EDITOR'S CORNER

Second National Survival Summit:
Messages of Unity, Urgency and Action
by Alicia Christian

We, the victims of poverty, must go back to basics; hit the streets and organize by the thousands. We are over 60 million strong. We have the necessary knowledge of our needs; food, clothing, shelter... We will not sit by and wait for a leader because we are all leaders!
— Arenita Edwards, Treasurer, National Welfare Rights Union

THE SECOND NATIONAL SURVIVAL SUMMIT of the Up & Out of Poverty Now movement will be convened in Detroit, Michigan, August 20th to 23rd. Over 500 low-income leaders from every state in the nation are expected to attend. The Summit will provide a forum in which leaders exchange tactical information and plan collective, fight-back strategies.

This Summit comes at a critical time. Millions are jobless, homeless and hungry. The facts and figures of our condition are a scathing indictment of our government's policies, priorities and practices. Today in the U.S. — the richest nation in the world — one out of every four full-time, year round workers is earning poverty-level wages; six million men, women and children are homeless; the drug epidemic threatens to overwhelm impoverished communities; a significant percentage of the population has little or no access to this nation's expensive and technologically advanced health care system; and hunger and malnutrition is a daily reality for millions of citizens.

The government's response to these devastating indicators of human misery is to contain, suppress, or ignore human needs. So, therefore, welfare is cut; public health and social service programs are gutted; low-income housing dollars are diverted or mismanaged by developers; shelters are closed; new prisons are built; police brutality is condoned, and our rage grows.

Our dreams, too long deferred, are positioned to explode. Our rage saw a furious expression in the fires of the L. A. rebellion and in the emergence of organized, collective resistance of diverse groups, bound by the common denominator of poverty. Black, white, Native American, and Latinos have all been pressed into the belly of the beast called poverty. Together, we should be clear that the heart and head of this beast feeds on ignorance and disunity; thrives on greed; and values profit above all nature and humanity. Again, the Second National Survival Summit comes at a critical time.

The First National Survival Summit, convened in Philadelphia in 1989, brought together nearly 500...

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In TAKEOVER homeless people take over government foreclosed houses in eight U.S. cities including New York City. The film premiered nationally on P.O.V. (Television With A Point Of View) on August 10th.

Breaking the Media Blackout

TAKEOVER On PBS Channels

On Monday, August 10, 1992, the film TAKEOVER was shown nationally on P.O.V. (Television with a Point of View), a series aired by PBS stations. The film tells of the nation-wide political takeover of HUD foreclosed housing units, a motion led by the National Union of the Homeless and also involving the National Welfare Rights Union. The P.O.V. series is widely acclaimed for its promotion of independent nonfiction films. For information on purchasing or renting the film contact Skylight Pictures, 330 W. 42nd St., Rm. 2410, New York, NY 10036.

Another video from Skylight Pictures entitled "Street Heat" is available through Skylight and the National Welfare Rights Union, 3901 Cass St., Detroit, MI 40201. The video captures the people and the activities of the First National Survival Summit which was held in Philadelphia in July of 1989.

The stories of formerly homeless teenagers, now living in permanent, affordable housing through the victim run Dignity Housing program in Philadelphia, are captured in a video called "Shelter Stories." Through interviews and dramatizations they convey a vivid picture of shelter conditions, of the effects on school and family lives, of harassment from other children. This film was made through a collaboration with videographer Meryl Perlson. Grassroots organizations and low income individuals can direct inquiries to Meryl Perlson, 1430 N. Howard St., Philadelphia, PA 10122. For rental and purchase information contact Fanlight Productions, 47 Halifax St., Boston, MA 02130.
FIGHTING HUNGER AND ITS CAUSES:
The National Anti-Hunger Coalition

By Annie Smart and Michele Tingling-Clemmons

"Can America survive without poverty? If the answer is no, then in order for America to survive it must have some type of public benefits in order to regulate the victims of poverty, the permanent army of the unemployed. If the answer is yes, then everybody will have to be brought Up and Out Of Poverty Now!"

— Annie Smart, Co-Chair, National Anti-Hunger Coalition

EVERY 35 SECONDS A CHILD IS BORN INTO poverty in the United States. Children represent the poorest age group in the U.S., a tragic distinction they have had for 18 years. According to U.S. Census Bureau Data, 33.6 million Americans — 13.5% — lived in poverty in 1990 — up 2.1 million from 1989. This was the first annual increase in the poverty rate since 1982 and in the number of poor people since 1983. These figures do not reflect the full weight of our most recent recession — signaled by a slowing economy, increases in the unemployment rate, rapidly growing demand for food stamps and other public assistance programs, and emerging budget crises at all levels of government. One in ten U.S. citizens is currently receiving food stamps and that number is growing.

