

A History of the National Union of the Homeless

To: Members of the Leadership Development Institute Planning Committee

From: Phillip Wider

RE: Some initial thoughts on writing a history of the National Union of the Homeless (to be made into a working draft proposal at some point).

Date: Wednesday, January 13, 1993

Introductory Statement

A history of the National Union of the Homeless (NUH) is necessary, but why? Surely not just because it would be a good thing. Given our limited resources we can not afford to do things just because they would be nice to do. There must be a clearly articulated rationale for devoting the resources it will take to make this project a reality.

An effort such as ours needs its history to be recorded. In an age when stories of struggle and liberation are often coopted by main stream "popculturities," we need to record our won history and have control over it. This is to ensure that indifferent unknowing and even hostile outsiders to our effort do not distort the reality of our struggle and subsequently profit off of our work.

The history of the National Union of the Homeless would be written for a wide audience to include: posterity; those who are making and leading the struggle now; and those living simultaneous to it and who want to know about it so they can get involved (especially for those not local who want to learn of what has gone on in Philadelphia).

A written history would serve to demystify and demythologize the current history. This history of the NUH is out there now in an oral tradition with many different forms and variations. A written and official history would make what has happened more available and free to all.

A history would chart the evolution of NUH efforts by providing a through accounting and analysis of past and even present efforts. By identifying and exploring successes and failures of the NUH, the history, told from our own perspective, would reveal lessons that would shed light on the direction of current and future efforts.

The history would probably include or analysis of the social problems facing society. It would also take into account the external climate of U.S. society in which the NUH has been evolving.

In short, a critical study of our history that is in tune with and influenced by the theoretical underpinnings and strategic considerations of our struggle is vitally necessary in informing the future of our movement. Such a study would help current leadership to chart a course for our work. It would also serve simultaneously as a tool for education, outreach, and fund raising. Possibly a new movie or video would be made at some point.

This is a serious task, one not to be taken lightly. We need to believe our history as worth telling. As our efforts challenge so fundamentally the existing social structure, pop culture will

offer little recognition of our most revolutionary efforts. Thus we must believe in ourselves enough to tell our won story. Incidentally, it's quite worth telling by any standards.

While ultimately a history of Up and Out of Poverty a in Philadelphia and nationally is needed, a likely starting point, both because of it's importance and accessibility seems to be the history of the National Union of the Homeless.

We need to start now this process so as not to lose vital tid bits of the early stages of our struggle. We need to start to work on it now while so many of the key players are still around. We also need to start now before it gets to unruly to tell. Already, it is quite an overwhelming task to give an account of all that has gone on with our efforts. As we engage in this process, we will become more cognizant of our tremendously significant role in history.

Some things to be done:

- Clarify goals and objectives of this project
- Create outline that includes key events, themes, individuals (leaders and allies)
- Check the outline with many people
- Come up with a catchy title
- ID key people
- Interview key people
- Secure money for writers
- ID writers and advisory group
- Look at Poor People Movements-by Piven and Clowrd
- Look at Guida West's book
- ID other resources
- Gather News Articles and Videos
- Timeline