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**The  
National  
Toxics  
Campaign**

**Some Reflections,  
Thoughts for the Movement**

The National Toxics  
NTCF  
Campaign

Dear Friends:

Enclosed is a copy of a report written and published by a number of board members and staff involved with the former National Toxics Campaign. We have compiled these thoughts and ideas to document some of the issues that arose within NTC; issues that ultimately led to the board's decision to cease operations.

We intend for this report to serve as a learning tool for the movement. Some of the difficult lessons that NTC taught all of us can be put to use within our organizations as we struggle to make them the strong vehicles for change so badly needed.

The decision to close NTC was an agonizing one. We feel that in the long run it was the right decision and that both the movement and our organizations are, and will be, stronger for it.

The process to put this report together was educational for all of us, as individuals and as a group, but it wasn't easy. However, creating a collective analysis with the viewpoints of many diverse activists dealing with the sensitive issues faced by NTC was very important. We struggled for almost a year to arrive with a common voice that speaks to our experiences at NTC.

We hope that this report will be taken in the spirit in which it is offered and that it will help us to reflect on our work and develop clear visions of how to build a stronger movement for social change.

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# The National Toxics Campaign

## Some Reflections, Thoughts for the Movement

### Introduction

In April, 1993, the National Toxics Campaign Fund's (NTCF) board of directors voted, by majority, to cease operations and spin-off viable projects within two weeks. This decision, a surprise to many, brought to closure a nine year-old organization which was one of a handful of national groups fighting toxics in the US. This document explores the key elements that led to the board's decision, and offers some analysis about lessons learned from our experience. We hope that this will be of interest and use within movements for social change.

This document represents the thinking of a number of board and staff members who challenged the organization on what we believe were chronic problems of racism, sexism, poor management, and lack of accountability — problems which ultimately led us to push to shut NTCF down (see "Who We Are" section). Our intention is to clarify the history of NTCF, and to state clearly why we felt it was absolutely necessary to close NTCF.

Many foundations poured hundreds of thousands of dollars into NTCF. Many people and community groups contributed an even more important element — faith and energy. We feel a need to open a dialogue, a healthy dialogue, about what went wrong. We think that a movement organization should not

reduce an analysis of what was good and bad to private kitchen-table debate and discussion, but has a responsibility to pry open the public space to better enable other organizations to look inside and learn from this experience.

Although we'll explore some of the positive impacts that the organization had fighting for a cleaner environment and a more just and sustainable economic model in the US (see "Accomplishments" list at end), our focus here will be to examine the problems that contributed to the demise of what many believed, and many of us hoped, would be an important player in the broader struggles for social justice in the US and internationally.

After reading about many of the limitations of NTCF, you may ask yourself why so many of us put so much energy into this experiment. The simple answer is that we felt NTCF was the best vehicle in this country for building a national organization that could be genuinely representative of the disenfranchised sector in the US, the majority; truly responsive and accountable to grassroots communities; and one which could mobilize real power to effect lasting change in people's lives.

The organization we dreamed of and struggled for was to be led by people of color and low income people, by women, by the people who actually bear the brunt of the destruction happening all across the nation. We wanted it ~~was~~ to bring together people in the workplace and in the broader community in a deliberate effort to break down the barriers and divisions so often successfully created by corporate poisoners and governmental bureaucracies. We sought to champion new models of organizing that went beyond traditional methodologies that pit campaigns and victories against building local power and long term education. We were to forge new forms of grassroots solidarity with our counterparts in other nations.

In our collective discussions both during the internal struggles and in the months since the shutdown, we have agreed there were a number of primary reasons why we were initially attracted to NTCF, seeing it as having possibilities that other national environmental groups did not demonstrate:

- The *appearance* of having a grassroots base at the leadership level;
- The *appearance* of having a strategy of community-based organizing and base building around the country as opposed to providing technical assistance and other services to the grassroots; and,
- The organization's response to the letters that went out to many groups in the environmental movement in May, 1990, charging environmental racism due to near total lack of people of color in either leadership or issue focus. NTCF responded to these letters by immediately placing a number of key leaders of color onto its board, as well as adopting a program and committing serious resources to focus on organizing and building leadership in communities of color.

**This critique is not as much about the past, as we hope it is about the future.**

NTCF achieved and helped to achieve many real victories such as:

- the creation of a cutting edge laboratory that put science to work for and not against people;
- the research and publication of invaluable reports that documented what many grassroots communities already knew, but didn't have the statistics to prove;
- the nurturing and development of many leaders;
- networking among groups that made people realize they were not alone in the often isolated local struggles they were fighting;
- important collaborations with sister organizations in every region of the US and around the world;
- the first environmental organizing training program to focus on training people of color, the people hardest hit by toxic poisoning (the Environmental Justice Project, EJP);
- the development of a project that exposed and targeted the biggest polluters known to date: the military and the military industrial complex (the Military Toxics Project, MTP);
- an ideology that unabashedly targeted corporations and the lack of participatory democracy in politics and economics as the root cause of our ills;
- [ see "Accomplishments" section for more.]

The critique we offer here about NTCF – at times rather harshly – may well reflect the problems faced

by many other 'social change' groups. Yet we are in desperate need of organizations and movements that can achieve what we could not. This critique is not as much about the past, as we hope it is about the future.

A positive result from our experience in NTCF is that those of us engaged in what became a protracted struggle to transform the organization actually transformed ourselves. Our collective understandings of the limitations of NTCF at the strategic, organizing, and structural levels, and our increasing awareness and clarity about the constellation of race, gender and class issues within an organization (and society) will no doubt serve to strengthen the work of all of our organizations. This trust built has led to more solid collaboration among us, both between local and regional groups, and among our newly spun-off projects.

## Summary

From the get-go, NTCF got off on the wrong foot. The organization for many years was led, quite decisively, by an elite clique of white men, a 'Club.' Within the culture of NTCF, jokes abound about the early days when decisions were made on the basketball court. In actuality, this was no joke – it was real.

The jury may still be out as to whether or not it is possible to transform an all-white, all-male led organization into one which represents its grassroots base. In any case, it is true that no organization that claims to be national can be exclusively white or male, either at the base or at the decision making level. Sporadic attempts to deal with NTCF's 'Club' are woven throughout the organization's history. However, it was not until the emergence of the Environmental Justice Project (EJP), a People of Color Caucus, and the subsequent alliances they built with like-minded white people within the organization, that a persistent and coherent challenge emerged.

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Some may be tempted from this experience to blame

efforts to versify NTCF as one of the central reasons for the organization's ultimate downfall. To be perfectly fair, it was the presence and depth of institutional racism, and not efforts to counter it, which were central to NTCF's demise.

In addition to racism, what complicated and ultimately destroyed the organization was a combination of:

- corruption and unethical behavior;
- sexism and paternalism that went far beyond movement norms;
- a lack of strategy for how to deal with the predictable problems of organizational growth and development;
- a lack of internal democracy which subverted the building of a national board of diverse people who actually represented organizations, (and therefore stood a chance to put a program into place that could serve the movement's needs);
- and, centrally, the failure on the part of the founder of the organization to relinquish or share power with the newly emerging voices of the grassroots.

**What complicated and ultimately destroyed our experiment was a combination of racism, sexism, paternalism, poor management, corruption, and a lack of real strategy.**

In the final years of the organization, there were valiant efforts to undo past wrongs and right the structure, ethics, principles, strategies, and goals of the organization. These efforts were insufficient to salvage a viable, effective national organization.

By the Spring of 1993 the organization was engulfed in an internal struggle which made any forward positive motion virtually impossible. And while the reform effort within the organization had made some progress over a 2-year period, the power of a founder with immense personal wealth who sought to thwart reform at every turn was overwhelming.

In the end many of us realized that our energies were not best spent maintaining a dysfunctional organization. Beyond that, many of us felt that the organization had so many overlapping and deep crises that it could only do more harm than good:

- the few projects within the organization that were still managing to carry-out good work were beginning to suffer;
- if the organization had been left as a shell with the people of color and a number of whites leaving, NTCF would have had no chance at actually achieving what its stated mission was, and the organization would then have become a destructive force in the movement;
- if NTCF remained, it would have continued to drain scarce funding resources needed by groups who were already legitimately carrying-out pieces of the work that NTCF only attempted to do – but received large financial support for.

Simply put, the organization had outlived its purpose and it was time to close.

## Chronology

### 1984

- National Campaign Against Toxics Hazards (NCATH) kicked-off in New Hampshire, sponsored by Citizen Action and Clean Water Action.

### 1985

- Superdrive for Superfund, NCATH's nationwide campaign to pass amendments to the Superfund, launched.

### 1986

- Citizen Action pulls staff off NCATH. The establishment of the National Toxics Prevention Fund-C3, (later to be renamed the National Toxics Campaign Fund). board consists of founder and two friends in Boston.

### 1987

- Other movement activists join C3-board.

\* The terms 501-C(3) and 501-C(4) refer to the federal tax status of an organization as assessed by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Generally speaking - 501-C(3) organizations primary purpose is to carry out charitable activities, (including research and education), while a 501-C(4) allows more emphasis on lobbying, and political campaigns. It is common that 501-C(3) and C(4) boards work collaboratively to accomplish similar goals. In this document, "501-C(3)" is written as C3, and "501-C(4)" as C4.

- National Toxics Prevention Fund cuts staff and funding cross links to Clean Water Action, becomes independent.

### 1988

- National Toxics Campaign, a C4 organization, is established with board comprised of grassroots activists drawn from the Superfund fight, founder becomes the Executive Director.
- Decision to adopt canvasses as an organizing and fundraising tool, first canvass opens in Oklahoma.
- Citizens Environmental Lab opens out of a fishing tackle box in the office.

### 1989

- New Executive Director of C-3 put into place, founder maintains position as Executive Director of the C4 and Chair of the C3.
- Three members from the C4 'grassroots board' placed on the C3-board.
- Military Toxics Project begins with the release of report on rocket toxics.

### 1990

- Letter from the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (SNEEJ) challenging NTCE to address issues concerning people of color and to diversify the board and staff.
- First undoing racism session in organization's history carried out with the board (not the staff). A number of key decisions resulted:
  - \* that the organization would work towards 50% people of color representation on the board and the staff;
  - \* that to have the staff reach 50% people of color, regular affirmative action would not suffice, but rather a policy was adopted that for the foreseeable future, only people of color would be hired;
  - \* first time that the board formally discussed the issue of people of color being disproportionately effected by toxics;
  - \* the creation of the Racial Justice Committee (a bi-racial group);
  - \* a commitment to the development of a multi-racial organization.
- In the fall the concept for the Environmental Justice Project (EJP) is launched; EJP project board formed to oversee and manage the project; People of Color

### 1991

- First joint meeting of the C3 and C4 boards in February; EJP project board approved by the board, results in the first defection of a member of the 'White Male Club' (see "Organizational Integrity" section); Women's Caucus of the board formed.
- Organizational restructuring process initiated in the Spring.
- Financial problems cause organization to scale back, lay off staff in July.
- Restructuring process culminates at September joint meeting of the boards. Founder moved from Executive Director to Chair and 'Chief Visionary' of the organization; Executive Director of the C3 becomes Executive Director of both organizations (see "Organizational Validity" section). Boards have first in-depth discussion about mission, vision, strategy, principles, beliefs, and criteria for success of the organization. Board adopts principle of 50% women for its membership.
- December, C4-board votes to end contractual relationship with one of two canvass companies.
- Second fiscal crisis in organization, many staff laid off, pressure to use money raised for the EJP project to pay white staff.

