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THE NEW LEFT IN GOVERNMENT: PART II THE VISTA PROGRAM AS "INSTITUTION-BUILDING"

(Executive Summary)

VISTA "is probably one of the few government agencies established in the '60s which is both fondly remembered by the Left and still staffed by leftists." This was the assessment of Mother Jones, a magazine published by the Foundation for National Progress, referring to a June 1980 Washington, D.C., conference commemorating the fifteenth anniversary of Volunteers in Service to America, originally part of President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty." That the journal of a foundation created in 1975 by the far-left Institute for Policy Studies should so characterize VISTA says much about the redirection of the agency during the Carter Administration under the leadership of two principal New Left activists, Sam Brown and Margery Tabankin. It also helps explain both the Reagan Administration's reported decision to phase out the program entirely by the close of fiscal 1983 and the widely-held perception of VISTA as a program which, from 1977 through 1980, was captured by New Left radical activists and used to funnel government funds to organizations advocating programs and strategies basically antithetical to American political and economic usages.

It was Brown's view that federal anti-poverty efforts had tended to degenerate into programs that encouraged dependency rather than "self-help" and that what was needed was a renewed emphasis on "citizen participation." Tabankin's view coincided with Brown's. Stressing the need to develop "institution-building" and "networking" at the local level through community organizing programs based on the nationwide network of radical organizations

For Part I, see Heritage Foundation Institution Analysis No. 9, "The New Left in Government: From Protest to Policy-Making," November 1978.

from which activists like Brown and herself had emerged, Tabankin said that "VISTA should work towards more equitable distribution of income and opportunities."

The result was the national grants program, whereby grants were awarded by ACTION headquarters to national organizations with affiliates in local communities without restrictions imposed by state or regional boundaries. These grants were to be used "in support of citizen participation organization building efforts and the creation/expansion of advocacy systems" rather than for any "direct service for the sake of service (i.e., the end goal is to provide a service)." As noted in the March/April 1978 issue of Working Papers for a New Society, another IPS-related publication, "this procedure shielded the agency's new direction from the public eye for a while -- an important strategy, as later became apparent."

The national grants program emerged from a lengthy "citizen review process" initiated early in 1977. Tabankin appears to have played an especially important role in this process and acknowledged that she had "made up the list" of those who should be invited to participate in a series of roundtable discussions held by VISTA in May and June of 1977. By ACTION's own account, the national grants concept "evolved" from these meetings, in which 100 organizations were represented, among them the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), Campaign for Economic Democracy, Federation of Southern Cooperatives, Laurel Springs Training Center, Midwest Academy, National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs, and National Training and Information Center. Of these, at least five -- ACORN, FSC, MA, NCUEA, and NTIC -- were among the first twelve recipients of national grants (ACORN benefitting through the Community Organizations Research and Action Project, which the ACORN leadership created specifically to handle VISTA funds). Another recipient was the Youth Project, a leftist funding agency for which Tabankin had worked as executive director.

One regional ACTION director was quoted as characterizing national grants as "Marge Tabankin's program and all her cronies." As summarized by Representative John M. Ashbrook (R-Ohio), "Of the 22 organizations represented at the meetings with which Ms. Tabankin claimed some prior association [exclusive of the Youth Project], 13 ended up as beneficiaries under the National VISTA Grants program." The leadership of these organizations, among them Michael Ansara of Massachusetts Fair Share and Heather Booth of the Midwest Academy, had in many cases been active in groups like Students for a Democratic Society and in annual conferences conducted by an IPS offshoot known as the National Conference on Alternative State and Local Public Policies, one of several IPS projects funded in part by Tabankin's Youth Project.

Subsequently-uncovered abuses in the operation of the national grants program included the use of volunteers in restricted staff-related work, union organizing, and political activity.

Under the ACORN/CORAP grant, VISTAs engaged in blatantly political activity in Arkansas and Missouri, while five VISTAs were active in a labor organizing campaign in New Orleans. In like manner, under the Midwest Academy grant, two VISTAs worked virtually full-time in Rhode Island in labor organizing among jewelry workers. Training materials had to be withdrawn from use by both CORAP and Midwest because of "intemperate" and excessively confrontational language.

National grantees were not the only organizations of a radical hue to benefit under the new program. Sponsoring organizations like the Illinois Public Action Council, Cleveland Women Working, the California Housing Action and Information Network, and the Institute for the Study of Civic Values also received assistance. Both CWW and CHAIN have been actively represented at "Alternative Public Policy" gatherings staged by NCASLPP or CED; and IPAC, working through a subsidiary known as the Illinois Coalition Against Reagan Economics (ICARE), mounted a demonstration in Chicago during July 1981 to protest an appearance by President Reagan. The Institute for the Study of Civic Values, which was represented at a July 1977 NCASLPP conference, recently produced "The Cruelty Index -- A Guide to Reagan Budget Cuts" and "The Greed Index -- A Guide to Reagan Tax Reductions."

Recently-discovered documentary material reveals that a major training contract was awarded in August 1978 to the Laurel Springs Institute, self-described as a project of a Campaign for Economic Democracy enterprise known as the Laurel Springs Educational Center. As far back as May 5, 1977, Tom Hayden wrote to Tabankin, "We want a voice in the training of VISTAs in California and the definition of their work." The CED staff employee recommended to Tabankin by Hayden was among those later invited to the roundtable meetings.

Laurel Springs Educational Center was specifically designed to train activists "in the fields of electoral campaigning and community organizing" and to enable participants to "learn more about the way our economic and political systems operate and what CED's alternatives are." It was also designed, in the words of Hayden's wife, Jane Fonda, to aid CED in "building a political power base." It is therefore not altogether surprising that assessments of certain VISTA-related LSI programs written by ACTION officials have emphasized that CED and LSI were virtually indistinguishable, that project meetings were dominated by extraneous CED business, or that VISTAs were pressured to attend CED meetings unrelated to their projects. Of the eleven staff members and consultants originally proposed by LSI, no fewer than nine had been actively involved in CED, frequently in leadership capacities.

Laurel Springs training material was pronouncedly New Left in content. It included a training manual issued by the Midwest Academy and a resource list recommending publications of such organizations as the CED-related California Public Policy Center

and an SDS offshoot known as the North American Congress on Latin America. Past workshops dealt with such subjects as "An Overview of Electoral Strategy in Relation To Community Organizing" and a "discussion of the meaning of Economic Democracy as it relates to community organizing." The propriety of government support for such a radical political apparatus is open to serious question, but it may be that the machinery of VISTA itself must be changed if similar abuses under future Sam Browns and Marge Tabankins are to be prevented.

THE NEW LEFT IN GOVERNMENT: PART II
THE VISTA PROGRAM AS "INSTITUTION-BUILDING"

INTRODUCTION

On the weekend of June 13-15, 1980, a conference was held in Washington, D.C., to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), the domestic anti-poverty program operated by "the federal voluntary service agency" known as ACTION. At a White House reception to help mark the occasion, Rosalynn Carter praised the estimated 1,000 assembled volunteers for their service to "people whose needs have been forgotten or were never understood -- people in Appalachia, in the Indian nations, the South Bronx, Chinatowns, Hispanic communities, the Ozarks -- in all our states."

Among those attending the reception, as reported in the Washington Star for June 14, 1980, were ACTION Director Sam Brown, ACTION Deputy Director Mary King, VISTA Director Margery Tabankin, and former Peace Corps Director Sargent Shriver, who observed that "The fact that VISTA is alive and growing and being celebrated at the White House is...a sign of its success." Shriver also served as master of ceremonies for an evening awards ceremony and benefit at the Kennedy Center; according to the Star account, "With singers Peter, Paul and Mary and John Denver heading the entertainment bill, well-heeled supporters of VISTA bought \$1,500 boxes for the event, and single tickets went for a modest \$10." The September/October 1980 issue of Mother Jones, a magazine published by the Foundation for National Progress, a creature of the "far-left" Institute for Policy Studies,* reported that an "unusual aspect" of this benefit was the "coughing up" of "\$2,500 or more each" by such sponsors as "AT&T, Atlantic Richfield, the Carnegie Corporation, the Exxon Corporation, the est Foundation and Laurance Rockefeller."

