

The report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders clearly points out the severe shortage of low-income housing resources and documents the fact that government, and in particular the Federal Government, is responsible for a decrease in the number of low-income housing units.

In a report that our staff submitted to Mr. Weaver, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, it is approximated that 3,000 low-income families have been displaced in Camden; that another 3,000 low-income families are going to be displaced under present plans by December 31, 1972. During the past 5 years only 101 new units of low-income housing have been added to the housing supply, and these are for elderly people only.

Congress must realize that under present conditions the poor consider even bad housing preferable to no housing. In our cities around the Nation individuals and families are being left homeless and thereby forced into overcrowded substandard housing or housing which is marginal and will rapidly deteriorate due to new overcrowding.

Item 2 is a matter of grassroots representation in the planning process; and we are pleased to see some direction in this particular bill. This addition strikes at the heart of the crisis in our Nation which is a crisis in democracy. Government appears to have forgotten the people, and the tension tearing at our fabric is founded in the failure of Government to provide and require that the people directly affected by urban renewal or highway construction, code enforcement, and other governmental actions be intimately involved in the planning, in the decision making, in execution, and in monitoring of programs which determine their destiny.

The law in theory requires citizen participation in the urban renewal process, but the Department of Housing and Urban Development does not enforce this requirement. The law provides for hearings on urban renewal, housing construction, and other public improvements, however, the lack of professional assistance available to the poor makes it impossible for a community to negotiate successfully with the Government which has the ability to provide countless expert witnesses and detailed studies.

These hearings are a mere formality. The poor must be given the power to enter the planning process at the stage where they can decisively affect the process; this means the poor must be involved from the beginning all the way through to the execution and construction.

I want to depart from the text at this particular point and emphasize that in Camden we have what is required by the work of a program of the Citizens Advisory Committee. The Citizens Advisory Committee are strictly members of industry and business, called the Greater Camden movement. There is no representation of the poor, no representation even of the citizens; only one member of this committee lives in the city. All the rest except one work in the city. One member is the president of John Wanamaker Co. in Philadelphia, who neither lives in Camden, nor has business in Camden; and the citizens are not part of the advisory committee. We documented this in January 1967 through a coalition of civil rights, religious, and neighborhood groups. We brought it to the attention of the regional office. We sent a letter to the President about it, and we have gotten no reaction whatsoever from HUD on this matter. We had to go