### 1992

- Canvasses close in January.
- NTC C4-board decides to cease operations of the C4 organization. The C3-board 'invites' the former C4-board members to join their board.
- New board meets in April; additional people of color added; new officers elected; diversity and oppression workshop held, first time sexism is systematically discussed; expansion of the Women's Caucus to include staff.
- First EJP training implemented [with Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO), Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP), and Gulf Coast Tenants Association (GFTA)], and the addition of three new staff organizers of color.
- From spring until September, the new board approves annual budget, affiliation structure and process, a job description for the Executive Director, an organization building model, and personnel policies.
- External attacks on people of color and other board members begin due to their connection to NTCE.

1993

- Board and staff women meet together for first time.
- During a major political attack on Executive Director, board gives him a vote of confidence, and decides to take up a series of allegations against the Executive Director and other board members.
- People of Color Caucus votes to split from NTCF on the basis that it was no longer a viable vehicle.
- April 25, board votes in Albuquerque to cease operations, and spin off viable projects.

## Our Reflections

Throughout this evaluation there will be exceptions that can be pointed to for all of the statements made. However, the focus here is on the norm; the rule, and not on the exception. Again, this document represents the opinions of the people listed at the end of the paper, a number of whom were with the organization in different capacities since its founding in the mid-eighties.

## First, Thanks

We wish to pay tribute to and offer sincere thanks to all the thousands of people who helped contribute to the victories and accomplishments of the organization. Many people devoted their hopes and dreams to NTCF, and many staff and leaders devoted large parts of their life to the organization. Lots of good resulted, and we need to hang onto that, along with the fact that next time, we will all be more prepared to overcome the obstacles put in the way of our progress.

## I. Organizational Integrity and Structure

### A) Decision Making: The Tyranny of Structurelessness; Who Held the Power?

In the life and times of the National Toxics Campaign Fund, there were four groups who held varying degrees of power:

- The 'White Male Club'
- The Boards
- The Staff
- The People of Color Caucus

#### The 'White Male Club'

The 'White Male Club' (the 'Club'), with the founder at its helm, held the decision making power at NTCF until the fall of 1990 when the People of Color Caucus was established. The 'Club's' membership consisted of the founder, (who up until 9/91 held the dual positions of Executive Director of the C4-NTC organization and President of the C3-NTCF board), the Executive Director of the C3-NTCF organization, the Organizing Director, the Research Director, and a number of different associates — all close friends — who held various positions. It also included the wife of the founder (a major funder of the organization).

At times, the 'Club's' associate members were being paid as consultants on research, legislative, and publication projects, others held key offices on the C3-NTCF board (the board with control over the disposable income). Some core members of this clique first met as students in a private New England university. They came together structurally at staff and board gatherings and informally on the basketball court, in the pubs of Boston, and at various summer vacation homes. Part of the excessive power of the 'Club' can be attributed to the geographical closeness of its ranking membership.

While 'white male clubs' are far from a unique structure in either society as a whole or in social movements, this 'Club' held exclusive power within NTCF

while it was busy raising and spending funds in the name of 'building grassroots democracy.' The organization, they articulated, was 'the only organization in the environmental movement where grassroots people — the real people — called the shots.'

The 'Club's' leadership determined virtually all decisions: who to hire; what to pay; what issues to work on; the organization's vision; the finances; the organizing; the fundraising; the canvasses; the campaigns; which community leaders to invite onto the boards; when and where the boards would meet; what the boards would talk about, etc.

To understand the scope of that power better, from 1984 until 1991, there was no organizational structure. No organizational chart. No staff personnel policies. No hiring policies. No budgets. No salary guidelines. No clear organizing model. Though two boards existed on paper, they exercised little significant power. This absence of organizational structure and policy allowed a few people to make decisions with no commonly developed principles, guidelines or rules, and no evaluation mechanisms or safeguards to assure organizational coherence, consistency or equity.

The power over decision making was the most clear from 1984-1991. From early 1991 on, the struggle over who controlled decision making was the real sub-text behind almost every other internal fight that emerged. This is not to say that other serious issues were not being struggled over — such as race, class, gender, vision, organizing methodology, and program. Rather, at some point every significant battle had an element of the founder and his 'Club' struggling to maintain the near-unanimous power over every aspect of the organization they had enjoyed up until early 1991.

### A Tale of Two Boards: The Dual Board Structure

While it is common practice that a group of people working to accomplish a specific goal found two organizations to achieve their desired end, (one a C3 and

one a C4), at NTCF a dual board structure was used to manipulate decision making power. Many members of the C4-board felt that they were denied important information pertaining to the organizations finances and programmatic direction, blocking the C4-board from exercising responsible and informed decision making power.

From 1984 until 1986, many of the individuals who went on to become the 'White Male Club' were collaborating closely as part of the Superfund coalition, making decisions together, and setting the stage for the structural formation of the National Toxics Campaign Fund (see "Chronology"). From 1986 until 1988, with the incorporation of the C3 organization, there was a board which consisted of the 'Club.' In 1988, NTCF decided to launch the National Toxics Campaign (NTC), a C4 arm, and to create a board of grassroots community toxics activists. So began the tale of two boards.

The C3 NTCF board had control over large amounts of disposable income since it governed the tax-

deductible arm of the national campaign (which is where all foundation grants were deposited and spent). The funds that the C4-board legally managed came from the canvasses which were only breaking even or losing money. The C4-board was referred to as the 'grassroots victims' board by the staff leadership, and particularly by the founder. This 'victim' language rather than the 'impacted people' or the 'grassroots' or the 'community people' was reflective of an organizational

paternalism which only began to abate when people who represented viable local organizations, primarily people of color, began joining the board in numbers in the early '90's.

The C4 NTC 'grassroots board' was told they had power because the C3 decision makers 'believed philosophically that the organization should take its direction from the grassroots' and would accept recommendations made by the C4-board. Ultimately, however, the grassroots board did not command the

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resources, and when push came to shove, their wishes could and were easily overruled.

As grassroots leaders realized the limits of their power, they demanded more information, more seats on the C3-board, and greater general accountability. While they got some response (for example, three members of the C4-board were added to the C3-board), the system continued to operate largely as usual. Total rebellion was staved off by the founder's ability to placate the grassroots representatives, both through forming very close personal relationships with them and through providing financial and other perks (see letter 'E: Unethical Behavior').

Until the two boards consolidated in April of 1992, the C3-board remained primarily white and male and was made up of 'Club' members or supporters of the 'Club's' leadership.

In 1990, responding to external pressure from the grassroots environmental justice movement, three new people of color who represented organizations were added to the C4-NTC board. This new energy led to the creation of the People of Color Caucus and the formation of the Environmental Justice Project (EJP). The first challenge to the authority of the 'Club' was the decision by the Caucus to create a quasi-independent EJP project board to control the funds raised for the Environmental Justice Project; hire the EJP Director; and select the sites for the organizers of color who were to be hired under the program.

The EJP proposal created a predictable backlash by the 'Club'. At a 2/91 joint board meeting called in response to the 'crisis' of the new EJP project board, (the first joint board meeting ever), the Caucus prevailed, with one result being the first schism in the 'Club's' membership. The Executive Director of the C3-NTCF organization, one of two key figures in the original 'Club,' decided to support the Caucus.

By the Spring of 1991, with a growing debate about decision-making, direction, structure, and a looming financial crisis, the Executive Director of the C3-NTCF initiated an organizational restructuring and long term planning process facilitated by outside consultants. The next decisive turning point in the power struggle came at the September joint meeting of the

boards to review and act on recommendations of the organizational restructuring process. The results of this meeting were:

- For the first time the board debated and adopted a strategy which addressed a statement of mission, beliefs and principles.
- The founder, who had maintained the dual position up until then of Executive Director of the C4-NTC organization and President of the C3-NTCF was moved to a role of national organizer, spokesperson, C3-board Chair and 'Chief Visionary.'
- The Executive Director of the C3-NTCF was made Executive Director of both organizations.
- Though not voted on, the question of which board actually controlled the power of the organization through controlling the disposable income was raised for the first time.
- C4-NTC board reviewed a budget for the first time.

During the four month restructuring process, board and staff members became aware of unethical behavior and gross mismanagement within the organization. The September 1991 meeting, and the process leading up to it, was extremely divisive and traumatic. Even though the results constituted progress for NTCF, this was a period of real crisis in which the board strove to keep the organization together by agreeing to a structure which still had major limitations:

This was the first in a series of critical moments when loyalty and liberalism led to compromises which continued rather than solved the deep internal crisis. For example, establishing the founder as 'Chief Visionary' made a white male the prime public representative and thinker of an organization which was working to diversify. Other problems such as the founder's use of personal money were identified but not dealt with by the board.

One of many items brought to light in the restructuring process was the fact that the canvasses were an enormous financial drain and were actually costing the organization money. The canvasses were maintained because ideologically the founder was committed to canvass operations, believing that they were an organizing tool to build power and avoid an over-dependence on foundations (see 'Canvasses Not Anchors' for more).

The founder often spoke of NTC being 'an organization for the grassroots, paid for by the grassroots, free from the contamination or reliance on big funders.' The reality, however, was that the founder's wife, (for years referred to as an 'anonymous donor,') was pumping at least \$100,000 into the budget of the C4-NTC annually to give the *appearance* of a solvent organization. Thus, the struggle to obtain financial information about the C4-NTC organization and the debate over the decision to end the contract with one of the two canvass companies were important moments for the board (12/91). Ultimately, it was a prelude to the next big power struggle.

By the Spring of 1992, the boards had voted to consolidate, with the C4-NTC arm of the organization (previously the legal and financial home for the canvasses) being shut down and the members of its board joining the C3-NTCF board. Fights over management, race, integrity and corruption engulfed the newly unified board as for the first time people with different ideas about the mission of the organization were now seated together.

From September 1991 up through the decision to close the organization, the boards, first the C3-NTCF board, then the C4-NTC, then the consolidated board, actually did exercise power.

### The Staff

The lack of personnel policies until August of 1992, less than one year from when the organization closed, is a clear indication that the staff didn't have much power. However, from the perspective of many members of the C4-NTC 'grassroots' board, the staff of the organization held undue power. In fact, the staff had power only while acting in concert with or as adjuncts to the 'White Male Club.' An example illustrates the dynamic:

During a national staff meeting in September of 1990, there was an important discussion taking place about NTCF's strategy on a particular issue, being led by the Organizing Director ('Club' member). At one point, not too far into the discussion, the Organizing Director decided to break for lunch. As the meeting was adjourning, he *announced* that he, the founder, the Research Director, and a visiting 'Club' member would 'meet over lunch and figure the strategy out.'

So while staff were, in fact, privy to decision making in ways that the C4-NTC 'grassroots' board was not, the staff rank and file had at best a minor role in the outcomes of many decisions.

### The People of Color Caucus

The Caucus emerged as a real power just shortly after forming (fall/ '90). Predating the People of Color Caucus (a multiracial body) was a Racial Justice Committee of the C4-board. This Racial Justice Committee had formed just a few months earlier in the summer of '90 during the first session on race issues. The committee was made up of white and African American board members, after some of the whites on the board objected strongly to the idea that the people of color on the board needed their own committee. With the addition of still more people of color onto the board, *and*, some struggle, the Racial Justice Committee was disbanded in favor of the all-People of Color Caucus.

The struggle to deconstruct the Racial Justice Committee and establish an independent space for people of color in a white organization was one reason that the Caucus emerged into a cohesive and highly effective leadership team within the organization. Some additional elements which made this possible were:

- From the start, the Caucus had resources at its disposal which took the form of a Chair, a budget, and a very competent staff person, the EJP Project Director. These combined resources made a tremendous contribution to the development of the Caucus.
- Many of the members of the Caucus came from viable organizations working at the local or regional level that held them accountable to actions taken when they carried out NTCF-related work.
- Members of the Caucus, through commonality of struggle within the organization around race and other questions, were able to establish trust amongst one another.
- Most of the people of color came to the organization so late in its history that they were outside the 'buddy' network of the organization, besides being outside the white culture of it, and therefore could identify problems that other people's loyalties to the 'Club' had prevented them from seeing.
- Most members of the Caucus were seasoned

activists with years of experience in organizations that gave them a reference point to quickly understand many of NTCF's organizational limitations, beyond the obvious racism. This facilitated the Caucus' ability to be decisive and strategic.