Less than a year later, the administration of Ronald Reagan reportedly had decided to abolish VISTA by the close of fiscal year 1983, a dramatic reversal that has prompted some sharp criticism. The question is, quite simply: Why? Given VISTA's seeming acceptance since its creation in 1965 as part of Lyndon

*In its financial report for 1976, the Foundation for National Progress is described as "formed in 1975 to carry out on the West Coast the charitable and educational activities of the Institute for Policy Studies." For a detailed examination of FNP, its subsidiary projects, and its ties to both the Institute for Policy Studies and Tom Hayden's Campaign for Economic Democracy, see Heritage Foundation Institution Analysis No. 14, "Campaign for Economic Democracy: Part II, The Institute for Policy Studies Network," April 1981. The origins, leadership, activities, and institutional perspective of IPS, which was characterized as a "far-left radical 'think tank'" in the 1971 annual report of the House Committee on Internal Security, are treated in Heritage Foundation Institution Analysis No. 2, "Institute for Policy Studies," May 1977.

Johnson's much-heralded "War on Poverty," what has happened to discredit it so completely in the eyes of the new administration?

The problem, it seems, is not merely budgetary. Rather, VISTA is now viewed as a program so conceptually flawed that, no matter what the intent of its creators, it became during the Carter Administration an instrument for New Left activism rather than an agency to provide "direct service" to America's poor. Indeed, Mother Jones has observed with unusual candor that VISTA "is probably one of the few government agencies established in the '60s which is both fondly remembered by the Left and still staffed by leftists."

The present study is devoted largely to the actual operation of the national grants program through which Brown and Tabankin redirected VISTA along essentially New Left lines; included are representative case studies of alleged abuses and examples of demonstrably radical organizations that were among the program's principal beneficiaries. The appendix provides additional background data on how, and for what ends, these individuals and organizations operated as a closely-knit network in conceiving and implementing the grants program.

NATIONAL GRANTS: THE PATTERN OF ABUSE

The national grants program appears to have evolved from three roundtable meetings conducted by ACTION in Washington, D.C., during May and June 1977. The evidence summarized in the appendix demonstrates that Tabankin played a crucial role in organizing these sessions and that those invited formed a network of like-minded New Left-oriented activists whose predispositions were shared by the ACTION/VISTA leadership. This virtually guaranteed a radical orientation for the new program before the sessions had even been held.

Just how the national grants program operated under Brown and Tabankin is explained in a report prepared during 1978 by the investigative staff of the House Committee on Appropriations and published in the record of an April 5, 1979, hearing before the Committee's Subcommittee on the Departments of Labor and Health, Education, and Welfare. It found that, unlike other grants made by ACTION, all of the national grants approved as of September 30, 1978, "were awarded without formal advertising or requests for proposals." In other words, as the report noted elsewhere, all "were awarded noncompetitively." Instead of the previously-followed procedure, "applications were informally solicited by circulating the word about the new program among community action organizations with interstate operations. Fourteen applications were received, and 12 were ultimately approved." Also, "Another 20 local organizations represented at the [roundtable] conference were subsequently assigned VISTAs under the National Grants program."

Implementation of this program resulted in a number of abuses that were discussed at length in the staff report. In general, it was found that "rules governing selection of VISTA sponsors" and "spelled out in the VISTA policy guidelines" had not been properly observed by ACTION "in numerous instances." Rather,

The Investigative Staff found volunteers working in many communities and with constituencies that would not qualify under the Community Services Administration poverty income guidelines for participation in Federal programs designed to help the poor. VISTA volunteers were also found working with groups whose chances for survival without the continued services of a full-time organizer were poor....

New, less stringent approval policies resulted in assignment of volunteers "to a number of local sponsors who were never incorporated as non-profit organizations" and who were approved in some cases "without on-site visits."* Also,

A combination of poorly trained supervisors and inadequate monitoring has resulted in national grant VISTAs becoming involved in restricted staff-related work, union organizing, and political activities. These situations may not have developed if project supervisors had been better trained to draw the line between proper and improper VISTA activity, and if the State directors, who might ordinarily have been expected to pick up the violations, had an interest in monitoring the projects properly.

The many allegedly improper activities that grew to plague VISTA's national grants program developed in a number of cases. Perhaps the most glaring examples were the Community Organizations Research and Action Project (CORAP) and the Midwest Academy, both of which were discussed at length in the investigative staff report.

THE ACORN/CORAP GRANT

The CORAP grant was awarded in September 1977 and provided \$470,475 "for the training of 100 VISTAs, of whom 80 were to be placed with the ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) field organization to work with low-income people on a broad scope of local issues" in Arkansas, Texas, Missouri, Tennessee, Louisiana, Florida, and South Dakota.

*"ACTION State director recommendations for approval or disapproval of projects were often overruled by either the Project Review Board (PRB) or the VISTA director," a problem illustrated by the Midwest Academy grant; see below, p. 10.

The ACORN leadership organized CORAP specifically to receive and administer VISTA funds. As noted in the investigative staff report, however, it was

difficult to distinguish between the makeup and operation of the organizations. The officers of both the CORAP board and the ACORN board are the same individuals. The project supervisor and the project coordinator are paid under the grant for full-time employment, but both are also on the ACORN payroll. Training under the grant is provided by the Arkansas Institute for Social Justice (the Institute), another spinoff organization run by two former ACORN organizers.

It appears that the VISTA grant was crucial to the survival of ACORN. The report quoted an ACORN publication's account of an October 15, 1977, meeting of the ACORN Executive Board at which consideration was given to the organization's "policy of taking money from the federal government." It was noted that "In the past ACORN has avoided being this close to federal funds, but our financial situation is such that we can no longer afford to be as distant--unless we are willing to see the organization risk death." The report observed that in states "visited where VISTAs were working, ACORN had no more than 1 or 2 staff organizers assigned as compared with a total of 32 VISTAs" and added that "ACORN had at least 16 organizers who were immediately converted to the VISTA payroll upon approval of the grant." The conclusion reached was that "VISTAs supported by the grant probably comprise the majority of the overall organization."

Other adverse findings with regard to the CORAP grant abound, but the heart of the matter is found in certain proscribed activities for which volunteers were allegedly used:*

In May of this year, in connection with the Arkansas primary election, at least one VISTA (possibly more) was instructed by his ACORN supervisor to participate in a mailing of a slate of endorsements to ACORN members, develop and reproduce a flyer endorsing candidates to State and local office for distribution at neighborhood meetings, cover the polls and pass out a slate of ACORN endorsements, and distribute endorsed candidates' literature to members.

* * * * *

Also, in Arkansas, the Investigative Staff interviewed a VISTA who had been involved in scheduling appointments for the local ACORN Political Action

*It is noted that these questionable "assignments were all made...well after ACTION's own Office of Compliance had completed an audit of ACORN which emphasized that volunteers were under no circumstances to get involved in the political process."

Committee (APAC) to interview candidates running for office. APAC is the political arm of ACORN. In the St. Louis area, VISTAs were interviewed who had been routinely engaged in taking ACORN groups to the State capital (Jefferson City, Missouri) to meet legislators and lobby for particular bills.

Another area of apparent impropriety uncovered by the investigative staff was that of union organizing:

Section 404 of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act prohibits VISTAs from engaging in labor organizing activities and imposes restrictions on funds appropriated under the act from being used "directly or indirectly" for such purposes. ACORN is involved in labor organizing. At its October 1977 meeting, the executive board unanimously endorsed a motion giving the ACORN chief organizer the authority and responsibility to organize the household workers in New Orleans and other unions along the same lines. The ULO (United Labor Organizations), which was described as a "separate entity" that ACORN "is helping to get started," shares space in the same building as ACORN in New Orleans. The sign in front of the building says "ACORN" on one side and "ULO" on the other. The HWOC (Household Workers Organizing Committee), also located in the same building, was said to be a ULO "subsidiary organization." It was stated that ACORN rents the building and that both ULO and HWOC rent space from ACORN, but the Investigative Staff was unable to verify this arrangement without access to ACORN's accounting records.

Five VISTAs were actively working with the HWOC, reporting directly to the chief organizer, until late this past spring when the ACTION Office of Compliance directed that the assignments be terminated. There is as yet, however, very much of an indirect involvement of VISTAs and the use of grant money in the labor organizing activity of ACORN. First, ACORN has only limited staff resources....Without the VISTAs to take over neighborhood organizing chores, it is doubtful whether the manpower would be available to mount a credible union organizing effort. Thus, the availability of VISTAs is facilitating (if not making practicable) the ACORN move into labor organizing. Second, there are no safeguards, of which the Investigative Staff is aware, to prevent membership dues solicited by VISTAs from being used for labor organizing. The dues are used to cover all expenses of the organization, and these expenses would include, for example, the salary of the chief organizer, who, reportedly, has made himself responsible for the household workers organizing project. The Investigative Staff believes the collection of dues, by VISTAs, which go in any part to support this

kind of activity is in violation of Section 404 of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act.