Millions of kids are hungry in the United States. According to the Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project (CCHIP), a ground breaking study by the Food Research and Action Center, 5.5 million children under the age of 12 — one in eight — are hungry in this country while more than eleven million — one in four — are either hungry or at risk of hunger. These staggering numbers give only a small piece of the picture, since the study, released March 6, 1991, only surveyed low-income families living in homes and apartments — not doubled up, in shelters or on the streets — and it was conducted before today’s "recession". The numbers only reflect hunger among children under the age of 12 and in families with at least one school aged child. What about seniors, families (singles or otherwise) with no children in residence? How well off can a society be when one of every eight of the population that will be its future leaders and workers are inadequately nourished in their developmental stages? What kind of a society will it be? More important for us to consider, what kind of a society is it NOW?

The family income of the richest 10% of the population grew by about 27% while that of the poorest 10% declined by over 10% between 1977 and 1988. Since 1981, spending on direct aid for cities has fallen by more than 60%, after inflation, the Federal share of city budgets plummeting from 18% in 1980 to 6.4% in 1990. This has been accomplished through tax code changes and massive deregulation in every facet of our lives, best epitomized by the savings and loan fiasco, a multi-billion dollar exercise in unrestrained greed which will be paid for by everyone but those who profited from it.

This travesty has been compounded by an effective public education campaign that has kept the general public "ignorant, confused, frightened and alone" about who is poor, where our resources have gone, and the source of the problems we face. Many people are uncomfortable and afraid to identify the source of hunger — our economic system which puts profit before people — but avoiding the truth does not make it any less true. The tremendous fear in making this identification, or of joining the struggle to change the status quo, is reasonable because of the brutality with which the government and its armed forces respond: evidenced by the assassinations of Malcolm X, Medger Evers and Martin Luther King, Jr.; the decimation of the Black Panthers; the jailing of Leonard Peltier and the genocidal policies against Native Americans; the charges of fraud brought against families on welfare or food stamps for daring to fight back; and the beating of Rodney King. The list is endless.

To move forward, we must know and understand our past.

To move forward, we must know and understand our past. Just as the knowledge about the African origins of humankind, culture and civilization is liberating for persons of African descent, the understanding of how real social change has come about in our country is just as liberating for working people. This country was organized in the interests of white males of property, and everything else —
FIGHTING HUNGER...Continued from page 3.

universal suffrage or the right to vote for non-prop-

erty owners, women and people of color; social secu-

rity; unemployment compensation; the eight hour

work day; public education; the right to organize into

unions; minimum wage, and so on — was won by

ordinary people who organized to change the status

quo into something far more acceptable and just, by

people who understood that there was no peace

without justice.

Those who profess to love freedom and yet depre-
cate agitation are those who want crops without
plowing up the ground. They want rain without
the thunder and lightning. They want the ocean
without the roar of its mighty waters. This
struggle may be a moral one, or it may be physical,
but it must be a struggle. Power concedes noth-
ing without a demand. It never did, and never
will.

—Frederick Douglass, 1857

While the number of all children under six in
the U.S. population remained relatively stable be-
tween 1968 and 1987, the number of poor children
under six increased by 35% according to the National
Center for Children in Poverty, School of Public
Health, Columbia University. One of every four
children is born into poverty; 1 of every 2 black
children and 2 of every 5 Hispanic children under six
live in poverty, according to the most recent U.S.
Census data. Yet our leaders still try to maintain that
this is “the greatest country in the world” — according
to what or whom?

Ask the woman on welfare who is penalized
dollar for dollar if she tries to work her way off
welfare. Ask the union member who strikes to retain
his health benefits but finds that exercising this right
makes him ineligible for food stamps to feed his
family. Ask the child who cries at the end of the
school year because she will miss the meals she got at
school, and (because the summer food program only
serves 14% of the low income children who get school
lunch) for whom summer vacation means hunger.
Ask the family cleaning offices who earn so little they
have been able to get food stamps but must live in a
shelter. Ask the Native American whose forebears’
kindness to the first “boat people” has been repaid by
treachery, theft and genocide, whose life expectancy
is only forty years. Ask the veteran who lost a limb
“being all that he could be” for his country and finds
himself destitute and living on the streets. Ask the
mother who was denied prenatal care because she
had no health insurance and no money, who watches
her baby die before reaching the age of one. Ask the
farmworker who cannot afford to purchase the crops
that he and his family picks, and whose child is sick
because she is allergic to the pesticides that are used
in the fields. Ask the family farmer who can’t get
bank loans to grow crops without using pesticides,
and is being taken over by agribusiness.

