

PROBLEMS CONFRONTING SOCIAL CHANGE

If one is to involve oneself in any kind of a movement for social change, one must realize that there will be innumerable problems with which to contend such as harassment, suspicion, credibility, motives, character motivation. All of these variables will be attacked at one time or another by people who for their own reasons wish to complicate the situation and not let it succeed. Then what is it that motivates an individual or individuals to involve themselves in a move for social reform? How do activists react to the variables which I have mentioned above? Another very important question of any social reform movement is how the existing establishment reacts? I hope to expand on these questions in the body of this paper. One thing which idealistic thinkers who are ready to embark on helping their own race toward social reform realize is that one's own race is usually the biggest enemy in obtaining social reform for the more oppressed La Casa de la Raza, a Chicano Mexican-American cultural educational center, is currently one of the biggest social reform movements taking place in Santa Barbara County and possibly in California. What makes the project totally daring is the fact that it is taking place in Santa Barbara, an ultra-conservative strong-hold, and the Mexican-American following of the Anglo establishment must also reflect this conservatism in order to exist within the dominant society. A Chicano activist who believes strongly enough about the inequities which the system sanctions against poor blacks and Chicanos will speak out his convictions. A Mexican-American, on the other hand, will support stereotyping of himself and his people. Sometimes he believes in the stereotyping of his people through the educational process to which he, himself, has been subjected, an educational system which does not teach Chicano history and which does not motivate Chicanos to achieve their potential. The inter-race problem has greatly hindered the forward motion of those people working within La Casa de la Raza.

La Casa de la Raza was started by a group of individuals who felt that a real, positive effort was needed in the community to amplify the needs of the Spanish speaking community which comprises approximately 25% of the population of Santa Barbara. This group of individuals consisted of people who had gotten tired of rhetoric, picketing, and those who would yell "Chicano power" yet do no more. This group called itself the Chicano Positive Movement, hereafter referred to as CPM. From the beginning this group came under fire from existing Chicano groups. Chicano Community Action, from which CPM evolved, was furious because until that point they were the spokesmen for the emerging Chicano community.

The name La Casa de la Raza, which means "House of the People," was chosen because membership would not be restricted to Spanish speaking people. Possibly CPM was thinking in more of a realistic manner than were their counterpart groups which expounded reverse racism. CPM felt that it was not going to do any good to educate their own people to be proud of their culture when the rest of the masses could not understand why they were being proud. All segments of the Spanish speaking community were included in initiating the groundwork for La Casa de la Raza. The Union Civica Mexicana, a conservative social organization which had been in existence for twenty years and which had not really done anything positive towards social reform, was invited. Their main

function had been to celebrate Mexican holidays. The Brown Berets were also invited to participate. They were the more militant element in the community. So by all indications La Casa de la Raza was off to a good start.

This project was to put human commitment and individual theories to their ultimate test. Within this central core group that started La Casa de la Raza, there existed various talents: a union organizer, a craftsman, a militant, a businessman, a doctor, and a potential lawyer. All of these talents were to be relied on heavily in the coming year.

Problems which La Casa has confronted in the last year have been too many to count. However, the many problems can be categorized into three main groups: (1.) problems resulting from self-interest, (2.) problems resulting from jealousy, and (3.) problems resulting from idealism.

In the beginning La Casa attracted many people who wanted to become associated with a worthwhile project with which Dr. Michael Lemus was associated. Many of these people were high on self-interest but very low on commitment, which was a poor combination for a project such as La Casa de la Raza. However, these individuals left with Dr. Lemus or shortly thereafter. Unfortunately, we still have this type of person joining La Casa when they see it beneficial to themselves to do so and then leaving when they are called upon to commit themselves to certain tasks which bring no immediate rewards. This type of person is unaware that La Casa is but the beginning of a total social change movement, an experience to those that are involved as to the problems that they may encounter when called upon to develop a plan for social change wherever they may go. Also, it gives those involved a chance to see the establishment for what it is and the problems that they will encounter and how to cope with them. Those persons who ran to protect their own self-interest will never be beneficial to anyone but themselves. They will only involve themselves to the point of frustration, but never will they learn how to cope with situations. They will never lead because they never have learned to follow.