## **B) Related Power Issues**

### **Conflicts on the Board**

Other themes were at play on the boards of directors. Many of them raise issues important to movement work, the outcomes of which were never resolved. Some of the more consistent ones were:

- **Gender.** Like racism, sexism existed at all levels of NTCF. Three central problems were evident: 1) some male members of the board were sexist; 2) other male members of the board failed to take up the banner of undoing sexism; and, more subtly, 3) while the board's gender disparity in number may not have been enormous, the male and female members had very different sources of and experiences with power.

Typically the women were volunteer activists at the community-level – people without years of paid activism which would have put them at a different place with respect to the skills and confidence needed to exert more leadership in, and challenges to, the organization. For example, few of these women had much opportunity to meet with funders, write grant proposals, work with boards, strategize for a regional or national organization, make hiring decisions, or track budgets. Typically, the men on the board were full-time paid activists whose skills in many areas, though surely not all, were often more developed. These differences were *not* due to a 'natural ability of men,' but rather the often deliberate leadership development that comes with working as a full-time staff person in a movement organization.

- **Class.** Class conflict was central to the struggle within NTCF, although it was almost never discussed and there was an absence of deliberate class analysis as it played out in the organization. At the heart of the internal class issues within NTCF were the 'White Male Club' and the two boards, one middle to upper class, mostly white and mostly male which held the power, and the other low income, working class, multiracial (post '90), which was for many years pri-

marily an advisory body.

Class issues were reflected in a C4-NTC board discussion about whether paid 'professional' activists should be considered grassroots. Many members of the board who were community volunteers contended that paid activists should not be considered grassroots and therefore not eligible for the C4-NTC board. While this is a legitimate question, it is interesting to note that a more serious class question about the difference in the type of people on the C3 and C4 boards, and the boards' relative powers in the organization, did not emerge as a significant debate. Partly, this was a result of loyalty and friendship to members of the 'Club' who were on the C3-board.

Partly the traditional pattern held true which is that many of the low income white C4-board members made alliances with wealthy people on the C3 'power' board and had antagonistic relationships with people of similar class, but often different race, on the grassroots C4-board.

Unfortunately, class was used by the founder to whip up loyalty among his allies on the grassroots board both by contrasting his own low income upbringing to that of the then sole Executive Director, and by claiming to be working class. The irony was that the founder and his wife were the wealthiest people in the organization.

- **Race.** Since racism permeated the organization, board interactions did not escape it. There were three main ways it played out: 1) the lack of people of color on the boards for most of NTCF's history; 2) overtly racist board members, and; 3) much of the time, the white members of the board who were sympathetic to diversity did not rise to combat either the racism displayed by fellow board members or institutional racism in the organization, nor did they rise to leadership in tough power struggles generally.

The result was that the people of color were doing double duty (triple for the women) by fighting the race battle, and everyone else's battles. This diminished the ability of the slowly developing white – people of color alliance to pursue unified strategy on key questions as trust issues between the people of color and the white members were strained until just near the end of NTCF.

Class was also a factor in the resistance by some of the low income white board members to accept the notion of environmental racism or the idea that race disproportionately impacted people of color when it came to toxics (many of them also lived in communities heavily contaminated by toxics). This created fertile ground for division where there should have been commonality.

- **Organizational Representation.** Due to the lack of clarity about the organizing model, and aggravated by many of the elements of the organizing culture of NTCF, the board was not explicitly accountable to or representative of anyone. While some members did come from viable functioning local organizations, NTCF's structure did not require that members came with any accountability or responsibility to the communities in which they lived. This was a major limitation of the organization and its ability to say it actually represented community people, though the rhetoric to the contrary was quite extensive.

In fairness, how to really achieve accountability is a very difficult question to answer. In order to be effective, this kind of mutual accountability among independent organizations working in coalition requires high levels of trust, responsiveness, and internal democracy on the part of each organization.

A related problem was the lack of intermediary levels within the organization. In some national groups, regional and sub regional bodies exist where emerging activists develop skills and relationships, so that when it comes time to fill the seat on the national board, new members have the experience, trust and power to truly exercise the authority they have on paper. In contrast, NTCF elevated many activists to the 'grassroots board' who had local, but little state or regional experience.

### Board Size: Efficiency and Democracy in Crisis

A major factor in the board's inability to function effectively or exert power was the size, both between 1988-1992 with two boards, and after the consolidation. The C4-NTC board had 19 members, and the C3-NTCF board had 13. The unification of the board's membership gave rise to a 32 member national board. Size effected the board negatively in a number of ways:

- **Lack of in-person meetings.** Due to the volume of financial and logistical resources required for a national board of such size, insufficient time was spent in face-to-face meetings. It became clear, especially as the boards began to exert more authority and the organizational crisis accelerated, that the outcome on key matters depended a great deal on the board's ability to meet, caucus, socialize and develop the trust needed to take control of the organization.

- **Thirty-Something-Person National Telephone-Conference Calls for Three Hours at Least Each Month.** Enough said.

- **Resources Wasted.** The amount of money spent merely convening a board of such size was staggering. Rather, less or equal amounts of money could have been much more effectively used to carry-out desperately needed leadership development with a smaller board and decentralized regional bodies.

### Founder's Syndrome, Money, and Power

The organization suffered from an acute case of 'Founder's Syndrome.' In NTCF's case, the founder was an inspiring speaker with tremendous energy and generosity of his personal wealth. Many realized that staff and financial management were not his particular strengths. Attempts to move him to a position of 'Chair and Chief Visionary,' with a major role as spokesperson and 'stump speaker' failed. The process of trying to shift his role, respectfully, within the organization to one that better suited his abilities became a key basis for the underlying power struggles that led to the decision to close the organization.

Compounding the traditional power wielded by founders was the personal wealth at the disposal of NTCF's founder. While often times founders have some access to 'angel' funders, rarely is the angel the founder, as was the case here.

## **C) Staff Issues**

### A Brief Overview of the Staff

The combined staff of NTCF and NTC ranged from 51/2 positions in 1986 to somewhere between 25 and 30 people in the last three years, not including the canvass staff. The Citizens Laboratory staff, as well as most of the financial, fundraising, research and admin-

Administrative staff were located in the Boston headquarters. Over the years, organizers were located in: Boston; Sacramento; San Francisco; Los Angeles; Denver; Livingston, AL; Seattle; Baton Rouge; Raleigh, NC; Oklahoma City; and Litchfield, ME. The initial staff for Texans United, a statewide ally which NTCF helped initiate, were financially supported by NTCF. Additionally, NTCF provided organizing, technical and financial assistance to and served as the fiscal sponsor for West County Toxics Coalition in Richmond, CA. And, briefly, NTC had a part time legislative person in Washington DC.

### Accountability, Authority, and Responsibility

Due to the lack of an organizational structure at NTCF (up until the time of the restructuring), there was little sense of, or clarity about, accountability, authority and responsibility with or among staff, board or management. An organizational chart was finally approved in 1992, eight years into NTCF's nine years of existence. This lack of structure was unquestionably a determinant in the overall inefficiency, power imbalances, and ineffectiveness of the organization. This fed the mistrust and misunderstandings between staff and board.

### Hiring, Job Descriptions, Training and Development, and Evaluation

The staff and management of NTCF received virtually no training. While this stood as a problem on its own, it was exacerbated by the haphazard way many of the staff were hired (there was no hiring policy...until the mandate to hire people of color, and even there, no plan for how to implement that policy).

Often staff were hired because they were a friend of a friend of those in power in the organization, and not because of a specific skill they possessed or need they would fill. This was particularly true with the organizing staff, some of whom had no prior experience with community-based organizing. Making matters worse, there was no process for systematic evaluations at any level.

There were exceptions to the above. The Citizens Lab had a well developed training program for its staff. The Environmental Justice Project (EJP) made staff training and structure a top priority.

### Communication

Communication, or rather the lack of it, was a significant issue within the organization overall, and certainly among the staff. This led to problems with coordination, isolation (especially among the field staff, both among them and between them and the national office), and poor staff morale. There were attempts at internal newsletters, organizers meetings, and other forums, but none ever ameliorated the structural problem.

### Board/Staff Relationship

The board and staff, for many reasons already outlined in other sections, never developed a healthy relationship, certainly not a partnership. In part, this was true because the board and staff did not have sufficient opportunity to communicate or meet and form relationships. The staff more clearly saw and understood that their marching orders came from the 'Club' without the involvement of the board. Some members of the board had disrespectful attitudes towards staff which implied or explicitly sent a message to the staff that they were not to be thought of as equal partners in the organization.

Additionally, in the final years, what contact the board did have with the staff was generally related to staff grievances which mounted as a result of an on-going management crisis. This crisis was compounded by the founder's escalating internal campaign to undermine the credibility of the management after the restructuring process. This type of board - staff contact complicated the already strained relations between the two.

### Favoritism

Certain staff were favored over others in terms of salaries, resources, and access to management. The lack of a salary structure, personnel policies, and standard procedures made it possible for management to treat each employee with a 'let's make a deal' approach, which not surprisingly resulted in many inequities. The institution of a number of staff-related policies towards the end of the organization's history helped address some of the problems.

### Staff Rights or Processes

The lack of policies in the organization became a major obstacle in the last two years when a number

of personnel complaints surfaced. With no established grievance procedure, steadily declining relationships between various staff and board, and the inclination of some individuals towards conspiratorial and confrontational means to address the issues at hand, internal conflagration ruled.

Some staff went directly to the board, filed grievances with outside agencies, or sought media attention, at times with little or no attempt to pursue any kind of internal staff airing. This added to tensions between the board and the Executive Director, and between management and the rest of the staff, and made any kind of resolution of personnel issues nearly impossible.

Although it was true that staff had legitimate concerns, it was equally true that the founder used these charges to attack the then Executive Director and the people organizing for change in NTCF. The irony was that the founder had been the Executive Director for all the years that no policies, including personnel or salary, existed. It was later efforts, only after the founder's departure from the Executive Director position, that the move for policies and procedures and structure began to take hold.

## Management

From the outset until its demise — NTCF was never managed effectively. Every aspect already discussed here about the concentration of power contributed to poor management — and poor management contributed to everything wrong in the overall structure. The result was a gradual downward spiral as the staff size and geography expanded. By the time these issues came to the attention of the board, the management deficiencies were being used a weapon in the conflict between the two principle managers, making it virtually impossible to sort out what was going on or devise a mechanism to rectify the crisis.

## **D) Funding and Finances**

### Funding

The limitations that surrounded the funding strategy

at NTCF are quite typical of many organizations. The near-total reliance on foundations dominated throughout the life of the organization, (exceptions were the lab, which increasingly generated contracts to support its work, and the idea that a canvass would generate large income, addressed below). Financially, NTCF was only able to survive as long as it did due to the presence of an Executive Director who had tremendous skill in the fundraising department; racism in the funding world which allowed NTCF to receive substantial grants, both explicitly for environmental justice monies and for general support while people of color groups were not afforded the same (*more under section on "Race"*); and, for many years, (except for the final one), large personal contributions made to the organization by its founder and family.

Neither individual contributors nor major donors nor other sources of funds were ever given the attention or resources necessary to make them successful. In 1991, NTCF began to try to seek regionally-based funding, but it was added as one more of the many expectations put on an already over-burdened field staff. The staff training was not adequate. The

board never took adequate responsibility for fundraising, nor did they engage in a planning process that examined it.

