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DEMOCRATIC PLANNING GROUP RELEASES REPORT ON ETHNIC AMERICA;
FOURTH IN SERIES OF ISSUE PAPERS FOR PLATFORM COMMITTEE

WASHINGTON, April 18 -- The fourth report prepared by the committees and planning groups of the Democratic Policy Council for consideration by the 1972 Platform Committee was released today by Democratic National Chairman Lawrence F. O'Brien.

Following a public hearing in New York on December 4, 1971 under the joint chairmanship of Joseph Duffey of Connecticut and Rep. Ella T. Grasso (D-Conn.), the planning group on the concerns of ethnic Americans summarized and defined the sources of restlessness among ethnics:

- Economic anxiety -- illustrated by inflation, fear of unemployment, job security, etc.;
- Social anxiety -- reflected in the inability to cope with rapid social change. . . drugs, widespread dissent and intergroup discord;
- Cultural anxiety -- produced by the melting pot myth and the Americanization process that everyone is to be "the same";
- Political anxiety -- reflected by politicians who ignore the worker or massage his economic, social and cultural fears, rather than challenge his hopes.

Former New York Mayor Robert F. Wagner, chairman of the DNC's All-Americans Council and host for the New York hearing, described the Nixon Administration as marked by "grave inequities, frequent indecision, unbelievable ineptitude." As a result, Wagner testified, "ethnic America has harvested a bitter burden: unemployment, poverty, mistreatment of the aged and ill, and declining educational facilities. The rich diversity of America's ethnics has come to be viewed not as an asset, but as a simple census configuration to be ignored wherever possible and politically exploited wherever profitable."

Specific issues addressed by witnesses and panelists included education, employment, occupational health and safety, income, housing, tax reform, medical care, the elderly, the cities, and foreign affairs.

The task of preparing these issues papers was assumed by the Democratic Policy Council, at the direction of DNC Chairman O'Brien, to fulfill the recommendation of the O'Hara Commission that documents outlining issues and alternative positions to the policies of the Nixon Administration be prepared for the Platform Committee.

(more)

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Emphasizing that the views and recommendations contained in each paper are those of the members of the committee or planning group, O'Brien said, "We do not presume to speak for anyone in the Democratic Party other than those who directly had a role in the preparation of these reports. By the same token, however, we are confident that these views will be afforded the most serious consideration by the Platform Committee members in writing the 1972 Democratic Platform."

Professor Richard E. Neustadt of Harvard University is acting chairman of the 1972 Democratic Platform Committee.

Future reports to be released include education, farm income, housing, women's political power, environment, consumers, the urban crisis, national regional development policy, intelligence and security, and international affairs.

The full text of the report of the planning group on ethnic America follows:

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CONCERNS OF ETHNIC AMERICA

Co-Chairmen:
Joseph Duffey
Ella T. Grasso

The planning group on concerns of ethnic America held a full-day hearing in New York City on Saturday, December 4, 1971. Testimony was received on eleven areas of concern to ethnic Americans: education, employment, occupational health and safety, income, housing, taxes, medical care, elderly, the cities, ethnic representation and foreign affairs.

PERSPECTIVE

Robert F. Wagner, chairman of the All Americans Council and host for the New York meeting, spoke of Republican promises unkept:

"The last three years have provided us with a soil sadly enriched with Republican mismanagement and callousness from which have sprung a variety of new ills to match the old ones that beset us. Since Richard Nixon came to the presidency, we have seen an Administration marked by grave inequities, frequent indecision, unbelievable ineptitude.

"And ethnic America has harvested a bitter burden: unemployment, poverty, mistreatment of the aged and ill, and declining educational facilities. The rich diversity of America's ethnics has come to be viewed not as an asset, but as a simple census configuration to be ignored wherever possible and politically exploited wherever profitable.

"The Nixon Administration seems not yet to have learned what most Americans already know: that political freedom is not possible without economic opportunity. Nor is it possible for Americans to be truly free so long as the right to freedom from oppression and self-determination are denied to others."