Jealousy has played an important role in causing dissention between members of La Casa, not so much with CPM members because we knew one another well, but with newcomers who would come with sincere intentions of helping. Persons within La Casa who belonged to other Chicano organizations have tried to draw away these newcomers to join their organizations. We did lose people to these methods, but over half of them returned after realizing that rhetoric was cheap and that La Casa was the best thing going. One of the biggest jealousy problems confronting La Casa was an individual from a rival Mexican-American cultural center, Richard Hidalgo. Hidalgo is a very good example of a brown person who would love to be white. He has a very middle class background. His father owned and operated Hidalgo's plumbing and owned an interest in the Spanish speaking theater. Richard was set up in the appliance store business and later became a real estate salesman. He was brought up through the established educational system and learned that he was better than his brown brothers, possibly because the establishment needed a native Californian for festivity purposes and the Hidalgo family patronized activities, which the establishment fostered. For whatever reasons it is a fact that Richard has hurt La Casa de la Raza.

From the very beginning Hidalgo began pressuring Dr. Michael Lemus to withdraw his support from La Casa de la Raza. His contention was that it was impossible for some young Chicanos to do what his organization had been talking about doing for over 20 years. Also at stake was the fact that Richard Hidalgo through the years had become the link between the Spanish speaking and the Anglo communities and the coming of the new center endangered his coveted position. He worked very hard and played a decisive role in getting Dr. Lemus to leave La Casa.

To make matters worse, Hidalgo was appointed to a City Council seat which was vacated by the death of a councilwoman from the East Side of town. The Council, we had learned, had purposely selected Hidalgo for the specific purpose of having a brown face on the City Council and who, at the same time, could be controlled. The Council knew of Hidalgo's sentiments toward La Casa and hoped that by appointing him, he would help to eliminate the progress there and would help to return Santa Barbara to a sleepy, peaceful, conservative, Spanish pueblo. All this would be carried out in the best tradition. After all, it would be a brown man against brown people. Who would dare to blame the white establishment when they had, in fact, appointed a brown man to the City Council. They could indignantly ask: "Wow what more do those Mexicans want?" However, I should make one thing clear now. The City Council voted 4-2 to seat Hidalgo and that particular vote is reflected in the present day voting record of the City Council, except now it is 5-2. Hidalgo worked feverishly to live up to the expectations of his fellow councilmen.

Inspector after inspector visited La Casa: fire, building, state, health, all were sent on a complaint from someone. The inspectors, after spending much time inspecting the premises and its projects, would hint as to who called and hoped that there might be some way in which we could get along. Our answer was simply that we in no way intended or had plans to launch a hate campaign against the Mexican center. To be truthful, we had no time to even think of such an undertaking.

During the Fiesta holidays we experienced one of Hidalgo's worst dirty tricks. The County Health Inspector arrived on the eve of Fiesta and closed down La Casa to any food selling, unless some stringent conditions were met. Because of the credibility that La Casa had built up throughout the community, especially in politics, we were able to confront several political allies and expose the issue as unfair and a personal attack against La Casa. The next morning we had our food permit and to date we have not been bothered by that particular inspector. Had we not been able to carry out our fiesta, we would have gone broke.

Richard continued his harassment during our first year of operation and I could go on indefinitely telling them all. We played a type of chess game with him. We would attempt to make connections with people in an attempt to explain our project and programs before Richard could spread his tales of militancy and long haired radicals living at La Casa who were ready to turn the town into ruins. If there was an award for an individual for trying to abort a worthwhile project, it would have to go to Richard Hidalgo.