### Financial Management

Again, typical of the growth of many groups, NTCF's development far outpaced its financial management. Real financial management began, like many areas relating to structure, near the end of the organization's history. Until 1990, when a full time financial manager was hired, all of the organizations' finances were handled by an outside consultant. The reporting mechanism on the canvasses, which NTC left to the canvass companies themselves, was particularly poorly handled. These reports came only periodically. The board rarely played a role in the oversight of the finances, and, when oversight attempts were made beginning with the restructuring process, the boards' available time was consumed by internal conflict.

**From the founder in his capacity as chief staff manager for most of the organizations life, to the later Executive Director, to most staff persons who held key supervisory posts — NTCF was never managed effectively. The result was a gradual downward spiral as the staff size and geography expanded.**

Mismanagement of the finances characterized much of the history.

## **E) Unethical Behavior, Deceit and the 'Process of Discovery'**

Corruption, deceit, lying, and unethical behavior were a major cause of NTCF's demise. On the senior management level, such behavior took the form of moving funds designated for one project into another projects lines as a 'loan,' (though with no guarantee that the funds would be paid back); keeping this information from the project staff, even when asked about it; not volunteering critical information to the board about staff-management conflicts if they were not in management's favor; and more.

On the part of the founder, there was an insidious misuse of personal funds in and around the organization. While money and perks are often associated with board and staff positions in corporations and the movement, at NTCF these were used repeatedly over many years in ways that built personal loyalty and influenced decision making.

There were personal donations made to board members' organizations. At times these checks were written out by the founder to *individuals* on the board and not to their local group. This left the recipients unclear about what the donations were for, and gave the impression that the support presumed faithfulness down the road. There were subsidies to families of the board and staff. There were offers to use the founder's vacation houses for people who rarely in their life were afforded such an opportunity. There were backstage passes to big national concerts. Even assuming that generosity was a factor in these dealings, the impact was powerful, particularly for low income people to whom these gifts were substantial. How do you cast a vote against someone who just paid your personal phone bill or paid your salary when the funds were low?

More subtle but nonetheless influential was the frequent use of the founder's vacation homes and Boston home for meetings and social gatherings. In an organization with limited funds, this kind of generosity was appreciated. However, it contributed to the already strong sense that the founder was the organi-

zational father or patron to which the board and staff members should be grateful. People were bound to be uncomfortable challenging the founder's role while they ate his food, drank his beer and slept in his house.

In addition to gifts to individuals, the founder's family made very large contributions to the organization (as much as \$100,000-\$200,000 annually). These contributions came anonymously, often to balance deficits and support the founder's pet projects.

The founder also exercised more control over his personal monies than is traditional for an individual donor. Sometimes he would hold back promised monies pending his approval of specific payees. Also, rather than channel money through the organization, he occasionally wrote checks directly to payees for organizational expenses. On a broader scale, just as his support was given to put off impending crises at times (the canvasses), after the restructuring process occurred, he withdrew promised donations in a way that accelerated financial crisis. For example, after the board voted him to become the organization's Chair and not chief staff manager, he decided not to make a previously committed gift, which caused a substantial shortfall that year.

## **F) Lessons Learned**

### **Accountability**

National 'membership' organizations must have a model and strategy to achieve legitimate accountability. While this is not easy to achieve, there are basic structures of national, regional, and local representation that groups must work to accomplish.

Related to this, every organization needs to look at how they can accommodate the day-to-day demands and constraints of community-based leaders who may serve on a national board yet who have little access to resources or say so over their life schedules. The ability of the boards to function was facilitated by the creation of a part time 'board development' staff person and the provision of basic resources to board members such as phone cards and fax machines.

### **Need for a Clear Structure**

An organization's structures should be clear to every-

one at the board, management, and staff levels. The structure needs to articulate the decision making mechanisms within the organization, and be democratically arrived at. Communication lines and tools are essential, particularly within a national organization with field offices, and a large staff and board. A sound accounting system, board and staff job descriptions and personnel policies are among a number of bottom-line items that groups need. The structure should be flexible, able to accommodate a growing and changing organization, and should be regularly re-evaluated as part of an annual planning process.

### Personal Relationships Cannot Be the Primary Building Blocks in Organizations

We need to draw our strength and unity in organizations from shared principles, mission, and direction, not from personal relationships. The more that an organization operates on personal relationships, the less people in it are able to act clearly on behalf of the organization's broader purpose. If the initial group is, as is often the case in our society, white men, building on personal relationships will almost certainly lead to more organizations dominated by white men.

People in leadership roles need to be especially careful about their personal relationships with others in the organization, and about abusing these relationships through favoritism or pleas for loyalty on policies and votes. Even the perception of personal alliances among people in power can alienate and shut down staff and board members who want to raise concerns or challenge the system.

### Primacy of Leadership Development

Institutional resources should be budgeted for leadership development and on-going training for the board and staff. Resources dedicated to undoing racism, sexism, and other oppressions is a particularly key piece to the overall development needs of any organization.

### Race, Gender, and Class

Early in the life of an organization and regularly thereafter discussions should occur that locate people's privilege with respect to the broader society in which our work takes place. Social movements do not escape the overlapping crises of racism, sexism, and classism. We must be deliberate in our efforts to counter them in our organizations.

And surely, the time for rule by 'white male clubs' in movements for social change in this country is over.

### Founder's Syndrome

The experience at NTCF, where the founders' failure to share power or allow the organization to evolve and change, had an extraordinarily debilitating impact and points to a need for broader, movement-wide discussions about this phenomenon.

Because 'Founders Syndrome' is such a common experience in social change movements, we suggest a model be developed for the movement to tackle it systematically. Some elements are obviously addressed above, such as having a clear structure in

which decision making is democratic and defined. But there is something here which is deeper.

If we acknowledge that founders are often visionary, risk taking, energetic people, which can be accompanied by a big ego, than how do organizations practically speaking say 'thank you, it's time to move over?' At the same time, the founders themselves need to assess their own roles and act for the benefit of the organization, not for their own personal needs.

A few questions that need to be examined are:

- How do we carefully evaluate the strengths and skills of the founder? Is the founder in the right structural position in the organization?
- How well does the founder share vision-making in an organization?
- Since most have access to funds, either their own or

**We need to draw our strength and unity in organizations from shared principles, mission, and direction, not from personal relationships. The more that an organization operates on personal relations, the less people in it are able to act clearly on behalf of the organization's broader purpose.**

more commonly, private 'angel' funders, are the dollars that are flowing in transparent? Are they being used to facilitate the agenda of the founder and not necessarily the overall organization?

- What are the limits to generosity? Because a founder may have access to vacation homes and large meeting spaces, is disproportionate power turned over when the organization's physical sense of space is dominated by the founder's?
- Are there mechanisms in place to share decision making and build internal democracy?

**The notion that 'we are all good people fighting to change unjust structures' may serve as a stumbling block to more deliberate efforts to insure that we embody the changes that we seek to create.**

### Funding and Finances

Much of what was learned in the NTCF experience about fundraising and finances is well known, but commonly ignored by organizations. Here is a brief list of some of the more important lessons:

- Both board and staff need consistent, accurate, understandable and regular financial reporting to effectively manage the organization.
- Once an organization reaches a certain size, an in-house financial recordkeeping system is preferable to relying solely on outside consulting.
- Board members need to receive training which will allow them to interpret financial information put out by the staff.
- Diversifying an organization's funding base is critical, and long term strategic planning is the avenue to develop fundraising plans:
- Large national groups (and many regional groups) with far more access to foundation and other funders must develop principles early on to address how they will avoid stepping on the toes of other groups deserving of the monies, whether this be smaller more local groups and/or people of color organizations:

Where personal wealth and founder's authority overlap, discipline and structures that force transparency of donations and allocations is mandatory. Otherwise, as in the case here, generosity steps over a very dangerous line into manipulation.

### Ethics for our Work

Perhaps too often movements and organizations set aside structured discussions of and systems for how to arrive at real ethics and principles for how we operate. The notion that 'we are all good people fighting to change unjust structures' may serve as a stumbling block to more deliberate efforts to insure that we embody the changes that we seek to create.

In the NTCF experience, egotism, manipulation, sexism, racism, classism and deception became almost commonplace in the organization. Here again, many of the lessons already noted would greatly increase the movement's ability to overcome or avoid this type of behavior. We need more explicit organization-wide discussions about what kind of behavior is and isn't acceptable. Written principles attempting to define acceptability in areas such as sexual politics, perks, and information distribution should be carefully considered and discussed in social change organizations.

## **II. Organizing**

### **A) What was the Model?**

NTCF had many different approaches to organizing in its almost ten year history. At times these multiple efforts were in conflict with each other, and were often changing. At no time in the history of the organization was there ever a coherent model.

The organization was attempting to build on and give strength to the growing grassroots struggles against the poisoning. NTCF hoped to make explicit a political analysis arguing that underlying these local fights were corporations that had too much power and virtually no democratic oversight. One obstacle to developing and disseminating this analysis was the organization's struggle to define its own organizing strategy. Another barrier was the disrespect that the organization displayed to local groups on too many occasions.

NTCF struggled with the complexities of building a national organization and carrying out national campaigns while supporting local and state efforts being fought by local organizations. Additionally, there was a multi-year struggle over how to get internal organizing resources focused on targeting the points of poisonous production (the beginning of the toxic process, i.e. chemical plants, paper mills, electronic factories, etc.) rather than simply working on end-of-the-pipe fights (once toxics have become waste, i.e. incinerators and dumps).

Examples of the approaches that NTCF utilized in attempting to deal with some of these questions include:

- **Six Week Organizing Drive.** This model was developed in the early years at Massachusetts Fair Share. It focused on an intensive door knocking blitz designed to organize a short term campaign mobilizing around a specific dump site, clean up, etc. This model involved having an organizer identify a few leaders who were personally affected by toxic exposure. The leaders were then promoted to the media to maximize public exposure for the issue. Then efforts began to build a local group. This model was derived from the 'Alinsky Model' of community organizing, which promotes organizing people around issues of immediate local concern as a first step to building empowerment.

- **Superdrive for Superfund Campaign.** This was the first national effort in the anti-toxics movement that involved local organizations in a high profile, media-savvy grassroots campaign. The campaign promoted the passage of the Superfund amendments. It was carried out by NTCF's predecessor, the National Campaign Against Toxics Hazards (NCATH). Trucks driven by the national organizers started from the four corners of the country and travelled to toxic sites in various communities picking up samples of toxic waste, holding press conferences, and then arriving in Washington, DC for Congressional lobbying and media events. The campaign had a major impact on Superfund reauthorization.

- **Door to Door Canvasses.** Canvass offices were established in several communities where the organization contracted with professional canvass companies to hire, train, and send door-to-door fundraisers

out into the communities to recruit members, raise money, and encourage letter writing and other political involvement. It's important to note here that while many primarily view canvasses as a fundraising tool, NTCF promoted the notion that they were part of the organizing strategy.

- **Regional Offices.** Regional offices were opened in various parts of the country as regional 'organizing hubs' sometimes for political/strategic reasons, sometimes in order to justify a canvass presence.

Organizers had multi-state assignments with the long term goal of building regional networks of NTCF-affiliated groups.

- **Three Rights Model.** [Right to Know, Right to Inspect, & Right to Negotiate] This strategy built on the Community Right to Know law. NTCF believed that neighbors of polluting facilities should have the right to inspect and take samples of the facilities waste, using our own experts, and then negotiate with the company for toxics use reduction and accident prevention measures. NTCF worked with industrial hygienists to conduct neighborhood inspections, and used its own lab to document contamination.

- **Organizational Affiliation.** There was a proposal late in NTCF's life that developed a structure for local organizations to affiliate with NTCF. Groups would receive technical and organizing assistance, discounts to the lab and other material benefits. The goal was to build a model that created community accountability for the national organization. This would take the form of a board or National Task Force representation, as well as representation at a National Assembly.