THE MIDWEST ACADEMY GRANT

Some of the problems attributed to the ACORN/CORAP grant were also evident in the case of the Midwest Academy, one of the New Left's principal training facilities. Midwest was founded by Heather Booth, described in a recent, undated Midwest brochure as "the leading social action trainer in the United States" and as a person who "has previously worked as a civil rights and labor union organizer." This source fails to mention her former activism in the militantly radical Students for a Democratic Society, but it does specify that she "also serves as Executive Director of the Citizen/Labor Energy Coalition." Among "resource people" listed in the brochure are at least two key movement activists invited to the 1977 VISTA roundtable discussions: Robert Creamer, executive director of the Illinois Public Action Council, and Day Creamer, executive director of Women Employed.

According to a brief item appearing in the Winter 1974 issue of Working Papers for a New Society,* the "summer 1973 session" was "the Academy's first term" and was "focused primarily on organizing working women, while the fall session was to be more diverse." Midwest "offers classroom work and practical experience where possible in community and group organization, labor union organizing, and political campaigns." Like so many other groups involved in the national grants program, the Midwest Academy has received funds from the Youth Project, a primary radical funding apparatus whose 1977 annual report characterized Midwest as

a national training center for community leaders and organizers. Based in Chicago and staffed by experienced organizers and researchers, the Academy holds two-week

*Working Papers for a New Society was described in Beginning the Second Decade: 1963-1973, an otherwise undated publication issued by the Institute for Policy Studies, as "sponsored with the sister Cambridge [Massachusetts] Institute for Policy Studies." According to the same source, Cambridge was one of several locations in which IPS "Fellows encouraged and aided in the development of long-term projects and institutes...." Martin Carnoy and Derek Shearer, writing in Economic Democracy: The Challenge of the 1980s, describe Working Papers as "created to provide a link between alternative policy thinkers and political activists, and to answer the questions: What is the task of the Left? and What works?" They further characterize it as the "best progressive policy journal in the country" and as "read by congressional aides, columnists such as Tom Wicker, public officials like the mayor of Cleveland, and thousands of professionals, union officials, and community organizers." For a brief discussion of the relationship between Working Papers and certain other segments of the IPS-related economic democracy movement, see Heritage Foundation Institution Analysis No. 15, "The Attack on the Corporation," September 1981.

training sessions in organizing and weekend workshops in fundraising and research. In addition, the Academy conducts over 50 on-site consultations and training sessions each year. Since it was founded in 1973, over 6,000 leaders and organizers have participated in these training sessions, including representatives of Massachusetts Fair Share, Carolina Action, the Vermont Alliance, the East Tennessee Research Group, Environmental Action, The Gray Panthers, the National Organization for Women and many other citizen action, labor and women's organizations.

The report also revealed that "in 1977, the Academy initiated several expansion projects" for which the Youth Project provided support. Midwest "played a key role in the development of the National Women's Employment Project by providing staff and leadership training for the six working women's organizations involved" and "laid the ground work for development of a national energy coalition [presumably CLEC] and expanded its own program by establishing a Labor Education Division and a Research Division."

A useful insight into Booth's perspective is gained from remarks reportedly delivered to the opening session of the fifth annual National Conference on Alternative State and Local Public Policies, held at Bryn Mawr College near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in August 1979.* As recounted in the August 24, 1979, issue of Information Digest:

The anti-business message was taken up at the opening session by Heather Tobis Booth, director of the organizer training school, the Midwest Academy and of the Citizen-Labor Energy Coalition. Booth forecast a "new level of political activities distinct from the 60's and 70's." She characterized the 1960s as a time of "multi-sector movements inspired by a new analysis," and the 1970s as a period of local "digging-in" amidst "popular disillusionment and disunion caused by economic decline." Stating that the new economic crisis was creating a new unity of effort, Booth said that a coalition of labor, citizens groups, women, minorities and environmentalists - which sounded very much like the Citizen-Labor Energy Coalition (CLEC) which she leads - would contest national policies, "organize across sectors," and focus on anti-corporate issues [punctuation as in original].

*The conference program reflects that, in addition to Heather Booth, scheduled speakers included Michael Ansara and Carolyn Lucas of Massachusetts Fair Share and Loni Hancock, described as "Regional Director, VISTA, San Francisco." Other speakers included Tom Hayden of the Campaign for Economic Democracy; Byron Dorgan, former North Dakota Tax Commissioner and now a member of the U.S. House of Representatives; and Marion Barry, a member of the steering committee of the National Conference on Alternative State and Local Public Policies and Mayor of the District of Columbia.

According to ACTION, an initial grant of \$432,235 was awarded to Midwest on September 30, 1977. A March/April 1978 Working Papers article stated that "The Midwest Academy's handling of the grant illustrates how the new system works" and reported that Midwest's "primary consideration" in placing volunteers was "to strengthen existing statewide organizations." The

academy gave five VISTA volunteers each to a black, Latino, and consumer group in Illinois to help develop the individual organizations and to strengthen their ties with the Illinois Public Action Coalition....

The academy also placed VISTA volunteers with groups that don't necessarily relate to larger organizations, but have the potential to unite in other ways. Volunteers went, for instance, to six new working women's organizations on the East Coast and to two established ones in Cleveland and Boston. Another group went to the Carolina Brown Lung Association, which organizes disabled textile workers in North and South Carolina. Yet another went to the New Jersey Senior Citizens Coalition, a statewide organization that recently won a campaign to reduce the cost of all prescriptions for senior citizens to \$1.

The Midwest Academy was responsible for selection and recruitment of its volunteers and, under its contract with VISTA, provided ten supervisors for backup and support. It also conducted two weeks of training for both volunteers and supervisors. Some training was done at the academy's Chicago headquarters and some closer to where the volunteers were assigned.

The investigative staff report found that sponsors under the Midwest grant were "independent entities" not formally affiliated with Midwest and that the "issues of the sponsors were parochial to the geographic areas they were serving and not part of a nationally coordinated program." The director of VISTA had specified that national grantees "were to have national or multi-regional affiliations" and that they "were to be selected because their projects demonstrated high national impact or addressed a special need/program emphasis area of high priority to VISTA." The staff report concluded, however, that Midwest "does not meet these criteria." Specifically,

All sponsors visited stated they were independent entities and their only relationship with Midwest was for preservice training and occasional consultation with the Midwest advisor. There was no direct supervision by Midwest. When interviewed, Midwest's director told the Investigative Staff that the term "affiliate" had been loosely used during the early stages of applying for the grant.

Training under Midwest's auspices was found to be at best uneven, but the real problem lay in the nature of the organization's training materials. The staff report concluded that some of the language contained in them "is intemperate and, if taken literally, could encourage VISTAs to take actions not contemplated by the Congress." This problem had also developed with respect to CORAP, which apparently ceased using such materials in its training of VISTAs. ACTION stated that "VISTA ordered Midwest to discontinue the use" of its offending material "in future VISTA training" and claimed that "ACTION officials were unaware such material was included as part of the training materials made available for VISTAs." In view of Tabankin's admittedly close relationship with Booth and both Robert and Day Creamer, such an avowal may strike some as being at best disingenuous; a review of several "Direct Action Organizing" documents prepared and disseminated by the Midwest Academy certainly indicates that the passages cited by the investigative staff are far from atypical. As "examples of the questionable passages" contained in Midwest training material provided to VISTA volunteers, the staff report reproduced the following:

"The Third Principle of Direct Action organizing is that it attempts to alter the relations of power between people's organizations and their real enemies. The enemies are often unresponsive politicians, tax assessors, utilities, landlords, government agencies, large corporations or banks. [Emphasis added]

* * * * *

"Give people a 'taste of blood.' Push your opponents so hard you can see them squirm.

* * * * *

"You may want to assign some people to be 'inciters' and move about to heat up the action getting people angrier and encouraging them to show their anger. You may at other times want some 'calmers' to stand near people who may be disruptive to the focus of the action.

* * * * *

"Make what the opposition is doing or not doing sound scandalous. It generally is scandalous, but the edge may have been dulled by the routine manner in which it is normally treated.

