

The Battle Against Segregation

MEMORANDUM

on

The Potentialities of Council and Camp, Inc.

The matter with resettlement and rehabilitation in Vermont has been that the attempts were made by individuals, very often so-called idealists, or people who had failed in the city; they took up depleted soil and abandoned farm without a thoroughgoing change in economy. They might establish a poultry farm or a mink or silver fox farm; but they always remained in the vicious circle of an isolated single crop business for a market that had nothing to do with the economy of the rest of the town. This truly is a vicious circle because even a success in his business would estrange him from the economy of his neighbors and his town at large.

The man who bought a place from the bank or at auction did not take time out to win the confidence of his new neighbors before he isolated himself on his new property with its special interests, antagonistic as these often had to be to the material interests of his neighbors. They had no time to explore the character and climate of the region in all its aspects.

They little realized what moral energies had kept this land in shape since the French and Indian War; they came without an appreciation of the terrible struggle that it had taken to hold and to hang on to the land. Since they thought of farming as less tough than it really is, these people had to make every mistake with the full impact of merciless reaction by nature and

neighbors against them. It often took only one cycle of seasons to squeeze them out again, with their only capital lost, the timber lot more depleted, the house more dilapidated, their own high spirits crushed. They now would try to hang on as tenants, be kept in perpetual debt, become dependent as laborers on their creditors' place. By their failure, the feeling of hopelessness and decline spreads all over their neighborhood. Their failure is by no means without influence on the economy of the whole town. The old-timers feel justified in saying that nothing can be done against the trend. The gap between those who hang on without hope to the ways of old and those who foolhardily plunge into a singlehanded adventure has so widened that the proper relation between tradition and progress is perverted into a complete break between a hopeless but well-established group and a passing caravan of naive squatters.

But since this country originally has been founded by and prospered because integrated groups and communities preserved continuity through seven generations, it is our intention to base resettlement on a long-range program.

First, time should be taken out to form living groups; and second only shall individual settlers be established. Now, although the old farmers are integrated into a pattern of behavior and moral traditions of long standing, their vitality is so undermined daily by the dwindling of numbers as well as of hope, the decline of families and congregations, that they do not form a living group. And the newcomers, hopeful as they may be, are not capable of instituting by themselves an integrated group because

they are lacking in that objectivity and significance that only comes from continuity of effort and a more than transient purpose.

However, when hosts and guests, farmers old and farmers new, are properly introduced to each other and helped by a third element more or less exclusively devoted to this purpose, these two elements together can become partners in a group in which tradition and change mix again. In other words, we discount the possibility of basing the future of Vermont on purely static communities or purely dynamic movements, as of old. We propose instead to make the perpetual and proper mixture of farmers old and settlers new, the principle of one economic machine. The two elements contain essential values for the functioning of the machine. We cannot expect neither that the old farmers will overthrow their traditions nor that the new settlers understand their values. But both elements together possess the tools for planning and building up the mixed economy recommended by every expert in a cooperative effort.

So far, the resettlement programs known to us have nearly always segregated the farmers old and the farmers new. The very names used in the neighborhood of settlement projects: "Sub-commercial group," "Government farmers," etc. point to this trend towards segregation. In our process, the farmers old and the settlers new would come to know each other and consider each other as full partners in the future of their community.

We shall try to set this process in motion in the following way:

We plan to acquire an area of from 700 to 1500 acres

situated between several of our towns within the Council's district, to ask Camp William James to build a reception center able to receive from 5 to 15 new families or settlers at a time, to start a cooperative sheep ranch, a timber salvage cooperative, and similar activities on this land as a project open for participation to the existing farmers, and served by the new settlers, for an ample training period, in the capacity of foresters, shepherds, etc. on the place. The place would also serve as a social center and thereby lend dignity to the newcomers and to their relations with the community. Since Camp William James would be a third social group, on a younger age level, offering and receiving hospitality, the integration of the three elements should not offer any serious difficulty as our experience so far already has proven. I may refer here to the letter by Ed. Flint as printed in the Congressional Record of the United States Senate, page 507. As the social activities, so will the economic cooperatives comprise the farmers old and new.

Whenever a member of the reception center feels ready, he may move on to a farm in one of the nine towns or anywhere else. And certainly if he employs the help of the Farm Sec. As., or has learned his lesson well, his economy will be treated as a part of the whole economic development. In this manner he would neither have to flood the dairy market as a competitor nor have to remain in the subcommercial group, but perhaps specialize his production for consumption and cooperative exchange.

The government so far has helped every group separately;

the farmers old through the triple A, the extension services, etc.; the settlers new through FSA, the campers through the CCC. We now ask it to contemplate the potentialities of a perpetual interplay between these three groups. Only if the government releases their creative powers can these groups stimulate each other mutually in a common effort.

For this purpose these groups must be allowed to face each other and to cooperate with each other. Financially, it would be necessary to recognize that funds for Extension Service, Resettlement and CCC may supplement each other. For example, while a loan can be given to a subcommercial farm by FSA, CCC cannot protect and increase the security of this loan by curing the desperate shortage of labor on this same farm. The AAA offers phosphate and lime and plans programs for the farmers to plant legumes which shall retain and enrich the soil; they should also strengthen the human fabric by admixing youthful and educated helpers to the old-timers. Many more farmers would make use of the AAA programs if somebody could put the lime on their fields. And the conservation of the soil is not their individual concern; it is of national importance. While they build new houses and even community centers and town halls, they do not fill them with significance and dignity, which only comes from the banding together in unselfish companies. The CCC is for the needy and pays relief wages, and by this false vocabulary, the green uniform does not invest its carrier with the distinction of a voluntary servant. The members of Camp William James were not allowed to

state in the questionnaire the simple truth: that they wish to serve their country. They have to profess that they are 'needy'. These barriers of law and indolence are untenable.

We feel certain that as soon as the government becomes conscious of the segregational trends of its present policy, it will abandon them. Pigeonhole a man, and his stature shrinks. We also are positive that the people of Vermont and American youth are ready for and sympathetic to the vital integration between Council and Camp as here proposed.

If we do not exploit these qualities all three, stability of the integrated community, mobility of the adventurous youth, and eagerness to get settled of the young married couples, we must abandon all hope of keeping either our country well populated or our population well settled. No other way has been shown us by which to satisfy the needs of human nature and of economic change, simultaneously.