no longer do this was primarily related to macro-level changes in the political, economic, and social system over which they had no control. Among the changes that occurred were a general decline of the economy of the entire northeast, the movement of manufacturing jobs out of New York City, a shift in our national politics away from a liberal activist state interested in helping the poor to a more conservative, budget minded state concerned with inflation and a stagnant economy, the continued movement of people out of the city to the suburbs, especially the

white middle classes, and with the movement of jobs, the middle classes, and less federal aid to cities, the phenomenon of fiscal crisis and the austerity state.

These macro-level changes at the national and regional level had consequences at the neighborhood level. In neighborhoods like the northwest Bronx very specific changes began to occur that ultimately changed the nature of its neighborhoods. For one thing starting in the 1960s and continuing into the 1970s, it became harder and harder for landlords to find white tenants for their vacant apartments. With low demand for apartments by whites and high demand by minorities, especially as the South Bronx began to "disintegrate," the old restrictive covenants that had once helped perpetuate racial segregation began to break down under the pressure of economic necessity. Even class segregation broke down as landlords no longer cared who rented the apartments as long as a rent was collected. In addition, as banks saw the writing on the wall, i.e. that the neighborhood was going to change racially and ethnically, they began to disinvest, thus making the prophecy of minority invasion and accompanying rapid deterioration a reality, a self-fulfilling prophecy. This in turn meant that a significant number of apartment buildings would deteriorate as landlords could no longer sell them or buy

them at profitable levels, nor even refinance and/or borrow to make necessary repairs.

Thus, as minorities began to move into the northwest Bronx in large numbers, with them came a host of changes that the white residents perceived as caused by their influx, with the most important and noticeable change being the deterioration of the housing stock.

Besides the white residents being affected by the changes sweeping the Bronx, there were also groups and institutions that could not help but be alarmed at what was happening. Most important among them were the clergymen of the northwest Bronx and Fordham University. Both the Catholic Church and the well known and respected university had a long history in the Bronx.

They saw the tide of deterioration as a threat to their respective positions, even their viability, with Fordham's attraction as a residential college surely affected and the Catholic Church's dioceses and their clergymen certainly feeling that they too could become "South-Bronxed," i.e. literally swept away with the burning and crumbling, as other parishes had been.

It was under these conditions that the idea of the Coalition was born. Paul Brant embodied the wants and desires of both institutions. It isn't hard to understand why both institutions were willing to assist

in the development of the new organization, with Fordham University supplying the knowledge base and most of the community organizers, and with the northwest Bronx Catholic Church supplying most everything else, including the full support of its vicar, Bishop Ahearn, its parish priests, its physical facilities, and perhaps most importantly its name, its prestige, and its legitimacy, all of which would be critical in getting what all such organizations need, namely, money.

Thus, there was the combination of a historical situation, of crisis-like proportions, and the perception of threat by two of the most important institutions of the Bronx. Of course there is a third ingredient, surely the most important one: the people of the northwest Bronx, both the white population and the growing minority population. This dissertation has been about the relationship between the organization founded by the important institutions and the people of the northwest Bronx. The nature of the relationship between these two variables has been the dominant concern of this analysis, with special attention being given to the issues of race, class, and democracy.

What can be concluded based on the data presented? Is there a set of definitive conclusions? No, the kind of analysis undertaken does not lend itself to definitive

conclusions, but some conclusions are suggested by the data and analysis.