* * * * *

"Your power is your ability to hurt the target or withhold something the target wants. The hurt can be immediate, as in a strike or boycott, or it can be potential, as when bad publicity will cause a politician

to be unseated. You should always know exactly what kind of power you are using and how it will work.

* * * * *

"Stunts can help * * *. If, for example, a politician won't meet with you, tape a sign across his office which says, 'This Office Closed to the Public.' If someone won't come into a debate, put a dummy in the chair and debate that for dramatic affect.

* * * * *

"Be ever on the lookout to play targets off against each other, Republican vs. Democrat, Up-State vs. Down-State, In Group vs. Out Group. Your enemy's enemy may be your ally * * *.

* * * * *

"* * * Civil disobedience * * * is not generally a good mass recruitment tactic. There are some exceptions. A community group * * * found that by having several hundred people cross a strategic street corner at rush hour, cars could be prevented from making a right turn on a red signal and traffic would be backed up for miles. The leadership was unjustly arrested * * * [punctuation as in original]."

In dealing with the question of how sponsors were selected under the Midwest grant, the investigative staff observed that "A number of the organizations were not serving poverty constituencies, and the VISTAs assigned were not working with poor people." In some cases, "State directors advised...that once they had disapproved the sponsors, they were never approached again until after the projects were approved" by higher authority.*

*State directors had "recommended disapproval of some four or five components" listed in sponsors' project narratives, but ACTION "headquarters personnel" claimed the projects were approved anyway because subsequently-submitted data "had convinced the State directors of the projects' appropriateness" or because "the Project Review Board had overruled the State director for its own reasons." It should be noted that Midwest's initial application for a national grant was approved by a nine-member Project Review Board. This approval applied to Midwest itself and to "most of the organizations which were to receive volunteers; other organizations were conditionally approved and one disapproved." Shortly thereafter, "the project was again reviewed and approved" in its entirety "by the chairman of the PRB and two other officials, without apparent consideration for the PRB disapproval of one project or the recommendations of several State directors for disapproval of other proposed sponsors." Interestingly enough, "Of the three approving officials...the chairman of the PRB was a consultant to ACTION" who was "subsequently put on the rolls as a full-time employee, and another was the executive director of one of the local sponsoring organizations approved to receive VISTAs."

The investigative staff "visited 11 of the local sponsors under the grant." Of these projects, "5 had the objective of improving the lot of workingwomen." The problem was that it had not been "established that the workingwomen were poor or the proposed VISTA assignments poverty related." In addition, several were found to be seriously deficient as to staffing. At three sites in New England, groups were found "to have primarily one-person staffs, with that one person being the VISTA volunteer." In Chicago, it was discovered that an organization which "did not exist prior to the grant application" was "even now...a one-man organization, with five VISTA volunteers assisting him." The staff report observed that Midwest had stated in its project narrative

that the local sponsors were selected on the basis of "a past history of success in selecting key issues and getting results; a tradition of good trainee supervision; solid prior funding or * * * a realistic funding base on which to begin operations; roots in and skill at organizing in a poverty community and a demonstrable need for the volunteers." The Investigative Staff believes that these criteria were largely disregarded in selecting sponsors. Rather, it appears that sponsors were selected on the basis of Midwest's prior acquaintance with the supervisors of the local organizations, coupled with the agency's desire to support a working-women's program.

The staff also uncovered other seeming irregularities, among them the questionable use of VISTA volunteers as staff employees by organizations for which they had performed exactly the same functions before they were put on the VISTA payroll. At the offices of three sponsors, it was even found that "the VISTA volunteer was the only full-time employee."

In Rhode Island, two volunteers assigned to the Rhode Island Workers Association "were engaged substantially full time in proscribed union organizing related activity" among jewelry workers, publishing a monthly newsletter which stated in its first issue that "Although we may be working in different factories, our wages, benefits, and working conditions are the same everywhere - - they stink [punctuation as in original]" and characterized itself as "the newsletter of the Jewelry Workers Organizing Committee (JWOC), a new community group in Rhode Island."* Both VISTAs had been working for RIWA at the time they were placed on the VISTA

*The 1979 annual report of the Youth Project described the JWOC as "a special program of the Rhode Island Workers Association, an eight-year-old organization working with unemployed workers and welfare recipients in Rhode Island" and reported that, "With Youth Project support, JWOC publishes a monthly newsletter featuring articles on legal rights, unemployment and welfare procedures and occupational safety and health."

payroll, and neither they nor their project supervisor acknowledged any impropriety. Instead, they argued that "getting workers together is not necessarily union organizing activity; 'confrontation' with the employer is the critical factor." The state director of ACTION, apparently aware of the situation, "did not see fit to visit the project or make any effort to stop it." Eventually, ACTION's Office of Compliance reviewed the project and directed that the grantee discontinue all involvement of VISTAs in activities related to the organizing of jewelry workers, although, "For reasons not altogether clear, the incident was not included in the generally favorable report on the Midwest grant."

RADICAL SPONSORING ORGANIZATIONS

Certain other sponsoring organizations operating under the national grantees are of interest because of their ties to the radical left movement. Representative examples include:

- * the Illinois Public Action Council, whose sponsorship involves 19 volunteers working to "Continue to provide ongoing research and information to local community organizations; develop consumer energy councils; strengthen current community organizations; develop and train local leadership in skills of research, problem analysis and strategy development." One of IPAC's recent activities was its active involvement in a demonstration against President Reagan during an appearance by the President in Chicago, Illinois, on July 7, 1981. The demonstration was sponsored by the Illinois Coalition Against Reagan Economics (ICARE), a coalition reportedly organized by IPAC to block cuts in the federal budget under the Reagan program and to advance a "new political program supported by a new political movement" dedicated to "a non-interventionist foreign policy, participatory democracy, alternative technology, energy conservation, and full employment."
- * Cleveland Women Working, with two volunteers in a project on "Upgrading the pay and status of low-income women office workers through education advocacy and organizing task forces of working women." In May 1978, several representatives of this organization participated in a conference on "Women in the Economy: Policies and Strategies for Change" that was held in Cleveland, Ohio, under the auspices of the National Conference on Alternative State and Local Public Policies. Other participants included representatives of the "Director's Office" at ACTION, the National Organization for Women, Women Employed, the Coalition of Labor Union Women, Working Papers, and the Campaign for Economic Democracy.
- * the California Housing Action and Information Network (CHAIN), with a ten-volunteer project in Sacramento "To establish or expand 10 low-income tenant organizing

projects in San Jose the San Francisco Bay area, Sacramento, Davis and the North Coast areas [punctuation as in original]" and a three-volunteer effort in Laguna Beach to "Work on local housing issues as well as statewide issues such as rent control, ordinances, just-cause evictions, production of low-income housing" and to "organize tenant unions." Members of CHAIN were actively involved in the Second California Conference on Alternative Public Policy, organized by the Campaign for Economic Democracy with major assistance from the California Public Policy Center and held in Santa Barbara in February 1977, and the third annual California Conference on Alternative Public Policy, held in Oakland in February 1978. The Campaigner for Economic Democracy stated in its March 1977 issue that "Cary Lowe, co-director of the California Public Policy Center, is also interim coordinator of CHAIN" and further revealed that "CED forces are active in CHAIN and related efforts, like the attempt to pass the Berkeley Rent Control Initiative this June." On October 2, 1980, the San Diego Daily Transcript published an article which reported that the California director of ACTION had been informed by his regional director "that there may be cases of Vista [sic] workers involved in voter registration drives in San Diego in connection with the rent control initiative." CHAIN had requested volunteers and supervisors in 1978, according to this account, and had listed on its organizational chart the San Diego Fair Rent Coalition, active in pushing the rent control initiative. A former VISTA supervisor had filed a quarterly report covering the period April through June 1979 in which he had stated his objective as "Achieve rent control programs at the local level" and had reported as an "actual accomplishment" in San Diego the fact that he had "organized petition drive placing rent control on ballot. Result: Still collecting signatures."