NTCF also had two projects that placed a premium on building power at the base, on movement building by training and developing organizers and local leaders, and less with pulling these groups into national issues or the national organization. These two projects, The Environmental Justice Project (EJP) and the Military Toxics Project (MTP), were spun off just as NTCF closed in order to continue their work unhindered by the internal conflicts of the organization.

- **Environmental Justice Project (EJP).** The EJP was a program for people of color which provided organizer training. EJP recruited organizers from communities of Color, provided an extensive training

oration with the C3 (see "Organizational Integrity" section). The C3-NTCF board, the board with significant disposable income and resources at its command, was not 50% women, and the founder was the C3-board's President throughout the organization's history.

Other inequities were at play on the boards. As noted in both the "Organizational Integrity" and "Organizing" sections, white male leadership reinforced the view of the women community leaders as 'victims.' The differences in the level of activism between men and women members of the board (see "Organizational Integrity" section) further undermined the notion of a gender-happy-gender neutral NTCF. Additionally, even within the People of Color Caucus, noted already as a powerful and forward thinking entity within the organization, male leadership prevailed, (though not as part of, nor in collaboration with the 'White Male Club').

• **The Staff.** On the staff level, the number of women increased considerably in the last four years of the organization, going from well under half to just over half women. There was some movement of women into leadership positions. For example, the final management group of nine people included four women — two Development staff, a part-time Research Director, and the Military Toxics Director. This was progress, but a closer look at this group points out continuing disparities.

The management positions with the most supervisory responsibilities — Executive Director, Lab Director, Organizing Director — were always filled by men. The women in the management group, for example, collectively supervised four people. The remainder of the staff of 25-30 were supervised by men. All four men on the management team were supervised by, and reported directly to, the Executive Director; only one of the women was on this first tier of the hierarchy of the organization.

For the first seven years of the organization, the formative years of the organization's culture, the following positions were all held by men:

- Board President (s)
- Founder
- Executive Directors of the C3 & C4 organizations
- Media Director
- Lab Director

- Organizing Director.
- Research Director
- and later, the Environmental Justice Project Director.

When women did finally reach some higher positions, their authority was undermined by men acting in concert to defend and protect one another. For example, one women manager's attempts to deal with a problematic male employee were consistently diluted by other men in power who ignored or minimized her concerns or even overrode her actions. On the staff, like the board, even from the few positions of power filled by women late in the history, women had to fight to be appropriately included in important organizational decision making. Women at all levels were frequently left out of the loop when men were making decisions that impacted the departments or regions or areas of work that women supervised.

And finally, when the organization voted to create and cede the title of 'Chief Visionary' to a man, the notion was reinforced that men were more equipped to handle vision, (not to mention that yet another leadership title was going to a man).

**Lack of Organizational Resources Devoted to Fighting Sexism or Gender Questions**

Since most grassroots leaders in the toxics movement are women, from an organizing standpoint alone, the expenditure of money and energy to make an effort at better understanding what their perspective was, and how to most usefully assist them, would have been well-spent.

In terms of funding, NTCF received a small grant of \$4,000 in the late 1980's for women's leadership; it was plugged into general support for regional offices staffed by women! Near the end, a \$5,000 grant was received for an in-person meeting of staff and board women. Although searching for specific monies for gender issues within the organization might not have resulted in a funding bonanza, surely, given the track record of the organization's chief fundraiser, more monies would have come through.

There was almost a total lack of training when it came to sexism and gender related issues. In April,

focused on organizing strategy and political education, which was then followed up with a placement of organizers with a local organization. During the two year placement participant organizations received support to focus on long-term base and organization building.

- **Military Toxics Project (MTP).** Launched in 1989, the project created national issue networks based on the needs of local organizations confronting the military's pollution problems. The MTP subsidized networking and workshops to support the development, visibility, skills and political power of the local groups. Issue networks included chemical weapons, depleted uranium, rocket toxics, base closures, and conventional munitions.

## Major Limitations

### Campaigns not Base Building

Over the years, NTCF focused on and succeeded at winning particular victories, locally, regionally, and nationally. While winning specific campaigns is a key element of organizing, NTCF often replaced base building and laying the foundation of viable local groups with winning the fight. On many occasions, NTCF failed to leave an intact local group behind after a campaign and in some cases, NTCF hurt local efforts.

Additionally, NTCF parachuted staff into communities and regions with little sense of strategy and with little or no consultation with the local group or other groups already operating in the area. This often led to problems with future coalition work or collaboration. This was particularly true when NTCF put a white staffer or a canvasser into an area that was predominantly a community of color.

A clear example of NTCF's limitations was an effort the organization devoted a huge amount of resources and time to: the 4/91 Jacksonville, Arkansas, rally. There was little sense of strategy or discussion of

how this campaign fit into the overall organizational mission. In addition, there was no criteria to define a victory nor any articulated strategic reason for going to Jacksonville.

NTCF was invited in by the local community and a large national rally was planned. It was designed to build local and national opposition to an incinerator planned to burn 37,000 barrels of Agent Orange waste, much of it contaminated with dioxin.

NTCF sent in an inexperienced staffer with little understanding of the local political landscape. When that person failed, the organization sent someone else, who didn't work out, then a third person. The lack of continuity damaged the effort and the relationship with the local group. Additionally, NTCF initiated a lawsuit on 'behalf' of the local community that was never followed through. The organization touted that this would be a 'major national action,' which didn't materialize, and the numbers of outside protesters that did arrive met the Jacksonville community for a day, and left. The local organization was not built or strengthened in the process.

The incinerator fight, dropped by NTCF, was taken up by Greenpeace and continues to this day.

### Canvasses, Instead of Anchors

The organization had canvasses from 1988 through 1991. The canvass operation was a central underpinning to the ideology of

the founder, and represented one of the biggest limitations to the vision and the organizing of NTCF. The canvasses were as much about 'empire building' as anything. When the first one opened in 1988 in Oklahoma it was to be the 'first of fifty.' The organization was to gain a million members with which it could become independent of big funders and deliver millions of people on a campaign.

One of the two canvass companies the organization contracted with often selected a new site for the canvass based on the simple fact that an operation could go there because there was no competition. In one case, for example, a national environmental organiza-

NTCF began as an assemblage of local groups across the country fighting dumps, deepwell injection and incineration, and never could quite expand this early foundation to a dual strategic focus on both waste disposal and targeting the points of poisonous production.

Union and the canvass company became involved in a legal dispute in North Carolina, so the canvass company gave the signal to NTCF to immediately set-up an operation there. A canvass began, and then NTCF placed an organizer there to back up the claims that the canvass was selling: that the organization was fighting toxics in North Carolina. There was no discussion about how North Carolina was a priority location for opening an office or how it fit into a national strategy.

The canvasses were a drain on resources both in terms of money and staff time. The results of the canvasses never lived up to the stated purposes for their creation, that they would build a financial base for the organization and free it from foundation dependence and create a large membership base. In fact, the canvasses highlighted the inconsistencies between what NTCF said it wanted to do and what it was doing, chief among them:

- **The canvasses were often a contradiction to base building.** A canvass would sometimes go through a community with 15 people knocking on doors in a night, then be in a completely different community the next day. Unlike organizers, canvassers did not spend months in one community identifying leadership and building people's commitment to the local organization. Organizers in the area were expected to service the canvass, and not the membership. So even though the regional organizer had a multi-state assignment, the canvass stayed within a two hour drive of the regional office, demanding undue time from an organizer with a much larger field.

- **Race and class contradictions were heightened by the canvass operations.** The financial contribution was the bottom line for the canvass. The communities that were being canvassed were often white middle class communities. In exchange for their donation, donors received 'membership' and a promise that the organization would work to tackle some local community issue. This was a contradiction to NTCF's stated vision of working with 'those most impacted by the toxics crisis,' low income, working class, and people of color. The result was that NTCF had a membership base in middle class white communities as the canvass was reluctant to go to other communities because they would not earn their daily income quota.

- **The canvasses were a losing financial gamble for the organization.** Overall, the canvasses never made money for the organization. In fact they were a substantial financial drain. The organization never implemented a strategy to make long term financial 'subscribers' out of the canvassed homes and never did any follow up.

### Personalismo

Much of what passed for NTCF's organizing approach was a loose structure that allowed each staff organizer to work however s/he saw fit and according to her/his particular skills. Despite the presence of four different Organizing Directors in NTCF's life, none successfully articulated or facilitated agreement about a consistent methodology. Organization-wide discussions about what a model should look like did not occur until late in 1991.

This loose structure resulted in a highly personalized style, one embodied by the founder, (who was also the Organizing Director until 1987), that emphasized his charisma, and in his absence, left the cameras focused on the regional staff, and not the community leaders. While not all organizing staff followed this pattern, there was constant pressure to get press so the fundraising could proceed. In one case, local groups complained that the organizer sent out monthly mailings that were simply press clippings about the organizer.

### Fire Fighting

NTCF began as an assemblage of local groups across the country fighting dumps, deepwell injection and incineration. The organization was never quite able to expand this early foundation to a dual strategic focus on both waste disposal and targeting the points of poisonous production.

NTCF wanted to be proactive, working on the factories where poisons were produced and used, and not just on end-of-the-pipe fights. The logic was that the organization and movement were more likely to build long-term organizations and confront corporate power most directly around operating factories. In many of the waste dump fights, the local groups were often short lived. In reality, the organization spent much of its time fighting incinerators and dumps and other 'quick fixes' to the toxic crisis.

## III. Vision

### A) What was the Vision?

NTCF did not have a coherently stated or democratically decided vision of the future it sought to create. That which was articulated were visions promulgated by the founder, in the form of speeches, books, articles, etc. His was a vision of 'environmental democracy.' This was essentially the idea that local people had the right to make decisions about what, for whom, and how production occurs in their community.

Three themes surrounded this vision: 1) a focus on multinational corporations as the root of the toxics crisis; 2) the grassroots communities of this nation, those hardest hit by the crisis, were the ones who needed to lead the fight for a clean, safe, toxic-free economy, and; 3) the importance of local base building.

### B) What Was Missing?

It was often this simply stated or short version of the vision that attracted many people into the organization. Yet, when the time finally came for deeper and broader discussion about the vision or the strategy to achieve it, it was clear that there was not internal consensus on the vision at all. In fact it was in the very process of opening up the vision and mission discussion for internal organizational consideration where discord began.

For example, one past staff member recently reflected that in private discussions it was asserted that it was okay for the organization to have racists on the board of directors because it was a *working class* board. Had this been a public discussion, much debate would have occurred where a position on such a matter would have been agreed to, and people could either live with the decision or have the choice to leave. However, absent any collective discussion, people were assuming that they more or less shared major points of unity with each other based on the anti-corporate and pro-grassroots activist line so often espoused.

This allowed people to go on functioning in an organization assuming higher levels of agreement than actually existed. The confusion created by people thinking they agreed on vision, when they didn't, then played out in other areas, such as debates about the organizing methodology or the accountability structure for the organization. By not ever having a real discussion or resolve on the vision, the struggle over vision complicated other parts of the organization.

Aggravating this situation, in a move to try to accommodate the founder at a critical moment when he was being shifted out of the chief staff manager role, the board actually voted to cede him the title of 'Chief Visionary' for the organization. This made the board culpable in exacerbating the already too far stretched idea that the founder was the vision maker in the organization and not the grassroots leaders collectively.

Additionally, aside from the chief limitation of no organizational discussion about the vision, a few problems existed with the stated vision.

Justice was simply not a precept being advanced by this vision. 'Environmental justice' as an idea did not emerge in NTCF until people of color brought it forward. The focus on 'environmental democracy' negated the fact that for many people of color, whose ancestors lived as slaves or victims of colonization in this country under what was also called 'democracy,' racial justice is a prerequisite to the achievement of democracy.