It is their condition that defines this country’s
greatness, and on which this country’s future rests.
When their needs are met, when they have a decent
quality of life, and can share equally in the wealth
that they and their forebears have helped to produce,
then and only then will this country be great.

Don’t Cry Alone

I don’t cry alone anymore.
I won’t cry alone anymore.

I am not alone because I couldn’t feed my kids today.
I am not alone because I don’t have a place to stay.

What do I say to the people who made the world this way?
I don’t cry alone anymore.
I won’t cry alone anymore.

I might not be able to pay my utility bills on time.
But damned I won’t let you make me feel that’s a crime.
You rob from us and steal and kill and do it all at will,
But that’s alright, because we are learning how to fight.

What do I say to the people who made the world this way?
I don’t cry alone anymore.
I won’t cry alone anymore.

You had done us oh so wrong, for so damn long.
But today we are seventy five million strong.
And it won’t be much longer, before you realize that we
are stronger.

What do I say to the people who made the world this way?
I don’t cry alone anymore.
I won’t cry alone anymore.

So when you think that I am out and down.
You better learn how to look around.
Because seventy five million of us is going to knock
you down.

WHAT DO WE SAY TO THE PEOPLE WHO MADE THE
WORLD THIS WAY?
WE DON’T CRY ALONE ANYMORE.
WE WON’T CRY ALONE ANYMORE.

By Diane Johnson, President of the Philadelphia-Delauore Valley
Union of the Homeless, Board Member of the National
Welfare Rights Union, and Board Vice-Chair of Dignity Housing. She is a formerly homeless woman, a welfare recipient, and
a fighter.
Wake Up, America!

A Response to the L.A. Riots

By Ronald Newhouse Casanova, Member of the Steering Committee of the National Survival Summit.

Kansas City, MO — I don't want to be someone saying, "I told you so," but the people who have been hurting real bad have been telling America and other brothers and sisters in the same struggle (whether they realize it or not), about all of this that has happened and will happen. The poor, the homeless, the hungry, the parentless, are all fed up. People are so tired of being neglected and pushed to the side, disregarded and abused.

That acquittal was the beginning of a revolution that we've been talking about for a long, long time. The only unfortunate thing about it is that a lot of people who don't deserve the pain and the destruction find themselves in the path of anger and frustration. I feel sorry for them.

But then, I feel even sorrier for the people who are hungry, homeless, living in the woods and abandoned buildings. These things are being taken away and the frustration is continuously building up. And then you put police brutality on top of that...The government and the powers that be are telling people, "We don't give a damn about you. We're going to do whatever we want, when we want and as often as we want."

That acquittal shouldn't have been a surprise to anybody. What did they think — that the powers that be are going to lock up their own men? Gimme a break! They need their gestapo force and the police are part of that force.

People have to realize that it's not a race riot that went on out there. It's still the same old thing this country was built on — separatism, hatred between the races which has always been forced on the people. I believe this riot is a power struggle, a struggle between the rich and the poor, the have-nots and the homeless.

People have to realize that it's not a race riot that went on out there.

PHILADELPHIA—Caseyville Tent City—The Kensington Six, six women arrested for entering and attempting to clear an abandoned welfare office building in an effort to turn it into a community center, are scheduled for trial on September 29. The protest was organized by the Kensington Welfare Rights Union. These women are facing charges that include burglary, disorderly conduct and criminal trespassing; charges that could lead to ten years in prison. Charges far too severe for a political protest. Please send letters of support and donations to the address of the Up & Out of Poverty Now! Legal Defense Fund listed below.

On April 20, 1992, two young black men were accused of a crime they did not commit. The two young men, named Mike and Jerry, did not even know one another, yet they were both falsely arrested for the same robbery. Apparently, a drunken white man was robbed. The police took this drunken man's word and did not listen to the activists of Caseyville as they tried to defend their fellow activist, Mike. After being denied a line-up, Mike spent 41 days in jail until his third court appearance. At this hearing, the judge noticed the full court room and his large number of supporters, and knew there was something wrong. Mike was set free. Jerry was released earlier on bail. Solidarity prevails and the struggle continues.

In response to these arrests, an Up & Out of Poverty Now! Legal Defense Fund has been developed. As poor people join one another and step up the fight against the inequities of governmental policies and priorities, arrests are imminent! This fund could help YOU!