- * the Institute for the Study of Civic Values, an organization whose president, former National Student Association president Edward Schwartz, was an active participant in the July 1977 annual gathering of the National Conference on Alternative State and Local Public Policies, held in Denver, Colorado, and attended by such other movement leaders as Sam Brown, Loni Hancock, Michael Ansara, and Tom Hayden. ACTION data reflect that volunteers were assigned "TO ENABLE COMMUNITY PEOPLE TO RUN SELF-HELP PROJECTS TO MEET THEIR ENERGY RELATED NEEDS, INCLUDING THE CRISIS OF FUEL AND GASOLINE COSTS." Like the Illinois Public Action Council, the Institute for the Study of Civic Values has also engaged in a campaign designed to fuel opposition to the Reagan Administration's program of budget reductions. In March 1981, the Institute issued an eleven-page publication containing "The Cruelty Index--A Guide to Reagan Budget Cuts" and "The Greed Index--A Guide to Reagan Tax Reductions." The "Cruelty Index"

lists a succession of "hardships" that will presumably accrue "under the Reagan program" to low-income and middle-income families; it is also characterized as "a measure of the hardships imposed upon a community or city by Ronald Reagan's proposed budget cuts in 1982." The "Greed Index" is described as "a measure of the benefits that the taxpayers--primarily wealthy taxpayers--will receive under the President's Tax Reduction plan in 1982." The "Cruelty Index" lists numerous categories of federal spending programs and records "the funds cut from the federal budget in terms of Cruelty Points." The purpose of the Institute's "Cruelty Index" and "Greed Index" is amply conveyed by the wording of a question at the end: "Is it worth all the suffering the program will cause?"

THE LAUREL SPRINGS INSTITUTE TRAINING CONTRACT

One case study merits special attention. Recently-obtained documentary evidence provides details of a grant of approximately \$200,000 for the training of VISTA volunteers in ACTION's Region IX. The background is established by a letter from Tom Hayden of the Campaign for Economic Democracy to Marge Tabankin of VISTA:

TOM HAYDEN

May 5, 1977

Dear Marge,

I'm sorry we didn't have more time to talk the other day.

The CED will view the new Administration by several concrete standards, including how VISTA-type programs work. Either they will go back to effective community organizing, or they should be shut down.

We want a voice in the training of VISTAs in California and the definition of their work. This should not be farmed out to individuals without a base or to traditional agencies.

Sam indicated his agreement with this approach, though I sensed a need to pursue the implications further.

Therefore, I am proposing a) that we in California will brainstorm about VISTA possibilities and b) you should be directly in touch with Bonnie Ladin of our organization, who was once a very effective VISTA organizer in Long Island (before she ran afoul of the Nixon group).

Specifically I would hope she will be invited to any national brainstorming sessions you might be having. She is reachable at P.O. Box 22699, San Francisco, Cal. 94122, (415) 386-8475.

I know you are on a tight schedule between now and August. Let me know how fast we should move, and we will not fail you.

Let's get it together again.

Love,

/s/ Tom

Tom

Slightly more than a month later, on June 10, 1977, Tabankin responded with the following letter:

Mr. Thomas Hayden
152 Wadsworth Street
Santa Monica, California 90405

Dear Tom:

I too am sorry we couldn't talk longer when you were here with Sam.

I took this job because I believe VISTA should be redirected to volunteers working for grassroots community organizations, especially as organizers. However, as you point out, training is very important, as is placement.

You are correct that Sam also agrees with this emphasis on community organizing and training, and I believe that is why I was hired for this job.

I will have [name indistinct], who is dealing with national VISTA programming, contact Bonnie Ladin of your organization to talk about organizational concerns, and to hopefully figure out a direction to move in.

If I can be in California between now and the summer, I'd love to sit down with you folks.

My love to Jane [Fonda, Hayden's wife].

Warm regards,

/s/

Marge Tabankin
Acting Deputy Associate Director
for VISTA and AEP

Both the Campaign for Economic Democracy and another organization listed as "Laurel Springs Training Center" were represented at Tabankin's roundtable sessions in May and June of 1977. These were obviously the "national brainstorming sessions" to which Hayden had asked that Bonnie Ladin of CED be invited. A June 7, 1977, robotype letter to Ladin from Sam Brown demonstrates that she was invited to at least the meeting of June 17, billed as "a wide ranging discussion of the future of our domestic programs" with the aim of generating "new ideas for demonstration projects and for strengthening current programs" maintained by ACTION and VISTA.

The inclusion of the "Laurel Springs Training Center" in ACTION's roundtable meetings is of particular significance. This was clearly a reference to the Laurel Springs Educational Center, one of the Campaign for Economic Democracy's principal enterprises, the nature of which has been discussed at some length in a previous study.*

The June-July 1977 ced news [sic] reported that the Laurel Springs Ranch, located ten miles north of Santa Barbara, had been purchased to be "used by the Campaign for Economic Democracy" for several purposes, among them "CED's Organizer Training Institute." A CED appeal signed by Hayden, Fonda, U.S. Representative Ronald Dellums, and United Farm Workers President Cesar Chavez spoke of the "opportunity to meet and get to know political activists from all over the state" in

periodic organizer training workshops -- some in the cities and others at the Laurel Springs Retreat in the mountains above Santa Barbara -- where you can increase your skills in the fields of electoral campaigning and community organizing or learn more about the way our economic and political systems operate and what CED's alternatives are.

CED's view of "the way our economic and political systems operate" is amply conveyed in one of its promotional brochures, which decries the "racism and sexism and joblessness and wars and inflation and...sugar-coated poisonings of our minds and bodies" supposedly caused by "this source of our ills" and "stink in our midst" that "is called Corporate Capitalism." Its "alternatives" are those of the so-called economic democracy movement, economic democracy being, in the words of one of its principal theoreticians, essentially "a euphemism for democratic socialism" that is "also a way of going beyond the usual idea of socialism to... workers' control and consumers on corporate boards."**

*See Heritage Foundation Institution Analysis No. 13, "Campaign for Economic Democracy: Part I, The New Left in Politics," September 1980.

**For a detailed explication of the economic democracy movement's program, see Heritage Foundation Institution Analysis No. 15, "The Attack on the Corporation," September 1981.

Hayden's admonition that VISTA training "should not be farmed out to individuals without a base" should be taken in conjunction with a statement attributed to Fonda in the May 26, 1977, edition of the San Francisco Chronicle: "'We're building a political power base,' she said. 'To be able to do this, you have to be able to bring your people together. We needed a land base for that.'" The following passage from the Summer 1977 issue of Santa Barbara Tomorrow is equally instructive:

Although Hayden promised to hold no large political gatherings at the site, he did not attempt to disguise his plans for regular strategy meetings by organizers of the Campaign for Economic Democracy. Nor did he rule out creation of a "training institute" potentially to be financed in part by taxpayer's funds. The institute would be designed to impart organizational skills to CED activists, but also to publicly-supported groups. "We might contract also with community or government agencies or unions," Hayden announced in April, "--people who have staff to train."

Hayden's hopes were realized in August 1979 with the signing of a contract awarded to the Laurel Springs Institute for "Curriculum design and training of VISTA Volunteers in ACTION Region IX." A Region IX memorandum to "ALL STAFF" from "Ilona Hancock, Regional Director" of ACTION, announced that "Laurel Springs Institute (LSI) has been selected as the Region IX VISTA training contractor" and specified that the contract was to be in force until October 14, 1980. The total cost of this contract was to be \$201,238. Hancock further stated that the contract had been awarded "after a full year of effort" and that "this new VISTA training is one of our most important endeavors as a Region."

The relationship between the Laurel Springs Educational Center and the Campaign for Economic Democracy is shown by the fact that articles of incorporation filed by LSEC with the office of the California Secretary of State on July 11, 1977, were signed by three people as "first Directors." They were Sam Hurst, Sr., Sam Hurst, Jr., and Jane S. Fonda. Fonda's role as a principal source of funds for CED is well-known, while Sam Hurst, Jr., has served CED as staff director and was subsequently listed as president of LSEC, with Fonda as vice president and Cass Levison, a CED staff member, as secretary. The relationship between the Laurel Springs Institute and CED's Laurel Springs Educational Center is shown by the title page of a December 11, 1978, "TECHNICAL PROPOSAL: ACTION TRAINING PROJECT - REGION IX," which bears the name of the Laurel Springs Institute and the wording "A project of the Laurel Springs Educational Center." It is further demonstrated by a May 17, 1979, letter from Michael Mahdesian of the Laurel Springs Institute to an ACTION Region IX official in which Mahdesian wrote that LSI's "Executive Director, Shari Lawson, is responsible solely to the Board of Directors of the Laurel Springs Educational Center, of which it is a part. The Board of Directors consist [sic] of Sam Hurst Sr., Sam Hurst Jr., and Jane Fonda."