And, the founder's notion that NTCF was to become 'the big, the bad, the almighty organization' in the movement was problematic for many. This empire building model conflicted with the more principled vision of having NTCF be only one of many important vehicles in building a grassroots movement. This particular piece of the vision surely added fuel to the fire of a battle that never should have been: NTCF's rivalry, rather than collaboration with, the Citizens Clearinghouse on Hazardous Waste (CCHW).

organizing staff, until the development of the Environmental Justice Training Project (EJP), was entirely white and lacked the training or skills necessary to build strong local groups.

## **B) Lessons Learned**

### **Have a Clear Organizing Methodology Based on Principles of Equity and Justice**

Clarity about an organizing methodology and the centrality of deliberate leadership development should be the cornerstone of any group involved in movement building and organizing.

### **A Campaign Model Is Different Than an Organizing Model**

Organizing is a long-term process that builds organizations and develops local leadership. Campaigns, when enacted, need to keep clear and focused on how to build the base, how to complement rather than contradict the long term goal of education and empowerment. We need clear criteria for identifying situations when campaigns actually hamper rather than help long term goals.

Active members need to be cultivated who help make the decisions about when to move, how to move, and when to quit. Our strategies and tactics need to provide opportunities for members to develop skills and analysis. Certainly a lingering question remains: what does 'membership' mean in a national organization? How does a national organization create effective ways to involve local groups and members?

The idea of canvasses as part of an organizing strategy should be examined. Canvasses should not drain resources or negatively impact an organizations ability to organize their constituency. They must support the on-going strategy not become the tail that wags the dog.

### **Selection of Field Office Sites Needs Clear Criteria**

In the last two years of NTCF's existence, the Environmental Justice Project (EJP) developed a series of criteria for the selection of placements for the EJP organizers (see "Attachments"). Criteria such as this would be useful in making decisions about field placements. The very ability of a national organization to work well locally depends, in part, on questions of respect for local and regional groups already organizing and carrying out local efforts. Criteria should relate to the needs of the base and the organization.

### **The Model Needs to be Independent of Personalities**

Much of what passes for organizing in the US movement is attached to the creation of a few dynamic leaders. This practice is often perpetuated by funders and the media and contradicts our experience and understanding that it takes many people engaged at the grassroots to win. We need to create models that equally value the contributions that everyone has to give — not simply those who are charismatic and shine on the podium.

**To build a movement, we have to be increasing the capacity of the base. Attempting to recruit the grassroots to pre-packaged, pre-strategized issue campaigns is not the best formula for building engaged, effective mass participation, never mind democracy.**

### **Organizer Training and On-going Staff Development is Essential**

Often times, even when a group has elected community leadership on a representative governing board, it is the organization's field staff who are the people engaged in the day-to-day building of a movement. It is particularly important for these staff to have resources allocated to them for updating and expanding key skills.

### **We Need Models that Embody the Vision of the Society We Seek to Create**

Democracy and diversity and respect are much bandied about principles, yet the fact is organizations often ignore them in practice, or make them secondary to 'more immediate' goals. Our challenge is to find or create models that will build strong organizational representation and support us in the long haul

tually all of the history of the organization, yet the national office was a *critical* place where people of color staff were needed.

By the time that the organization had committed to creating a multiracial staff, the internal conflicts were one more reason that NTCF was not an inviting space for people of color. To the extent that hires were made of people of color, with the exception of the three organizers brought on by the EJP and its Director, they were into entry-level positions, often exacerbating race questions within the organization.

Unethical management practices also prevented the organization from continuing its diversifying efforts at the staff level. At the Summer 1990 board meeting, a decision was made that the next four hires would be people of color. However, the Executive Director ignored that mandate and hired two white staff people in the national office.

Not only did this anger members of the board, as these two hires were perhaps the last opportunity for some time to begin integrating the national office, but it seriously eroded the credibility of the Executive Director who was otherwise perceived at that time to be an ally to the reform efforts that the people of color were spearheading. This act, and the subsequent denial of wrongdoing by the Executive Director, undermined the next two years of reform work as it became only the first in a series of mistakes carried out by the Executive Director. The lack of trust in him was damaging as his role was a desperately needed one in the efforts to transform the organization.

In addition to ignoring affirmative action hiring mandates, the organization did not treat employees of color well once the few who made it to staff joined the organization. There were many complaints and grievances against the white management by staff of color.

Illustrative of the racist behavior on the part of the staff managers was an attempt by the founder to

undermine the authority of the Environmental Justice Project Director and the People of Color Caucus. The founder called a well known person of color in the movement, someone working with a national training institute, in September of 1991 and attempted to offer him a 'significant training position with the Environmental Justice Training Project.' This violated the carefully laid out and well articulated process proposed by the People of Color Caucus and accepted by the boards that *all* decisions that relate to hiring and firing of EJP project staff were made by the Environmental Justice Project board, an all person of color multiracial board. Worse still, in our opinion, the offer was part of an effort by the founder to get rid of the EJP Project Director.

### A Racist Organization

Racism is about power and privilege and white people's inability to yield or share the former or acknowledge the latter. NTCF's board was not just all-white or overwhelmingly white for much of its history. It contained members who were known to unabashedly display racism. In the case of one member in particular, years of public racist comments hadn't led the other whites on the board to challenge her or seek her removal. At one point this board member made a comment that 'black people could not be as literate as whites and that they spent all of their money on booze.' It was, as is typical, left

to be the work of the people of color who were beginning to increase in number and power. It took until September of 1991 and the energy of people of color on the board to successfully demand her removal.

Another example of the kind of behavior that existed occurred at the time of the start-up of the EJP project. Two members of the then all white organizing staff were asked by the founder to claim that due to some small amount of ancestrally Native American blood, they should claim that they were actually people of color.

**If we note that throughout any protracted effort to undo racism, every day that passes in the struggle is one more day of racism and betrayal and disrespect for people of color, aren't white people always putting the people of color in the position of 'being patient with whites?'**

## Divide and Conquer as Tools of Self-Proclaimed White "Progressives"

When real confrontations around a growing number of crises emerged the time-tested tactic of divide and conquer surfaced. The founder was successful in exploiting situations to damage the force that a unified people of color group presented to his power and authority and lack of accountability.

Divide and conquer was not limited as a tool internally around questions of policy, but was also used externally on people of color within their own communities. In one case, an accusation was launched that the board members from organizations which the EJP project was collaborating with in the placement of organizers were being 'bought off.' The accusation followed that the people of color board members from the participating organizations were being silenced or quelled when it came to criticizing actions of the then sole Executive Director (a chief target of the founder's attacks in the later years). The irony is that it was these very people of color who were regularly leveraging a heavy critique against the Executive Director.

Ultimately, despite the pressures brought to bear, the Caucus maintained its unity, as witnessed by the fact that every person of color on the NTCF board voted to shut down the organization.

## Funding White Organizations for Environmental Justice Work

The fact that NTCF received hundreds of thousands of dollars to diversify racially and implement programs with communities of color angered people of color whose organizations had been doing work for years in those communities.

A further source of conflict was that fundraising and planning for the EJP moved forward very quickly after the board made their initial commitment to make environmental justice a priority and *without* the consultation of the people of color on the board, or other important organizations of color.

The EJP planning pace slowed and incorporated people of color initially left out, but resentment and mistrust grew from this experience towards the organization and its white staff management for seizing upon this funding opportunity. This is a classic example of funders giving money for diversification and environmental justice work to white groups when there were already people of color groups carrying out exemplary work in the same issue and geographic areas.

## Institutional Racism, Not Efforts to Undo it, was a Major Factor in the Closing of NTCF

In NTCF it was racism and the lack of organizational structure and accountability that destroyed the organization, not the struggle to achieve equity.

**As is often the case when attempts at transforming white institutions occur, the tendency to blame the effort; and not the racism, prevails. In NTCF it was racism that helped destroy the organization, not the struggle to achieve equity.**

## **B) Lessons Learned** People of Color as Major Force for Overall Change

When the struggles around race began to be waged in NTCF many other issues emerged, including: questions about the organizing

model; resistance to the deceit and financial mismanagement; gender inequities; resistance to the paternalism; the push for democracy within the organization; the demand for more effective management structures; and questions about fundraising and the politics of funding. Virtually every major problem at NTCF was illuminated either as a direct or indirect result of the struggle around race. Further, it was the tight organization and leadership of the Caucus that enabled the people of color to open the space for questioning the myriad limitations of the organization and lead the battle towards resolution.

## Undoing Racism in an Organization Must Reach all Levels: Board, Staff, and Constituency

At NTCF efforts to undo racism did not commence until the first few people of color were on the board. The board went through two sessions on race and oppression. However, more work needed to be done. At the board level, opportunities for on-going educa-

tion and 'unlearning' occurred due the meeting-to-meeting battles over the EJP project and other organizational questions. Many white board members and key staff who related to the board underwent a dramatic transformation around issues of race as a result of the on-going debates around these issues.

At the staff level, one session that addressed race occurred, and it was race *in the context of* other oppressions. This was a mistake as the very people who most needed to understand how to undo the pattern of whiteness in the organization from the base up were never given the opportunity for training and development in this area. A result was that the board often far-outpaced the staff when it came to race-related questions.

NTCF did not carry out any programs around race among its constituency. The question of undoing racism at a much more fundamental level — i.e. communities — wasn't advanced in any manner.

### White People, not People of Color, Bear the Responsibility to Force Change

At NTCF it was people of color who put forward an agenda of undoing racism. People of color not only began the effort, but also carried the banner throughout the struggle. Whites never emerged to systematically challenge the organizational culture they had helped create. While some whites, at different stages and points in the conflict, supported the effort, the often typical pattern held true — the burden of the battle was placed on those who were being marginalized by its impact.

Relationships between the people of color and the white board members were strained. Trust was not sufficiently developed between sympathetic whites and the people of color which may have been able to resolve other endemic and ultimately organization crushing fights. Instead, board members took liberal positions on tough issues and never resolved the underlying causes of the conflicts.

A good example of how this affected the decision making process came up when the boards consolidated in the Spring of '92. At that point the decision was made to continue adding people of color to reach a 50% goal of people of color on the new board, mak-

ing the size of the organization's board unmanageable (see "*Organizational Integrity*" section). The option of reducing the number of whites on the board was never seriously considered by the board. People were too preoccupied with how painful it might have been to remove a white member. Politeness should not have pitted board diversity against efficiency. This might have led to a very different outcome today since it would have meant the removal of key allies of the founder, those who were consistently blocking broad organizational change.

White people, working in collaboration with and accountable to people of color, must be willing to step out and take risks in challenging racism in organizations, and in society. The risks for whites still pall in comparison with the day-to-day dangers of being a person of color in a racist society.

### The Transformation of an All-White Group, if it is Possible, Must be Swift and Stubborn

One pattern emerged in the battle to undo racism in the organization: that white politeness, altruism and liberalness was a factor in the ultimate demise of NTCF. The fact that board members were too concerned about 'offending' or 'hurting the feelings' of other white (and sometimes people of color) members, and staff, often led to only half-solutions or half-resolutions of important confrontations. In a number of cases, had swift and decisive actions occurred, the result might have been entirely different — including the possibility that the organization might not have closed.

In a number of cases, had swift and decisive actions occurred, the organization may have been able to move forward with a cohesive vision and trust.

And while this raises big questions about consensus building and educational efforts and how long it takes individuals to change internally, a central question is: Is there a difference in how we conceptualize undoing racism within a movement organization versus undoing racism in society broadly speaking?