First, the character of the struggle to save the northwest Bronx from the deterioration that had swept through the South Bronx was established by the founders of the Coalition, i.e. the Catholic Church. There is no question that this was and continues to be a Catholic Church dominated organization. It does not mean that the Church is the only influence, but it appears that it was the dominant one. This does not mean that what the Coalition did was controlled by the Cardinal of the Archdiocese of New York. No, not at all; instead what is meant is that Catholic clergymen and Catholic lay people were the dominant force within the organization and at least oversaw the activities of the organization. Catholic clergymen were represented in all the activities of the Coalition, from the Board of Directors, to local parish involvement in important activities, to the communities organizers who were supervised by ex-seminarians, to the lay activists who often were also active parishioners. What impact did Catholic Church domination have on the character of the organization? To call the organization Catholic Church dominated is meaningless unless it can be shown that it had its own special character, that the Church put its own indelible

mark on the soul of the organization. As described in Chapter 2, it appears that the Church influenced the general elitist nature of leadership, the hierarchical nature of the organization, and its general lack of real democracy with regard to organizational decision making and control.

Is any of the above meant to indicate that the Coalition was an ineffective organization. No, on the contrary, it was and continues to be a highly effective organization. Its "numbers" are truly impressive [footnote on accomplishments]. Nonetheless, its Catholic character appears to have influenced the kind of organization it became in a number of ways. Firstly, the fact that the organization that the Church created was an Alinsky-type organization does not appear to be accidental; there is a long standing relationship between the Catholic Church and Alinsky-type organizations. Alinsky himself believed very strongly that religion was one of the "natural" bases of community organization and so he often looked for Church involvement in the creation of local community organizations. Why would the Church have an affinity for the Alinsky model of community organization? An obvious one would simply be that it gave the Church an opportunity to play an important role in people's everyday lives. It gave the Church a more

meaningful relationship with its people, one that was not divorced from their everyday lives. But, there another reason for the Church's involvement somewhat less obvious. The other reason for the Church's affinity for Alinsky organizations may be its populist flavor, and therefore its lack of a strong political ideology. Since Alinsky believed that people should be organized "as they are" , without the use of any systematic ideology, the only political belief they had was that of "received political culture" which was non-ideological, and basically populist, or as described previously, "down-home-man-in- the -street" variety. This non-ideology was not only non-threatening to the Church but also allowed for the Church to exercise domination over the activities of the organization, and all this while singing the praises of "grassroots democracy." While there may have been grassroots participation, the control of the organization was by elites, with the most important elites being Catholic clergymen and Catholic laymen.

The second consequence of its Catholic Church character is tied to its emphasis on action as opposed to process. Here the focus is on the reasons for its involvement in the first place. The Church's involvement was not based on altruism; its involvement was based on self-interest; the Church in America has virtually no

history as a supporter of grassroots democracy for its own sake. While the Church in Latin America, or more properly, some individual Catholic clergymen, even Bishops in Latin America, have been supporters of grassroots democracy, even revolution, this has not been true of the Catholic Church's social activism in America. The Catholic Church has been involved in ethnic politics, but that is a far cry from grassroots democracy. Thus, while Paul Brant may have been quite idealistic about his reasons for involvement in neighborhood activism, there is ample evidence that he and even more clearly the clerics of the northwest Bronx were not so much interested in the stimulation or growth of grassroots democracy as in the use of the grassroots for accomplishing the tasks at hand. Thus, once the Coalition became an established organization, known both to municipal and private interests, less and less did it even attempt to involve large numbers of local residents in its activities. In fact there is evidence that it continually depended on the same basic core of white activists, who by race and class, were less and less representative of the new and emerging black and Hispanic majority.

Thus, there is evidence that Catholic Church involvement has meant a moderate politics (with radical

tactics), with an emphasis on grassroots participation without grassroots power. This in turn has allowed for Catholic Church domination of the organization. Catholic Church involvement has meant less of an emphasis on democracy and more of an emphasis on getting the job accomplished, which job also served the interests of the northwest Bronx Church.