The technical proposal listed five individuals as staff and six as consultants, observing that the "staff and consultants have worked together intimately throughout the last ten years on numerous community grassroots organizing projects" such as "farm-workers' organizing campaigns, tenant's rights, anti-war campaigns," and the like. Of these eleven individuals, no fewer than nine have been active in the Campaign for Economic Democracy, as shown by data extracted from either the technical proposal or their resumes, which were attached:*

- * Shari Lawson, Project Director/Trainer, "Campaign for Economic Democracy activist, 1976-present;"
- * Bonnie Ladin, Senior Trainer, "Member of the 5 person Organizing Committee which founded CED";
- * Sam Hurst, Assistant Trainer, "Staff Director: California Campaign for Economic Democracy 1976-1979";
- * Michael Mahdesian, Logistics Coordinator, "Activist" and "Representative to State Steering Committee, Campaign for Economic Democracy";
- * Tom Hayden, consultant, "Chair, Campaign for Economic Democracy";
- * Jane Dolan, consultant, "Member, Campaign for Economic Democracy";
- * Conrado Terrazas, consultant, "organizer, Campaign for Economic Democracy";
- * Cary Lowe, consultant, "Co-Director, California Public Policy Center" and, according to an account published in the January 26, 1980, Washington Star, "a tenants' rights specialist for the Campaign for Economic Democracy"; and
- * Ken Msemaji, consultant, "Member of the State Steering Committee of the Campaign for Economic Democracy."

It is not difficult to understand why the State Program Officer of ACTION, in a May 18, 1979, memorandum dealing with three earlier Laurel Springs VISTA-related training projects, wrote that "The distinction between Laurel Springs and CED is frequently blurred and could result in all sorts of legal and/or

*As of a July 26, 1979, memorandum written by Hancock, Terrazas was Senior Trainer, Mahdesian remained as Logistics Coordinator, and an Assistant Trainer was still "to be appointed." The new Project Director was to be Mary Humboldt, whose resume reflected membership in the Campaign for Economic Democracy and "Political Experience" as a "CED Fundraiser," "Organizer CED Chapter Oakland", and "Member Berkeley CED Chapter."

political problems" and that "The leadership of both are intertwined, which adds to the problem." Also, as the Program Officer reported at a later point in the same memorandum, "The Working Women's project has complained that Laurel Springs' meetings were dominated by CED business or the VISTAs were pressured to attend CED meetings of little value to their specified project." A June 21, 1979, memorandum written by the "Grants/Contracts Officer" for Region IX recorded similar "management problems which have occurred [sic] on the VISTA project currently sponsored by Laurel Springs." These "management problems" included, among others named, the "involvement of VISTAs in Campaign for Economic Democracy (CED) meetings, the appearance of CED and Laurel Springs Institute (LSI) as 'one' entity; i.e., use of CED stationery for LSI business, closeness of staff offices, etc."

Training materials used by Laurel Springs under the contract for Region IX further reflect the Institute's New Left orientation. The Laurel Springs "VISTA PRE-SERVICE TRAINING ORGANIZING MANUAL" for 1979-1980, for example, reproduced in full a manual on "DIRECT ACTION ORGANIZING" published by the Midwest Academy. This document describes one of the "three criteria which any good strategy must meet"* by asking "Does it alter the relations of power between people and their enemies?" and goes on at a later point to state:

*"Strategy is about power and winning specific concrete demands." It "starts with specific goals and objectives" and "requires an evaluation of the power of your opposition." Strategy "proceeds with an analysis of the weakness of your target which can be used to your advantage" but "must also consider potential allies and the organizational needs of your group." Tactics, on the other hand, "flow from strategy" and "involve the use of meetings, picketing, demonstrations, actions, strikes, educational events, press exposes and possibly law suits." ("The Action is a staple tactic" which "involves a direct confrontation between the members of the [citizens] organization and a political or corporate individual." It "centers around a specific demand to which the target...is asked to respond. The citizens organization attempts to figure out what the target would least like to have happen, and then make that threat implicit in the action.") Such undertakings as "the sit-in movement, the freedom rides, the teach-ins and, more recently, the grape boycott and the J.P. Stevens boycott" have unfortunately led to confusion between strategy and tactics because "the media focused so much attention on the tactic and so little on the strategy...that it often appeared that the tactic and the strategy were one and the same." The result was "the false view that social change organizing consists of thinking up a dramatic tactic and then building an organization around it." While tactics "are often dramatic, clever and headline catching," they "should always be part of a larger issue campaign and a strategic plan which involves a number of targets and a wider choice of tactics." As stated in the Midwest document's concluding paragraph,

In trying to be creative about tactics, we need to keep in mind that no tactic has any particular significance outside of the strategy of which it is a part. The strategy only has meaning in relation to the specific issues to which it is applied and the issues, while

Because the target of an action is always a person, rather than an institution, it is important that the membership be reminded that it is the institution, not the person, which is the real cause of the problem, and that we are about structural change, not just getting nicer bureaucrats to confront. The value of personalizing a target by having the action against an individual is that the membership can see that "important people" are really people like themselves, who have the same human responses of nervousness, fear or confusion that the rest of us have when put in a difficult situation. This tends to demystify the enemy and makes the campaign seem more winnable.

The Laurel Springs manual's "RESOURCE LIST AND BIBLIOGRAPHY ON PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH" is no less instructive. Heavy emphasis was given to conducting research on "business enterprises" by utilizing the resources of such organizations as the CED-related California Public Policy Center and the North American Congress on Latin America, an offshoot of SDS that has described itself as seeking the support of those "who not only favor revolutionary change in Latin America but also take a revolutionary position toward their own society." The Laurel Springs manual particularly recommended the NACLA Research Methodology Guide and stated:

Published originally in 1970 to assist the anti-war and anti-imperialist movements, this guide was reprinted in 1976 and has useful material in a wide range of topics. About half pertains to imperialism and third world related subjects but about half is pertinent to domestic issues.

The technical proposal stated that "The fundamental difference between past Laurel Springs workshops and those envisioned in this proposal is an increase in the use of video-tape roll-playing [sic] and direct community interaction." In other words, VISTA could assume that the essentials of past Laurel Springs workshops were fairly representative of what could be expected under the new training contract for Region IX, a fact which lends considerable interest to the "TENTATIVE AGENDA" for a "LAUREL SPRINGS ORGANIZER TRAINING INSTITUTE" five-day session on "The Fundamentals of Grassroots Organizing" that was attached to the technical proposal submitted for ACTION's approval. Included in this program were such topics as "An Overview of Electoral Strategy in

important in their own right, should also be part of an overall conception of restoring democracy in our country. Direct action organizing is about bringing power back to people and to communities. It is about restoring that human dignity which is lost when we can no longer control our environment, our community, our jobs and our lives.

Relation To Community Organizing" and a "discussion of the meaning of Economic Democracy as it relates to community organizing." On the second day, a session was held on such subjects as a "Discussion of Sun Tzu [author of The Art of War]" and "CED strategy as it relates to community organizing." The final day included a "Tenants Rights Organizing Workshop." On the next-to-last day, a "Film on Unions" was followed by a session described as follows: "Discussion on the Union film. Coalition politics developed."

CONCLUSION

It is clear that during the Carter Administration, the VISTA program was transformed into a vehicle for the "community organizing" strategies of the political left. This was accomplished under the leadership of Sam Brown and Margery Tabankin with great deliberateness and a skill learned through years of activism within the radical left during the 1960s and early 1970s.

As demonstrated in the appendix, the heart of this transformation was the national grants program, in which Tabankin played perhaps the key role and from which several organizations with which Brown and Tabankin had been associated benefitted directly and significantly. In several instances, national grantee organizations were found to have engaged in activities clearly improper in nature and in violation of standards applicable under ACTION/VISTA guidelines. Among these were the Community Organizations Research and Action Project (CORAP), a subsidiary of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), and the Midwest Academy. Training materials used in some programs were sufficiently radical and confrontational in nature as to be found unsuitable, although other materials published by at least one group, the Midwest Academy, are similar in tone and import.

The ACTION/VISTA commitment to working through New Left-oriented organizations to change the system itself rather than to providing "direct service" to the poor was perhaps nowhere better epitomized than in the awarding of a training contract for Region IX to the Laurel Springs Institute, an operation of the Laurel Springs Educational Center, itself a creature of Tom Hayden's Campaign for Economic Democracy, an avowedly radical political organizing apparatus. That CED enjoys the same right to organize for political power as any other organization is not in question; what is in question is the propriety of using government money, raised through the tax system, to support the activities of any entity as closely interrelated with a professedly political movement as the Laurel Springs Institute was to CED.