Please contribute a donation and write to:

Up & Out of Poverty Now!
Legal Defense Fund
c/o Louise Mayberry
6408 Park Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19126
Voices. What has been the plight and fight of the homeless as we go into the Second National Survival Summit?

Leona. When I look back to our early organizing in 1984 and think about the struggle against homelessness, I remember how the homeless issue was completely ignored. Because of the struggle of homeless people and the fact that some of us were really clear about the economic conditions in this country, the public consciousness about homelessness was raised. Political candidates trying to garner votes started to put the homeless issue out front, although they distorted the facts. Before this homeless people thought homelessness was our own fault. If this was the thinking of the victims, then surely the general public felt the same. However, as we began to understand the root causes of homelessness through our organized struggles, we understood that this country’s economic system and governmental policies have failed.

By 1986, the media paid more attention to the homeless issue. But the media pushed messages that made the public think that we were lazy and crazies, drug addicts and derelicts of society. They said that we were homeless because we wanted to be. But economic conditions kept getting worse and more people were losing their jobs every day. Many working people in this country are but “one paycheck away from homelessness”.

Today, neither the media nor governmental leaders can persuasively blame homelessness on the victims. Millions of working people are losing their jobs and falling through the cracks, ending up right along side of those already in the streets. The media is not willing to educate the general public about the real causes of deteriorating conditions. In fact, we are now experiencing a media blackout; they don’t cover our fight to end homelessness. But collective action of the growing number of poor must force the truth to the forefront.

Voices. What do you have to say about the drug issue?

Leona. In examining the drug issue people are not focusing on the real culprit. As far as I am concerned, the government is guilty of entrenching poverty by perpetuating a drug industry. I call the drug problem a nationally planned genocide. I think that genocide through death from drug related activity (including the AIDS epidemic) is part of this plan.

The powers that be know that if you’re an addict, the last thing on your mind is economic justice or political struggle. You’re not yourself. You become destructive against family, your children, your mother, your father, your grandparents. You can’t think of anything but feeding your addiction. There is no question that the government has no intention of interrupting the flow of the tremendous profits made from drug sales. These profits are, internationally, second only to the sale of military commodities. If our government can produce missiles for wars, if they can put satellites on the moon, if they have the resources to do this, then the government should be able to detect and stop the amount of drugs coming into this country. But this government simply does not have the will when it comes to meeting the needs of working and poor people in the U.S.

Under these circumstances, I can’t help but assume we are dealing with a designed plan. It is a plan designed to try to prevent poor people from organizing and fighting for social and political changes. But this plan is not working as well as intended. We, as victims, are beginning to educate ourselves about these connections, and are now fighting in our own best interests.

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ARE YOU SICK AND TIRED OF BEING SICK AND TIRED AND POOR?
TOGETHER WE CAN FIND THE CAUSE AND FORCE A CURE.

Second National Survival Summit Up & Out of Poverty Now!
Detroit, Michigan
August 20 - 23, 1992

Preliminary Program:

Thursday, August 20
On site registration, check in 1:00 pm
Opening Plenary, 7:00 pm

Friday, August 21 – Sunday, August 23
Continued Registration
Survival Speaker Panels
Lunch Table Forums
Special Presentations
Workshops
Defining Local and National Action Plans

Workshop Topics: All workshops will focus on organizing, strategies, and tactics.

Economic Development — What does it mean for the poor?
Employment — Who's fleecing who?
Environment — Save the people as well as the animals.
Education — Education for whose society?
Health Care — Our Bodies, Our Lives, Our Families
Hunger — Who will eat and what will we eat?
Education — Who is failing who?

National Survival Summit
c/o 3901 Cass Street
Detroit, MI 48201
(313) 831-1040
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Voices. Why are homeless and poor people the hardest hit in the current round of state and city budget cuts taking place throughout the country?

Leona. Those in control see us as the most vulnerable ones in society. Why not target the most vulnerable? They’re not going to target themselves. They’re not going to target those who have money. It all boils down to preying on those with the least—those who are the least organized and powerful. They don’t view us as people who can organize and mobilize; people who can make social changes in this country. But they are making a mistake, because there are more of us than of them, and we are coming together stronger and clearer.

Voices. What do you think poor and homeless people should be doing about the budget cuts, drugs, and the media blackout?

Leona. All over this country homeless and poor people are beginning to fight back, from the homeless encampments in the forest of Portland, Oregon, to the hut city in Chicago, to the tent cities in Michigan and Pennsylvania. The L.A. uprising was a protest of the poor. During the uprising, the poor took pampers for their babies and food for their families, they took whatever they needed. There was a rage based on despair and need, and a rightful sense of injustice.