A second conclusion suggested from the data is related to the above, even follows from it, but is distinct; this has to do with the issue of class struggle. Based on the above as well as data from the body of the dissertation, it appears that from its early beginnings, there was elite control of the Coalition and a general lack of real democracy within the organization. While there was substantial grassroots participation, this participation did not result in real democracy. As was stated earlier, any democratic elements that may have existed within the organization were stifled in favor of efficiency, order, and centralized and hierarchical control. Thus, rather than the Coalition being something resembling a neighborhood social movement it was much more like a neighborhood interest group, with the crucial distinction between movement and interest group being the amount of grassroots participation and level of spontaneity as opposed to organization. This being the case it is more

and more difficult to characterize the activities of the Coalition as class struggle with class consciousness. In other words, as the Coalition became more and more dominated by the few, as it began to depend more and more on a few core activists to accomplish its goals, then it moved away from the people, away from considerations of class, and more to considerations of goal attainment. In other words, the Coalition may have been engaged in class politics but more and more it isolated itself from the people and therefore became more and more like an interest group. As an interest group, it will pull for its own, it will try to get what it can for its people, but it will not identify with other city peoples or neighborhoods in the same plight as the people of the northwest Bronx. Thus, the behavior of the City Services Committee and its symbolism became more the model the Coalition's struggle than that of the Reinvestment Committee.

Finally, on the issue of race and class, here again, the problem with interest group politics without real grassroots participation and a conscious ideology is that it leaves unspoken what should be discussed, i.e. the divisions that continue to plague American society. On this issue, the evidence is that the Coalition, along with the impact of market forces, has helped to stabilize

the housing situation in the northwest Bronx. The Coalition has been instrumental in getting both private and public funding for the renovation of literally thousands of apartments. Coalition neighborhood associations have even developed their own local housing corporations which have taken over, renovated, and now manage apartment buildings. It appears that the northwest Bronx is stabilizing in a manner reminiscent of the way it once was. And, therein lies the problem. On the one hand, much has been accomplished, but on the other hand, the ultimate conservatism of the Coalition is revealed. Generally, the system of inequality that previously existed in the northwest Bronx has in part been reestablished (though at significantly lower levels). The northwest Bronx is now largely Hispanic and black, with a still significant though dwindling white population (though a recent increase in the number of Irish immigrants has altered the ratio of minority to white inhabitants in the Norwood section). The areas that were the "best" places to live have been maintained as such, e.g. along the Grand Concourse, Kingsbridge Heights, Bedford Park, and the areas that were always the least desirable are where the poor live, on Decatur, Jerome, and Webster. So, the abandonment and arson that once threatened the northwest Bronx appears to have been

stopped, and this of course is a great accomplishment. But, the success consists in part of simply reestablishing the old system of inequality that once existed. Furthermore, in that there has been a kind of moderate gentrification, with increased rents accompanying the renovation of most apartments (with two bedroom apartments now renting for \$800 a month) the poor have been squeezed out. While the issue of racial discrimination is probably less serious than it was in the 1970s, the neighborhood's stabilization at even moderately high rents means that the northwest Bronx is yet another neighborhood where the poor cannot live. A former Coalition organizer, now director of a northwest Bronx neighborhood housing corporation, appeared in the "New York Times" about a year ago with a priest from one of the local parishes. The story dealt with their efforts to get funding for the establishment of a shelter for homeless families in the northwest Bronx. Why a shelter for the homeless in the northwest Bronx? Obviously because there is a lack of affordable housing for the poor, not only in the city in general, but even in humble areas like the northwest Bronx.

A few years back, when I talked to this same former Coalition organizer, and asked him about managing buildings and about what he did when tenants did not pay

their rent, when the Coalition was in a position to act like a landlord, he said that it was indeed difficult, but that he had to do exactly what landlords do, i.e. evict people who did not pay their rent.

Thus, the Coalition may have succeeded in stabilizing the northwest Bronx, but it has done so by reproducing the same mechanisms (and relations) that had previously operated to maintain stability. The divisions that had previously existed but were in flux for a period of time are now going back in place, the northwest Bronx is returning to a state of equilibrium wherein conflict and turmoil move again below the surface, the previously existent status quo is again being reproduced.

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