It is, of course, true that different leadership can promulgate new guidelines and establish different priorities, thereby altering the pattern of support for the radical left that characterized the Brown-Tabankin regime at ACTION and VISTA. This has certainly been done in recent months. But it may also be appropriate to ask whether the machinery itself needs to be changed so

that future Sam Browns and Margery Tabankins will not have at their disposal an apparatus so easily redirected to radical purposes.

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The foregoing analysis is one in a series published by The Heritage Foundation. This publication is intended as a background analysis of an important organization which affects public policy. Any views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Foundation. Any comments should be addressed to the Director of Research at The Heritage Foundation, 513 C Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002.

APPENDIX

INTRODUCTION: "IT WASN'T AN ACCIDENT"

The takeover and redirection of the ACTION/VISTA apparatus was a major gain for the left and appears to have been accomplished with at least the tacit acquiescence of the uppermost levels of the Carter Administration. Sam Brown, for example, in an interview in the December 1977 issue of Penthouse magazine, observed that Carter "gives you a mandate and says, Go with it" and, after recounting how the President-elect had first called him in Colorado approximately a week before the inauguration, claimed "It wasn't an accident" that he and Veterans Administrator Max Cleland "were the first people into the White House on inauguration day. After Carter walked down Pennsylvania Avenue, he called us into the Oval Office."

That the new leadership in ACTION -- epitomized by such key appointees as Director Sam Brown, Deputy Associate Director Marge Tabankin, and Region 9 Director Ilona (Loni) Hancock -- came from radical New Left backgrounds has been demonstrated at some length in a previous study,* which also noted that

Instead of being on the outside looking in, representatives of the American left are now solidly ensconced within the policy-making process, perhaps for the first time on such a scale since the period of the New Deal and the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt. This influx of political leftists has been notable in several areas, but it has probably been nowhere quite as pronounced as at ACTION under the leadership of Sam Brown.

Because of their shared background in radical "community organizing" and other movements of the left during the 1960s and early 1970s, the new ACTION/VISTA leadership was determined to alter the agency's approach to the alleviation of poverty in the most fundamental manner. Some idea of their perspective is conveyed by an article, "Self-Help: New Roots to an Old Idea," written by Brown and published in a June 1980 document issued by VISTA in conjunction with the fifteenth anniversary gathering. He recalled that

in 1969, I was in Washington and went around to see friends at the National Welfare Rights Organization. There I met my first VISTA volunteer, Tom Glynn, who

*For a discussion of the backgrounds of Brown, Tabankin, and Hancock, see Heritage Foundation Institution Analysis No. 9, "The New Left in Government: From Protest to Policy-Making," November 1978; the same study also contains an overview of the relationships between ACTION and several of the more prominent New Left-oriented "community organizing" groups from which many of the Carter-era ACTION and VISTA leaders were recruited.

later came back to work at ACTION in 1977-78 as the Director of Policy and Planning. Finding one VISTA volunteer working for an organization like National Welfare Rights was interesting; finding a lot of them was surprising. Clearly, I didn't know much about VISTA.

Brown came to view VISTA as "a very odd program and a very good one" but "wasn't sure it would ever be understood or ever be popular." VISTA "was more a process than a program: a belief in the democratic idea that people ought to be involved in the decisionmaking process regardless of who they were or what they owned." This concept of "Citizen participation, the belief in the 'maximum feasible participation' of poor people in the decision-making process, came across as a very democratic idea when you read about it in the legislative language." But

when citizen participation turned out to be a rent strike in Chicago over rats in public housing, a bail bond project in Tulsa, a campaign in West Virginia to make the coal companies pay compensation to black lung victims, and organizing welfare recipients in Philadelphia to get what was entitled to them by law, well, that was a different ball game. A great many people didn't like the score. VISTA, for being so small a federal program, had a great many people who wanted to call it "out." I wondered if VISTA would survive in the years to come.

VISTA did survive, in large part because a great many good people in the program and in the Congress fought the bureaucratic wars that had to be fought to make sure the program had a future. When I became the Director of ACTION in 1977, I discovered just how close VISTA had come to not surviving; there was no request in the federal budget for money for the next year and some of the volunteers, all talented people, were being restricted more and more to administrative jobs in social service agencies. Gone was the emphasis on citizen participation. Gone was the idea of poor people helping themselves. VISTA, one of the government's most unusual programs, was on its way to becoming quite ordinary.

Brown saw this as the result of a fundamental misconception on the part of government ever since the days of the New Deal. While "social service programs for poor people" were necessary and largely successful, in Brown's view, "bit by bit, the cumulative effect of all these programs has been to strip away from individuals the sure sense that they have control over their own lives." Despite the best of intentions, we have

created a system of helping that encourages the poor to be passive rather than active, dependent rather than

self-reliant, recipients rather than producers, clients instead of people proud of their own work. We have divided the poor from the working, even though the poor are the most self-reliant people in America and have to be in order to survive.

"INSTITUTION-BUILDING" AND "NETWORKING"

"With strong support from President Carter," however, things would now be different. The essence of this difference is illustrated by two fundamental concepts discussed by VISTA Director Tabankin in another article, "VISTA in the 1980s: So Much to Be Proud Of, So Much Still to Do," also published in the June 1980 VISTA document. These two concepts are "institution-building" and "networking." With regard to the first,

The old description of VISTA volunteers -- white middle-class college kids parachuting into America's ghettos and hollows -- no longer holds true. Nearly a third of VISTAs are minorities; 15 percent are over 55 years old; and 70 percent are locally recruited, drawn from the same communities they serve. Volunteers still provide direct services to low-income people, such as tutoring individual children, because that is very important and meaningful work, and it has given volunteers an excellent foot in the door for larger projects. But more and more, we have emphasized institution-building, such as organizing an ongoing tutorial program run by parents and community volunteers. Mobilizing resources for system-building makes sure a volunteer's term isn't just a one-time effort; it has a multiplier effect. And it leaves behind institutions that give shape to poor people's hope and aspirations, that express their expertise, channel their energies, and develop their leadership capacities.

The second concept emerges logically from the first. "Institution-building" is necessary to the fulfillment of the original VISTA idea -- to use community self-help and citizen participation to fight poverty." Unfortunately, however, "All the signals point to a continuing energy crunch and an ever-tightening economy, with consequent restrictions on government social programs." Thus,

It is essential for low-income people, grassroots organizations, and those involved in anti-poverty work nationwide to build networks and coalitions in the 1980s. Through networking, self-help groups can combine their strengths and together overcome many individual weaknesses. Networking results in cross-fertilization of ideas and the development of organizational resources far beyond the capacity of single community groups. VISTA has already begun to meet this challenge through

its National Grants program, which provides volunteers and support resources to networks, which then place them in local groups otherwise too small to engage volunteers. Through techniques like this, VISTA encourages further networking.

To most people, of course, ideas like self-help and the encouragement of anti-poverty capabilities within local communities would seem to be both sensible and desirable. No one possessed of even a minimum of good will would advocate that the poor be made dependent and thereby relegated to the sort of permanent client status described by Brown. At the same time, however, it is assumed by most Americans that self-help will be effected within the context of our historically proven political and economic institutions, so often dismissed by the left as "the system." This was not the assumption of those to whom the building of new self-help mechanisms was now entrusted. Under Brown and Tabankin, the attitudes and perspectives of the left were to become institutionalized within the national ACTION/VISTA bureaucracy and transmitted to local communities through "institution-building" and "networking."

The magnitude of this transformation is indicated by an admiring account, "The Revolution at VISTA," published in the March/April 1978 issue of Working Papers for a New Society:

By congressional mandate, VISTA was to create a domestic corps of men and women of all ages and backgrounds to help poor people improve the conditions of their lives. Recruited on a national level, the volunteers were often sent to unfamiliar places. Many worked with community action programs associated with OEO [the Office of Economic Opportunity]; many others went straight into poor neighborhoods to try to create activist organizations. They participated in campaigns as diverse as voter registration and welfare rights; VISTA volunteers were part of the early SEPAC [South End Project Area Committee, characterized in the same article as "a mechanism for citizen participation in planning" in the South End of Boston, Massachusetts] drive to check the excesses of the BRA [Boston Redevelopment Authority] in Boston.