A city councilwoman continued:

"The traditional roots and strength of the Democratic Party have been the urban electorate, primarily the blue-collar, often ethnic, population. If the Democratic Party is to win in 1972, it will win because of working people's communities in the cities such as Boston, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, Detroit and Baltimore."

Public and private agencies devoted to the restoration of urban America have largely ignored working class whites in designing programs to eliminate poverty, substandard housing, racial discord, declining schools and physical decay. The problems of American society, witnesses argued, were defined during the 1960's almost entirely within the context of poverty and race. They were not conceptualized within the framework of the total society, thereby making it impossible to deal with such social issues as the distribution of resources, rights, and privileges among different groups.

The ethnic factor in America today is a quiet revolution of consciousness aimed toward creating a new pluralism. It is sparked by an untenable economic situation and by indignation at having been alternately ignored and castigated by the establishment. It is a revolution of self-assertion that will utilize new techniques of community participation, community organization, community development, and legislative action to make its power felt at the polls.

A witnesses defined the sources of restlessness among ethnics:

- Economic anxiety -- illustrated by inflation, fear of unemployment, job security, etc.;
- Social anxiety -- reflected in the inability to cope with rapid social change . . . drugs, widespread dissent and intergroup discord;
- Cultural anxiety -- produced by the melting pot myth and the Americanization process that everyone is to be 'the same';
- Political anxiety -- reflected by politicians who ignore the worker or massage his economic, social and cultural fears, rather than challenge his hopes.

Hearing participants then spoke of specific issues that are a part of these economic, social, cultural and political anxieties of ethnics.

EDUCATION

An urban affairs organizational representative outlined the educational crisis:

"The educational crisis is not an affliction unique to minority inner-city communities. Millions of working class youngsters are tracked into vocational programs which do not provide them with job skills that are relevant to the job market, or an educational experience pertinent to human development.

"We must reassess the state of working class school systems presently ill-serving students. We must make available financial resources, facilities, and human talent that provide relevant vocational training and an equal opportunity to excel in academic curricula.

"School systems can no longer rely upon the regressive property tax for financing and a new progressive source of revenue must be found.

"Remedial and adult education programs must be designed for members of the labor force as well as for the men and women who never attended college.

"Ethnicity and the cultural heritages of all ethnic groups in the nation should be incorporated into all levels of teaching."

EMPLOYMENT

Participants agreed that it is within the capacity of our society to provide every American with a job paying an adequate salary. Yet today the rate of unemployment -- the highest in a decade -- is a source of deep concern to millions of working people. As a consequence, an alarming number of men and women in the prime of life do not have job security or are locked into dead-end jobs. Among the recommendations to ease unemployment and underemployment:

- Public service employment -- to make available funds to local governments to provide unemployed persons with jobs -- jobs that will provide desperately needed manpower for law enforcement, health care, day care and other social services.
- Manpower training programs -- enabling workers to acquire new skills and remedial educational opportunities for lateral job mobility.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Some 15,000 workers were killed last year (1970-71) in industrial accidents in the United States -- the most technologically advanced society in the world. More Americans have been killed in any one year in factories than were killed in Vietnam in 1968, the year of highest combat deaths. A labor spokesman testified:

"Thousands of these fatalities could have been avoided had management taken proper precautions. Yet as a result of administrative permissiveness and superficial legislation, millions of workers are maimed or permanently disabled in America simply because offending industries wield awesome economic and political clout. In consequence, federal, state and local legislatures and executive agencies find it convenient to look the other way when safety standards are scrutinized."

Another witness described the failure of the Nixon Administration to cope with job safety standards:

"The President's staff responds by patronizingly patting workers on the head and putting pictures of construction workers on postage stamps."

Witnesses recommended three immediate steps:

- New and tougher legislation for occupational health and job safety.
- Strict penalties instead of token fines levied against industries found criminally negligent.
- Adequate compensation for those unavoidably injured.

INCOME

Given the vast resources of the United States, witnesses suggested that there is no reason any citizen should be living in poverty. They noted the increasingly widespread failure of the average worker's income to keep pace with the rising cost of living.