If we acknowledge (as educators, organizers and activists), that people at all levels need time to make a fundamental change in thinking and actions, whatever

the change may be, how long is too long? If we note that throughout any protracted effort to undo racism, every day that passes in the struggle is one more day of racism and betrayal and disrespect for people of color, aren't white people always putting the people of color in the position of 'being patient with whites?'

In the case of transforming movement institutions — (unlike the US government, or the public education system, for example), we expect that people fighting for social change are committed to changing themselves, and changing more rapidly. Moreover, no movement organization in the US today with a regional or national scope has any business being all white. Isn't it then reasonable to argue that the change must be swift and stubborn?

### Starting Right, not White

Whether or not it is possible to transform a white organization is a major question left hanging by this experience. In any case it is clear that organizations must take on race questions in a principled manner from the outset. The time and energy that it will take to *attempt* to undo patterns of whiteness and racism will be considerably larger the longer an organization doesn't address the question. And, a white national group suffers irreparably from a lack of legitimacy.

### Other Major Crises Stymied the Effort to Transform the Whiteness of NTCF

The many overlapping crises and internal conflicts that existed within NTCF played a definite role in hindering the ability of the organization to make progress on race issues. The near-constant chaos that embattled NTCF's final year made almost any forward motion impossible.

### Alliances and Understandings

Important alliances emerged over the two year course of the internal campaign to transform the organization. In some cases these happened quickly, in others they took longer, often a reflection of the socio-economic status and historical experience of the individuals. For many, this struggle has provided

each person with new insights and lasting relationships. Struggle over complex and painful issues is a necessary and critical element to an activist agenda and, when done in a principled manner, can be a healthy part of social change work.

## V. Gender

### A) Sexism in NTCF

#### *Major Points*

#### Denial

What was perhaps most astounding about the sexism in NTCF was the denial that it existed. Some of the 'White Male Club' that ran the organization were involved in a process of *passively* denying gender as an issue, obvious by

the total lack of attention to gender until the forming of the board Women's Caucus. And yet some of the male leadership, when confronted by the question of sexism, *actively* denied that gender bias was an issue.

While racism was tacitly acknowledged after people of color forced the question, gender issues and sexism were never accepted as core problems in NTCF. This inability to see gender bias and sexism reflected a deeper leadership crisis where sharing or yielding power to others simply was not possible.

#### Power and Decision Making

- **The Board.** The fact that women always made up at least half of the C4-NTC board's composition was used as 'proof' by the 'Club' to deny that a gender problem existed. Additionally, the last two board Presidents were both women. And while they provided outstanding leadership which guided the organization through difficult efforts to restructure and correct internal flaws, for most of that period they were operating on the fringes of power. It wasn't until the spring of 1992 that the members of the C4-NTC board began to exercise any power over the direction of the campaigns and work being carried out in collab-

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1992, one year before dissolution, the first concerted discussion about sexism in the organization took place as part of a broader training on diversity and other oppressions at a joint meeting of the board and staff. There were no training opportunities for women on women's issues, or skills and leadership development.

Reflective of the general lack of attention to issues of concern to women was the ATSDR (Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry) campaign that NTCF carried out. The issue was primarily of concern to women in the organization (board, staff, and constituency) and was a rare instance of women taking a lead on strategy, as well as women working together at the staff and board level. The project, co-sponsored by the Environmental Health Network, culminated in a very successful report which has become a powerful tool used by activists dealing with the ATSDR agency. Yet as a national campaign priority within NTCF, it never reached equal billing with other issues in terms of attention or resources.

### Male Organizational Culture

NTCF had an intensely male culture. And while this was more subtle than the obvious lock-out of women in leadership, it contributed to keeping women out of the tight circle that directed the organization.

Some examples of this culture were: the pattern of some male staff leaders standing apart, holding side conversations, and skipping out of important staff meetings altogether because 'they had more important things to do;' the vacuum of women in the strategic planning area; the men in the organization frequently taking credit for work that women on staff were actually doing; the men holding important meetings, sometimes directly consequential to a particular female staff members work, excluding the women responsible for implementing the plan in that area; the tendency of men to re-state contributions women were making in the meetings that they were invited to; the prevailing 'victim' language; the sexist jokes at gatherings that none of the men tried to stop; and the ritual basketball games at staff and board retreats which were designed for men only (a key decision making arena). Much of this was at best offensive and at worst completely alienating to women.

This sense of arrogance and backstage 'wheeling and dealing' influenced NTCF's organizing style in ways which often showed disrespect beyond women and also to grassroots leaders, communities, and people of color.

### Women Were Not Unified for Power

While some organizational progress was made because of women's efforts, women as a group never became a major force within the organization. There are at least several reasons why this did not happen, all of which are important for future women's efforts in other organizations:

- **Women Divided by Class.** The women who initiated and were active in the board Women's Caucus were almost exclusively those who were volunteer community activists, many of whom were the initial women on the board. Their time together in the earlier years meant that they had a culture of their own based on the commonality of their experience within the organization. The Caucus' goal was not perceived to be unifying women for power, but rather as a place primarily where community women could support each other in their often enormously challenging local struggles. And while that was a very important function of the Caucus, it made it difficult for other, newer, often more diverse women who did not share the same kinds of problems to join.

Additionally, the debate about paid professional activist versus community volunteers on the board (see "Organizational Integrity" section) also hurt the Caucus - it created the atmosphere that women who were paid activists, and who brought different experiences to the board, could not engage the Women's Caucus unless it was on the terms already laid out by the defined culture of the community volunteer women on the board. Partly this meant that the different skills, ideas, and sense of strategy of the paid activist women were not contributed to the Caucus.

The class problem that divided the women in terms of Caucus energy can be seen as partly due to the community women wanting to keep and define their space for their primary needs (support from one another). And, partly due to the paid activist women's lack of attention to the community women's issues, or to engaging the Caucus as a potential source of power.

Additionally, the resentment towards paid staff kept the women on the NTCF staff from relating to the Women's Caucus. It also made it difficult for the women staff member assigned to work with the Caucus to function in a facilitative manner. As staff were the day-to-day women in the organization, a unification between board and staff women could have been very powerful.

• **Women Divided by Race.** Some of the white women on the board were racist. Many did not (as was the case with whites overall) embrace or make the struggle to end the racism in the organization a banner they were carrying. In fact, at one point this came to a head as one white Women's Caucus member who was running for an Executive Committee position on the board appealed to other Caucus members to support her over a women of color also running for the position that had the support of the People of Color Caucus. This did not make for a strong sense of unity between white women and women of color.

Most of the women of color who joined the board came in the later years during the overall push for more people of color on the board. Many of these women of color fit the 'paid activist' women category on the board, throwing another barrier between them and the white community volunteer women on the board.

• **Intense Personal Friendships and the Male Created-Notion of NTCF as a 'Family' Complicated Women's Actions in the Internal Struggle**

A number of the women in the organization had deep personal friendships with some of the key men in the organization. These relationships long pre-dated the arrival of most of the women of color, and the moment when serious examination of the internal limitations of the organization began. Because of the already mentioned sense of loyalty built in the early years by the 'White Male Club,' the women who had been around for some time in the organization had a difficult time seeing the struggle for what it was or acting clearly, decisively or with unity.

And while women bear ultimate responsibility for their actions, it was no accident that the loyalty ques-

tion was complicating their vision. Men on different sides of the conflict irresponsibly and intentionally used this notion of loyalty in a way which built resentment between women.

This question of loyalty and friendship relates to length of time in the organization and might help explain only one of many reasons why women were not able to overcome their differences compared with the people of color, who also faced class and other *potential* divisions. When the people of color came, they came nearly all at once to the organization, were confronted by a long and very obvious history of racism, and were shut out not just by the white culture, but also by the culture of the long-term friendships which existed in the organization. Thus for the most part the loyalty questions did not emerge for people of color.

Nor could women as easily see the gender history of the organization, since there were in fact women present in the organization. The sexism was more subtle, and although not any less damaging to the functioning of the organization, was more difficult for people to see.

• **Divide and Conquer II, Tools of Self-Proclaimed Male Progressives.** Incredibly sexist tactics were used to actually fuel the divisions among the women. Women who were leaders on the board and staff were regularly accused, often by men, of being pawns of the different male leaders, dismissing the possibility that women had opinions of their own about the direction or the future of the organization. Accusations and rumors abounded throughout the internal fight about which women were sleeping with which men in power. Again, this alleged behavior was then offered up as the rationale for women's allegiances and policy choices. And while it was true that loyalty complicated women's positions in the internal reform efforts, it was *equally if not more true* that men were also split in the internal battle due to loyalty. Not surprisingly, no similar rumor campaign or case was ever made about how men arrived at *their* judgment or *their* loyalty.

These tactics were almost all used behind the scenes to disempower women, were rarely addressed by the organization, and have had long lasting impact on many of the women involved.

## **B) Lessons Learned**

### **Identify Gender Equity as a Priority and Provide Resources to Back it Up**

In all organizations there must be an opportunity to examine why gender issues are important to the overall organization, and its work, and to formally commit resources (money, staffing, training, etc) to address these issues.

### **Support Active Women's Caucuses**

The leadership for work on gender issues has to come from women, and there is no way that this leadership and trust between women can develop without women meeting face-to-face. Women's caucuses should meet regularly to address organizational concerns. Resources should be allocated for staff time to assist the caucus; and there should be funds to support in-person meetings.

The mission of the caucus should be to examine and present a political and strategic analysis of gender issues and how they effect the work of the organization. As a result of the caucus, women can also receive leadership development and support.

Central to the work of the caucus should be providing the space for women to struggle through and take on race, class, sexual orientation, and other potentially divisive issues to women.

### **Training: a Key to Undoing Sexism**

Boards and staff of organizations need training that explores sexism in society, sexism in the organization, and how to undo it. Women in organizations need leadership development training to build skills, expand their knowledge on issues, and understand their own oppression.

### **Place Women in Position of Power**

Women in organizations need to be placed in actual positions of power in order to effectively combat and

change the culture of the organization, as well as to strengthen the work of the group.

### **Men Bear the Responsibility to Challenge and Take On Sexism Among their Peers**

Men must take responsibility for undoing the seeds of sexism planted and fertilized by their peers, including undoing the male culture of organizations which so many men benefit from. This work needs to be carried out with, and accountable to, women.

**A more accurate telling of the story is that people of color to a great extent, and women to a lesser extent (for reasons outlined in this evaluation), defined the need to greatly alter many aspects of the organization from structure to organizing methodologies to principles. The two principal staff leaders then chose whether to be for or against those efforts.**

## **Some End Notes**

**The NTCF Closure was NOT Due to an Irreconcilable Fight Between its Two**

### **Principal Staff Leaders/Managers**

A commonly asserted statement during the final two years of NTCF and since the closing is that what ultimately destroyed the organization was the fighting that ensued between the organization's two Executive Directors. To reduce this story to a battle between two white men is incorrect and a disservice for those who are interested in looking hard at and challenging the often multi-faceted elements that lead to success or failure. It is a simplistic and convenient thesis not grounded in the real and complicated history of the organization. It is racist and sexist in that it ignores powerful conflicts over race and gender questions.

A more accurate telling of the story is that people of color to a great extent, and women to a lesser extent (for reasons outlined in this evaluation), defined the need to greatly alter many aspects of the organization from structure to organizing methodologies to principles. The two principal staff leaders then chose whether to be for or against those efforts.

## Empire Building and 'a' Visionary Founder are Concepts that Ought to be Retired

At the core of NTCF's limitations was the notion that NTCF would become the all-powerful organization to champion peoples rights. Feeding this grandiosity was the door-to-door canvass company that promoted empire building and a foundation funding community that often funds organizations without the strategic analysis of how the organization helps support movement building rather than advancing a particular issue agenda the foundation might have.

The question of building a national environmental organization accountable to the grassroots movement is a complicated one. If the grassroots was not able to call for, and create on its own terms, the formation of a national structure, should it be left to a few individuals who have a good idea to start it? Or, should we be devoting our energies and resources to the development of local, state and regional structures that set the stage for national structural formation?