Until [President Lyndon] Johnson resigned, VISTA received the highest compliment a president can give -- money. In its first year of operation, it survived on \$3 million. By 1968, its budget had risen to \$30 million.

When Richard Nixon came to power, he went about dismantling VISTA along with other poverty programs. In 1971 he combined it with the Peace Corps and several other, more obscure programs for the elderly and students to create the single agency ACTION. Programmatically,

VISTA underwent significant change, partly as a result of stated policy and partly as a result of administrators sensing the new mood in Washington. John Torian, VISTA's New England regional director, who started with the agency in 1965, remembers a specific directive from Washington in the early seventies forbidding volunteers to engage in any direct organizing. Increasingly, volunteers were assigned to government agencies or service organizations as cheap auxiliary labor.

SAM BROWN AND "THE LANGUAGE OF THE LEFT"

As Brown expressed it in a quote taken from a magazine for former Peace Corps and VISTA volunteers, his "predecessor said he turned VISTA into motherhood and apple pie. Well, that's not my intent. Right now we have VISTA lawyers pushing paper for the community. My view is that they ought to be filing cases against the community." Asked during his Penthouse interview whether "The rich, the corporations, Republicans in general, may still regard a highly publicized VISTA program and your volunteers as a threat," he answered, "I assume they will, and they ought to; if they don't, then I'm not doing my job." He added that "VISTA is not simply a service organization" and "ought not to be just a bunch of low-paid social workers. It ought to be people helping to get themselves together to build new institutions [emphasis in original]." A useful gloss is provided by Tabankin's statement, quoted in various press accounts, that "VISTA should work towards more equitable distribution of income and opportunities."

Brown's commitment to the perpetuation of New Left radicalism through the ACTION/VISTA apparatus was encapsulated in the Penthouse interview, during which he revealed that

in this job I spend my time calling on that same network of community organizers that has been there right along. When I want to talk to somebody about prisons, I call David Harris or Phil Berrigan, because they're the people I know best who've spent time in jail. So I'm going to San Bruno, Calif., next week, where we have a program in the city jail, and I'm going with Dave Harris and Sheriff Richard Hongisto of San Francisco County. Hongisto is clearly the most interesting law-enforcement officer in the country,* and Harris spent of couple of years in jail as a draft resister.

*In February 1977, Richard Hongisto participated in a "Criminal Justice" workshop conducted as part of the Second California Conference on Alternative Public Policy, also known variously as the California Conference on Alternative Public Policy and the Santa Barbara Conference on Economic Democracy. According to the March 1977 issue of the Campaigner for Economic Democracy, a tabloid published by the Campaign for Economic Democracy, CED was the "major group

When I talk to people about community programs, I want to talk to people from ACORN [Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now] and [Massachusetts] Fair Share and Mass Advocacy -- all the community groups that I've known over a period of years. VISTA volunteers -- there are 5,000 of them out there -- ought to be assigned, and are being assigned, to genuine community groups. VISTA is a whole series of little programs that grow out of the community, or that do when it's at its best. So it's really not too difficult, if you make the effort to stay in touch with local people.

With these indicia in mind, it is hardly remarkable that Joseph Nocera, writing in the September 1978 issue of the Washington Monthly, summed up the situation by observing that

From the beginning Brown spoke in the language of the left -- he would "put ACTION on the cutting edge of social and economic change," he would "find the places where you have some latitude and try to create some models" -- and from the beginning most of Washington bought it. If he infuriated the right with his statements...that was a feather in his cap; he must be doing something right to get those folks mad at him. Within the first few months, many of the heavies of the left came to ACTION to visit Brown. Tom Hayden came by. David Harris. Phillip Berrigan. Ralph Nader. It was as if he had to prove to these people that he could be a part of the federal government and not sell out; their approval would mean that his credentials were still intact.

ORIGIN OF NATIONAL GRANTS PROGRAM

As indicated in the June 1980 Tabankin article, the centerpiece of the new ACTION/VISTA leadership's efforts at "institution-building" was the national grants program, designed explicitly to provide "volunteers and support resources" to encourage "low-income people, grassroots organizations, and those involved in anti-poverty work nationwide to build networks and coalitions in

organizing the Conference" and acted with significant assistance from the California Public Policy Center, which, "At the request of the Conference... consulted hundreds of experts around the state and prepared a 150-page set of Working Papers on Economic Democracy." The aggressively leftist nature of both CED and CPPC, as well as the relationship between both organizations and components of the Institute for Policy Studies network, is outlined in detail in Heritage Foundation Institution Analysis No. 14, "Campaign for Economic Democracy: Part II, The Institute for Policy Studies Network," April 1981; see also Heritage Foundation Institution Analysis No. 13, "Campaign for Economic Democracy: Part I, The New Left in Politics," September 1980.

the 1980s." A useful characterization of this program appears in the report prepared by the House Appropriations Committee investigative staff:

The national grants program was conceived as a means of getting across a new VISTA philosophy in the quickest possible way. The objectives of the "new directions" were to deemphasize the programming of volunteers into situations where they provided direct "one-on-one" services in favor of using volunteers as organizers to help poor people achieve a more meaningful voice in making the social and economic decisions affecting their lives.

National grants differ from the traditional VISTA grants in that they are managed by ACTION headquarters. Under the program, VISTA volunteers and some financial assistance are awarded to national organizations that have affiliated groups active in various local communities. National grants are not restricted by State or regional boundaries. The national grantees typically do not use the volunteers but channel them to the local community organizations. The additional funding under the grant is used by the national sponsor to train and supervise the volunteers and to administer the grant. National grant budgets allow for no overhead charges.

In its formal response to this report, ACTION declared that the

end goals are to have volunteers leave the community with an established mechanism for continuing the project in the hands of the community residents and to have volunteers participate in breaking the cycle of poverty instead of perpetuating it.

National Grants enable VISTA to:

- (1) Program for national impact on issues of concern among poor;
- (2) Reach populations of special need;
- (3) Develop projects with grassroots groups which ordinarily would not be sophisticated enough to compete for federal funds;
- (4) Provide a single, simplified application process for multiple, grassroots projects which have a common program emphasis.

How the concept evolved is outlined at a later point in the ACTION response:

A series of three round table discussions was held in May of 1977.* The participants in these discussions included approximately 40 individuals [the same document later specifies 45] representing over 100 grass roots community organizations and networks of organizations from across the country. They were selected because: 1) for the most part they were outside the government poverty bureaucracy, i.e. most of them had not previously had Federal funding and none of them previously had VISTA funding; 2) they each had a proven record of successful community organizing experience; and 3) they represented a wide range of community organizations dealing in innovative ways with the needs of low income people. It was out of these round table discussions that the National Grant concept evolved. The participants in these meetings agreed on the need for immediate action to infuse new life and new directions into VISTA. By providing tangible models of innovative programming and community organizing, it was decided these grants would be more effective in giving guidance to field staff than any written directive.

These discussions were part of what ACTION called its "extensive citizen review process" initiated "in the spring of 1977 to examine the entire agency and its programs, including VISTA." Indeed, the hiring of Margery Tabankin, in the words of the ACTION report, was due precisely to "her extensive working knowledge of grass roots community organizations throughout the country whose activities were concentrated outside of the tradi-

*This report is dated February 15, 1979. On April 9, 1979, VISTA Director Tabankin testified to the same effect before the Subcommittee on Select Education of the House Committee on Education and Labor. It subsequently developed that these accounts were slightly in error; in a May 18, 1979, letter to the General Counsel of ACTION that was printed in the record of the Subcommittee's hearings, Tabankin wrote in pertinent part:

In addition, my best recollection at the Hearing was that three "Round Table" meetings were held within the period between the last week in April and the first two weeks in May (Tr., 125, 201). Subsequent to the April 9th Hearing date and at Congressman Ashbrook's request, I had our files reviewed again to try to locate any invitations to the aforesaid meetings. We discovered, in that file search, invitations dated June 7, 1977, to a "Round Table" meeting of June 17, 1977. Based on this set of invitations to the June 17 meeting, it is my best present recollection that the "Round Table" meetings occurred between the end of April and June 17, 1977. A further check of travel vouchers indicates that the meetings took place on May 2, May 16, and June 17, 1977. The foregoing statements represent my best present recollection, based on the above described documents, and should be taken as supplementing my testimony at pages 125 and 201 of the transcript.