"In 1970, the Department of Labor said a family of four required an annual salary of \$10,000 to live at a "modest standard of living. But in 1970 the take-home pay of the average production and maintenance worker was \$6,024. Even though he was poor and had problems raising his family, he was not poor enough to qualify for any kind of public assistance."

Five recommendations to alleviate income problems emerged from the hearing:

- A guaranteed annual income must become a reality if poverty is to be eliminated among our citizens unable to work.

- The minimum wage of \$1.60 must be raised since millions of poor people are already full-time workers. A bread-winner with a family of four who earns the minimum wage today makes a gross income less than the official government poverty level figure -- \$3,750. Even as we fight poverty, we should not forget that the average worker in the United States is barely making ends meet. In the last two years of the Nixon Administration the cost of living has been rising faster than the average worker's income.
- Unemployment compensation must be increased, the scope of the program expanded and the period of coverage prolonged.
- Redistribution of wealth -- a national policy in the United States deliberately designed to reduce the growing gap between the "haves" and the "have nots."
- Credit policies must be developed through consumer legislation and consumer education to end the price-fixing, shoddy merchandise and exorbitant prices inflicted by the business community in many community areas, particularly those predominantly ethnic."

HOUSING

Witnesses spoke of the continuing deterioration in housing conditions, particularly in low and middle income communities. In 1968 Congress pledged to construct 26 million housing units by 1978 -- 2.6 million units being constructed annually. We have fallen far behind that schedule with no hope of ever catching up, according to housing experts who testified:

"HUD Secretary Romney said last year that four out of every five Americans cannot purchase the median price home in America which is approximately \$27,000.

"Six years ago, the median house was in the reach of two out of every five Americans. Governmental policy and the practices of the private housing sector conspire against the working man who wants to own a home. Indeed, they also make it difficult for the small home owner to maintain or even retain his house."

Recommendations from the panel and witnesses included:

- Provision of resources by the Federal government to enable every American to buy or rent decent shelter;

- Standardization of building codes through state enabling legislation;
- Abolition of zoning laws discriminating against the poor or minorities;
- Redirection of model cities -type programs to stabilize instead of bulldoze working class communities;
- Local open space policies that will insure development conforms to the public interest and that will deny speculators the opportunity to get rich at the expense of individual persons;
- Imposition of more rigid restrictions on lending institutions and insurance companies, thereby denying them dictatorial powers over urban policy;
- Support and compliance with the above recommendations by federal agencies, particularly the Federal Housing Administration and other credit and insurance agencies as well as the private sector.

TAX POLICY

An economist described the inequities of the current tax system as it affects ethnic Americans in particular:

"The tax system in the United States favors the rich and influential at the expense of the citizen of modest means. Capital gains and profits are taxed at a lower rate than wages and a host of loopholes and subsidies are made available to the rich and powerful corporations.

"The property tax -- the major source of local revenue -- is regressive, fosters discriminatory zoning and enables vested interests such as polluting industries to force local government to look the other way for fear of losing a major source of its tax base. Today wealthy communities receive federal grants-in-aid for which poor communities cannot qualify.

Tax reforms suggested at the hearing centered on closing of loopholes, and redistribution of the wealth through more equitable taxation:

- Elimination of the regressive property tax and institution of an income or other progressive tax as the major source of revenue for local government;

- Development of a revenue system that taxes all sources of wealth and income, eliminating privileges and exemptions allowed currently to the personal and corporate wealthy -- a step that would, according to the National Urban Coalition -- immediately add some 25 billion dollars to the federal revenues;

- State-wide financing for schools and other local services designed to distribute funds on a more equitable basis;

- Withholding federal funds in localities where persistent discriminatory practices make it necessary to protect the public interest in this manner.

MEDICAL CARE

The crisis of health care in the United States was the subject of another planning group whose recommendations in the field of health are found in a separate summary released April 13, 1972. Recommendations from the ethnic planning group included:

- Adoption of a national health insurance program introduced in 1970 by Kennedy-Griffiths (S. 3 and HR. 22).

- Comprehensive medical protection, including preventive care, inexpensive drugs and specialized treatment, for the approximately 25 million Americans having no health insurance protection, whatsoever.