Grassroots organizations are springing up all over the place. Even against the genocidal weapon of drugs, a segment of homeless people are seeking and fighting for the right to recovery.

There’s going to be a poor people’s movement in this country. We are being forced into motion, we are at a point in time where there is no other choice. As the President of the National Union of the Homeless, I think that we need a strategy to link all the scattered struggles together. We must also get organized labor to identify with the homeless struggles. There is a connection, because many of the members of the trade unions have lost their jobs, and are becoming, through no fault of their own, members of the homeless and potential members of the Homeless Union.

Voices. Lastly, what do you think about the importance of poor people having a summit in light of the current conditions?

Leona. I think that the Second National Survival Summit in Detroit, like the first summit in Philadelphia, is going to play a significant role in the empowerment of poor people because it will be led by the victims of poverty. It gives us an opportunity to discuss all types of issues that affect all of us. It also gives us a chance to share information about the roles our different organizations have played and plan for roles we can play. It will give us tools to strengthen each of our organizations and to get more people and grassroots organizations to join in the Up and Out of Poverty Now! Campaigns. We will have an opportunity to share our resources to make big things happen. And most importantly, the summit is a vehicle to develop strategies and coordinate activities. Second National Survival Summit will be a historic turning point for the next period of struggle.

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low-income activists. It was planned by the National Union of the Homeless, the National Welfare Rights Union, and the National Anti-Hunger Coalition. The first Summit produced concrete plans. The dramatic documentation of those Survival Summit plans resulted in the eight city protest and political “take-over” of HUD, foreclosed and vacant homes. Some governmental concessions were secured, but the most significant benefit was the number of new leaders, victims of poverty, who emerged and grew during the year long conflict with HUD. In addition, regional Survival Summits were convened. Strategies were developed to break the media’s virtual black-out of any coverage or attention to the organized struggle of low income victims.

Last year we bore witness to the more than $100 million per day spent by Washington to sustain Operation Desert Storm while the jobless and homeless languished in America. And so, the National Welfare Rights and National Homeless Union declared a poor people’s Operation Storm. Tents have been pitched and lines have been drawn in Michigan, Pennsylvania and other states, as poor people protest state budget cuts of vital health service, and income assistance programs.

The Second National Survival Summit should yield dramatic follow-up activities, collective strategies and the kind of solidarity that nurtures real leaders and concrete victories.

See page 7 for more details on the Second National Survival Summit!
A CALL TO THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

Voices from the Front is the official newsletter of the National Up and Out of Poverty Now Coalition and is the voice of poor people who are fighting for their lives and are part of an organized and growing poor people's movement. The editors of Voices from the Front and leaders in the Up and Out of Poverty Now Coalition are seeking the direct involvement and support of leaders in the religious community and their congregations who understand that poor people themselves must lead the fight to end poverty.

Leaders from among the poor have historically been unable to attract support from more traditional funding sources. Their protracted disputes with governmental bureaucracies has made support from that sector unlikely. Clearly, religious leaders and church activists constitute the group most likely to understand and embrace the issues surrounding the fight Up and Out of Poverty Now. And of course, there are families in our congregations that are struggling to survive. However, there are few formal means in place that connect the well intended support and concern of congregations to those most in need of that support -- the front line leaders and victims of poverty.

In July, 1989, Up and Out of Poverty Now held its First National Survival Summit in Philadelphia. Yvonne V. Delk, currently the Executive Director of the Community Renewal Society in Chicago, spoke on the role of the Church in fighting poverty. She offered four ways in which the Church could fight poverty, by:

1. Claiming the agenda of fighting poverty as an issue of faith.
2. Affirming the intention of the Church to stand with the victims of poverty -- active standing -- not passive standing.
3. Exercising a moral imperative to influence political and economic policies that will eliminate poverty and guarantee freedom, justice, and dignity for all.
4. Standing publicly and in coalition with others as a vital force for change.

In this spirit, we are calling upon religious leaders across the country to join us in planning an Interdenominational/ Interfaith Survival Summit in 1995 that focuses on the resource and support needs of the victims of poverty who are engaged in collective and organized activities to end poverty. If you are interested in planning and implementing the Interdenominational/ Interfaith Survival Summit in 1995, please call the Annie Smart Leadership Development Institute at (215) 242-3140.

The National Up and Out of Poverty Now Campaign is guided by the National Union of the Homeless, the National Welfare Rights Union, and the National Anti-Hunger Coalition and is made up of over 500 organizations led by the victims of poverty.