From the NTCF experience, as well as the contemporary history of US progressive politics, individually sparked national organizations have often hurt rather than helped local efforts and movement building.

### Questions for Funders

The rise and fall of NTCF raises some important questions for funders that could help guide future grantmaking.

1. Organizations often need to articulate to funders why they are different and better than other organizations. This drives division and 'one upmanship' among groups in the movement rather than promotes collaboration. Since no one group even in a given sector of the movement could possibly reach the entire nation, perhaps funders should ask groups what winning strategies they share with others and who they can collaborate with to reach the constituency.

2. Why were/are people of color put in the position of sorting through which of the inexcusably-white national environmental groups had/has the *potential* to become multiracial and serve their needs? Why aren't organizations made up of people of color being funded at all levels to the point where they and their

organizations are the visionaries creating and leading multiracial national experiments and defining their own terms for collaboration with whites?

3. Why are organization's that have a rhetoric about inclusiveness, but in reality are led exclusively by men, still being funded?

4. Foundations need to develop mechanisms that evaluate to what extent organizations are accountable to a base of people affected by their activities. If funders continue to provide substantial funding to national or regional groups who do not help and even hurt local efforts, then the environmental and other movements will continue to suffer from division and serious internal weaknesses. The vitality of the environmental movement is at the grassroots level. The time is ripe to evaluate funding priorities and move beyond the same set of unaccountable national environmental organizations that have been receiving substantial funding for the last twenty years.

This document identifies a number of lessons and criteria that are important in evaluating an organization's integrity, organizing methodology, and approaches to race, class, and gender issues. We hope that funders will find them useful in grantmaking, and that the movement broadly will use them as a way to gage where to devote our energies.

### Knowing When to Call it Quits

One lesson from this experience is knowing when to call it quits. It is debatable whether or not the several years that were spent trying to transform NTCF were worth the energy and commitment. However, organizations need to be fearless in critically evaluating their work, process, and accountability and be able to recognize when they have outlived their usefulness in building movements for change.

- \* 'Inconclusive By Design: Waste Fraud and Abuse in the National Environmental Health Agencies:' written in conjunction with the Environmental Health Network, this report used five case study communities to show that the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) was conducting faulty health studies that underestimated the health problems of and further marginalized affected communities living next to toxic waste sites.
- \* 'Shadow on the Land:' a report that provided an environmental analysis to federal farm policies. It documented how farm policies keep family farmers on the chemical treadmill and are the biggest impediment to implementing sustainable farming practices. The reports findings were later substantiated by the National Academy of Sciences.
- \* 'Fighting Toxics:' a book that offered key technical advice on how to organize around chemical threats in local communities. Chapters included information on environmental law, organizing, media, government databases, inspecting companies, pollution prevention and corporate campaigns.
- NTCF pioneered an organizing strategy that built upon the Right to Know Law about toxic chemical emissions and assisted community groups in 'inspecting' local polluting companies for changes in their chemical use and management practices.
- NTCF offered a place for grassroots activists from around the country to network with each other. This helped to lead to a cross fertilization of ideas, strategies and collaborative projects between groups.
- NTCF was instrumental in shifting the national debate about toxics from one of waste disposal to one of toxic chemical production and addiction.
- The struggle to transform the organization into a multiracial-democratic organization was a powerful experience in which alliances were built that have outlasted the organization. The people involved will carry the lessons learned into other movement struggles.

# Accomplishments of the National Toxics Campaign Fund

- NTCF went further than any national environmental organization in confronting its racism and seriously addressing the need to train organizers of color to work in communities for environmental justice. NTCF's Environmental Justice Project embodied a collaboration based on equality with key environmental justice groups in the movement and a groundbreaking methodology utilizing the knowledge and skills of some of the movement's best trainers.
- NTCF's Military Toxics Project was an important new initiative to target the Pentagon and its companies as the nation's worst polluters and highlight the public health and environmental threats that the US military poses to hundreds of communities nationwide. NTCF was successful in building a network of grassroots groups, public health activists and veterans support groups confronting the Pentagon in communities nationwide.
- NTCF built a top rate public interest laboratory designed to serve communities at risk from toxic exposure. The lab received positive performance evaluations from the US EPA and during five years of operation provided reliable, low-cost testing and technical assistance to over six hundred and fifty groups.
- NTCF produced excellent research reports to provide support to grassroots struggles and give people national exposure and credibility to their issues. The following reports were produced by NTCF in its lifetime, many of them released with hundreds of participating grassroots groups nationwide:
  - \* 'The US Military's Toxic Legacy:' a comprehensive report that identified and calculated the full extent of the Pentagon's threat to the environment and public health and set out an agenda for holding the Pentagon accountable to the US public.
  - \* 'No Free Launch:' a report that identified the advanced solid rocket system, used by both the Pentagon and NASA rockets, as a major source of ground pollution and stratospheric ozone destruction.
  - \* 'Chemical Weapons: The Threat at Home:' a report that critiqued the environmental and public health threats of incinerating chemical weapons in eight US communities across the country, a plan of the US Army.
  - \* 'From Poison to Prevention' and 'The Rush to Burn:' two reports that critiqued the EPA's overall waste management strategy of building hazardous waste incinerators instead of forcing companies to reduce their use of toxic chemicals. The reports called for a moratorium on the construction of new hazardous waste incinerators.
  - \* 'Border Trouble:' a groundbreaking report that used NTCF's Citizens Environmental Laboratory to document the contamination caused by the maquiladora industries set up along the US-Mexico border. The report made recommendations for ways to regulate: cross border environmental problems; the companies escaping labor costs in the US; and environmental laws in the US.

## NATIONAL TOXICS CAMPAIGN FUND ORGANIZATIONAL BUILDING MODEL

### *1. What are we building?*

NTCF is building an organization of affiliated local groups with a sustained membership base and strong leadership; secondarily, NTCF is building a network of allied groups (labor, environmental, peace, farm, public health, youth) that can unite with us in campaigns; lastly, NTCF is building a national membership list of supporters who share our beliefs and values, who support the organization financially and who can be mobilized into political action around some of our priority campaigns.

### *2. Who are NTCF leaders?*

NTCF leaders are people who have a strong base of support from which they derive their power. In cases where leaders do not have a base, NTCF will make strategic decisions to help them build a local base. NTCF will primarily focus on building leadership at the points of poisonous production.

### *3. Which constituencies are we trying to reach? What is our base?*

In order of priority, NTCF's main constituencies are: 1) strong grassroots anti-toxics organizations with a sustained membership and strong and skilled leaders; 2) strategic allied organizations (described above) that unite with us to achieve programmatic goals; and 3) thousands of individual members who support NTCF and are willing to take some political action to further the organization's political goals.

### *4. What is an NTCF affiliate?*

An NTCF affiliate is a local grassroots group, most likely focused on a point of poisonous production, that shares a common vision and goals with NTCF. The group receives some organizing and technical support from NTCF staff and unites with NTCF to win their local fight, but also participates with NTCF in the larger struggle for building an environmental democracy movement in the United States. The specifics of the relationship is defined in NTCF affiliation materials.

### *5. Are we after building local affiliates and/or state and regional affiliates? Do we work more with and affiliate coalitions, or do we work more with and affiliate local groups?*

The issue here is one of timing. NTCF needs to build depth first in local organizations and leadership. Once we have built and strengthened a number of strong locals in a state or region, then we can talk about affiliating state or regional organizations. In the meantime, we should continue to assist and participate in state and regional coalitions (e.g. Oklahoma Toxics Campaign, Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice), but our primary work over the next two years should be in building local grassroots organizations.

### *6. What is the relationship between affiliates and the NTCF Board?*

Over the next year or so, the NTCF Board should become a majority of representatives of affiliated organizations; a smaller percentage of the Board should be representatives of allied organizations and networks. NTCF should not have Board members that do not represent some collective power and constituent base.

## NTCF NATIONAL STRATEGY

**BELIEFS:** We have certain beliefs that provide the underpinning to the restructuring of NTC's national strategy:

- \* we will create an organization where grassroots leaders have power.
- \* we will do more local base building.
- \* we will lighten our workload and focus our efforts.
- \* we will develop a structure in which to fit our local groups.
- \* we will establish relations with other groups based on equality, respect, and trust.
- \* we will work toward financial self-sufficiency.
- \* we will build an organization reflective of the diverse nature of the toxics problem.

**PRINCIPLES:** Before we can lay out a strategy for NTCF, we need to have a set of principles that define who we are. Those principles are:

1. *Environmental Democracy* - people exposed to toxics need to exercise control over the environmental and economic health of their communities.
2. *Environmental Justice* - NTCF is about helping to win justice for those communities most heavily impacted by toxics, especially communities of color that bear a disproportionate share of the toxics burden.
3. *Targeting the Worst Poisoners* - to solve the toxics crisis, we need to target the worst polluters.
4. *Pollution Prevention* - stopping the manufacture and use of toxic and non-sustainable products and energy systems and promoting safe processes is the answer to the crisis.
5. *National Campaigns that Strengthen Local Work* - NTCF does national campaigns to strengthen the power of the grassroots in their communities and achieve pollution prevention.
6. *Organize People* - NTCF is about organizing people to solve their environmental problems.
7. *Building an International Movement* - NTCF believes that an international grassroots movement is necessary to counteract the global reach of major corporate polluters in search of cheap labor and lax environmental regulations.
8. *Worker Health and Safety* - NTCF believes that workers, who are on the front line of toxics exposure, need strong health and safety protections while on the job and need their own "Superfund for Workers" that will guarantee income, education and training for displaced workers as we transform our economy to less toxic industries.
9. *Sustainable Agriculture* - NTCF understands that family farmers are the best stewards of the land and need federal government support to make the transition from high chemical agriculture to more sustainable, low chemical production methods.
10. *Economic Transformation* - NTCF believes that a fundamental transformation of the economy needs to occur in which industries that are destroying communities and the global environment are reformed and technologies that support life on the planet are promoted.

**NTCF'S MISSION:** Based on the above principles, NTCF's mission can be defined as such:

- a. (the 5 second version): grassroots action to prevent pollution.
- b. (1 minute version): empowering those most impacted by toxics to fight back against the poisoning of their communities...and joining local groups to make the economy more sustainable. Through this organizing work, NTCF will build a multi-racial, democratic and self-sustaining grassroots organization to prevent pollution.

**NATIONAL STRATEGY:** To fulfill the mission of NTCF and guided by our principles, NTCF will implement the following strategy:

- a. Support local groups in their efforts to win many local pollution prevention victories.
- b. Build the power and structure of NTCF, which is designed to unite local groups.
- c. Build stronger, and sometimes new, organizations.
- d. Win national policies that empower local communities and transform the economy.

**MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF NTCF:** Based on the above basic strategies, we can measure the success of NTCF by answering the following questions:

- a. how many local victories did we help grassroots groups win?
- b. where did we do strong regional leadership training?
- c. how many strong leaders did we build into NTCF?
- d. did the national bill we supported give people, not bureaucrats, the power?
- e. how have we built our relationships with other groups? what have been our mistakes?

**NATIONAL PROGRAM:** NTCF should do both local organizing and national campaigns that focus on the places where toxic waste is produced, used and dumped and where most of the poisoning is happening. NTCF should do organizing, leadership development, and technical assistance to help build strong local organizations to both win at the local level and fight at the regional and national levels. NTCF should also offer a service component to grassroots groups (even those not working on our issues) through its laboratory and written materials

Approved by the NTC Board at their Annual Meeting, September 19-22, and endorsed later that fall by the NTCF Board (Principles 7-10 were recommended conceptually at this meeting and approved as part of the affiliation package in late 1992.)