ELDERLY

Much of the ethnic population in America today arrived in the country in the early 1900s, thus is now in retirement. Inflation has diminished or depleted the value of whatever savings have been accumulated. Homes, laboriously acquired, have either lost their value or are now part of a deteriorating community. Medical care is inadequate; services needed by the elderly are not to be found in what were once thriving white ethnic neighborhoods. The ability of working class children to care for aged parents and grandparents has placed an awesome burden on people who themselves are caught in a never-ending economic squeeze. Panelists and participants recommended:

- A nationwide pension system similar to the social security system should be implemented since millions of workers lose part or all their pensions under present plans.

- Income supplements through Federal grants in aid should be provided to augment currently insufficient pensions and social security benefits.
- Federally-constructed and administered nursing homes should be provided since the private sector has completely failed to provide adequate care in nursing homes.
- Public service employment of the elderly in programs such as Head Start and day care centers.

THE CITIES

Baltimore's city councilwoman spoke of a New Frontier -- not of the Kennedy years but the frontier that is in Newark, Cleveland, Toledo; not just in the ghettos, but in entire cities.

"Cities are in desperate trouble. There are very few affluent or problem-free neighborhoods left in the cities. What incentive is there to stay on the frontier -- to stay in the city? What incentive is there in higher taxes, worse schools, greater fear, more pollution, fewer or no jobs?

"The one place where the ethnic felt the master of his fate was in his own neighborhood. Now even that security is being threatened. He wants new schools for his children and recreation facilities for the entire family -- not just the token wading pool for pre-schoolers or the occasional dance for teenagers. He wants his street fixed and his garbage collected. But when he goes to make his problems known, the ethnic American is either put off, put down, or put out.

"We suggest that we have a New Frontier of need -- a Federal act as grand in its scope as the Homestead Act of the 1860s -- to help the urban frontiersman of 1972 America. That urban frontiersman represents no one race, nor a single nationality, but he needs help that is specific, concrete and direct. Let me suggest some bold incentives:

- A significant tax write-off to individuals who remain in the city;
- An end to the designation of "target areas" in funding human service programs;
- Major insurance reforms to ease the near-impossibility of getting insurance for urban stores, restaurants or for urban families securing homeowner and auto insurance;

- A serious effort to deal with drugs, eliminating the sources and treating the victims;
- A realistic effort to reduce crime, including reforms in criminal justice systems not just the subsidization of urban weaponry systems;
- A balanced transportation system providing for mass transit as well as private automobiles;
- Comprehensive human services in health, education, etc.

REPRESENTATION

White ethnics have found it increasingly impossible to break through to local decision-makers. Even where the white ethnics still have access to city hall through their "own politicians", conditions are not much better. For example, out of a total of 522,000 elected officials in the United States, only nine are Puerto Rican. A witness commented:

"The nationally prominent politicians in both parties have ignored the needs of working-class white ethnics and have chosen instead to massage their pride. At election time the candidates make a pilgrimage to conventions sponsored by Polish - or Italo-Americans. They lavishly praise the rich heritage of Poland and the cultural achievements of Italy while chomping on pizza and Polish sausages. However, the candidates say little about the unmet needs of destitute old folks, unemployed youth, and workers whose income cannot keep pace with inflation."

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Recommendations:

- Reiteration and commitment to the human rights principle of political asylum;
- Continued refusal to recognize the forcible occupation and annexation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania by the Soviet Union;
- Support of House/Senate Concurrent Resolution 416, urging the United Nations to place the issue of the Baltic States on its agenda for public discussion;
- Support of Ethnic Heritage Studies Legislation offering Federal financial assistance to the preservation of minority languages and cultural backgrounds.

SUMMARY

There was general concensus among panelists and witnesses that a growing number of Americans have become estranged from government and the political process. They are unable to participate effectively in decisions affecting them, the welfare of their communities and the future of their children. Any meaningful reassessment of public policy in the 1970s must involve the ordinary man and woman or their representatives to participate directly in the decision-making processes at all levels of government and party affairs.

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CONCERNS OF ETHNIC AMERICA

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