A STUDY OF THE DECISION-MAKING AND ACTION-TAKING PROCESS IN A SMALL APPALACHIAN TOWN

by

JONATHAN WINTHROP REUSSER

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Signature of Author.

Department of Humanities, September 24, 1968

Certified by.

Professor Hans Guggenheim

Accepted by.

Professor Roy Lamson
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ABSTRACT

The subject of this paper is the study of the process by which a small Appalachian town mobilizes to take collective action on problems which face it as a community. This process is viewed as the way in which community decisions to act are formed, and how the actions thus decided upon are implemented. Following a discussion of this decision-making and action-taking process, the effects which my activity as a community action organizer in the town had on this process are examined.
INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The material presented in this paper is based on my work as a volunteer community organizer in the small Appalachian town of Tioga during the summer of 1967. My preoccupations and activities during my stay in Tioga were those of an organizer, not of an ethnographer; the possibility of studying what I saw there from an anthropological point of view did not occur to me until after my return to the academic world at the end of the summer. By way of preface, I include here an account of my own motivations and objectives in volunteering for the work, of the training I received prior to my placement in Tioga, and the conditions under which I worked while living there. I realize that the inclusion of material of such a purely personal and descriptive nature in unorthodox in the presentation of a paper of this nature, yet I feel it is worthy of mention to provide the reader both a perspective useful in gauging the validity of my remarks, and an insight into the human element which I feel is crucial to the understanding of the successes and failures of similar antipoverty programs being undertaken all over the country.

I volunteered to participate in this program with virtually no knowledge of what I would eventually find myself doing. I had little more than a vague notion that I would be working in some capacity with economically
depressed Appalachian mountain dwellers. My motivations in doing so were of a deeply personal and philosophical nature, springing from my deep-seated faith in the fundamental goodness of all men and a belief that this goodness can be realized when one is honest, open, and trusting in relating to others. My experience within my own social framework had led me to believe very strongly that all people will eventually respond positively if approached with trust, respect, concern, and the expectation that they will respond in kind. I felt I had to determine whether this belief was mere pollyanna or in fact valid in a wider social context, with reference to people with whom I shared little in common. I expected to find myself unusual among the other volunteers in this philosophical motivation, but found that this was indeed not the case. In the course of our intensive training and orientation, I became surprisingly close to perhaps fifty or sixty of the hundred and twenty other volunteers. With only seven exceptions which I can recall now, each of them had volunteered out of similar beliefs and concerns which were at least as deeply held and as far-reaching in their lives as mine are in my own life.

Although funded by and under the official auspices of VISTA, my program was designed and directed by a private organization of community planners and organizers who called themselves the Appalachian Volunteers. The group was conceived and founded in the Appalachian
mountains, and has an impressive record of six years of successfully organizing mountain people into local community action groups through which they can have a voice in the decisions of local power structures, and eventually in those of state and federal power structures. In his excellent treatise on the ethical and theoretical underpinnings of community planning and development, Goodenough distinguished between the objectives of three types of community planning: the creation by a planner of a new set of conditions to which people must adjust, the attempt by a planner to create new conditions that fit the values of the community, and undertaking of change by the community itself (Goodenough 1963:36). It is toward this third objective that the Appalachian Volunteers have directed their efforts. Their approach is founded on the premise that the underlying problems of Appalachian poverty will begin to be remedied only when the people begin to make their own decisions in their own development. In agreement with this premise is the volume of Goodenough's data and theoretical work. "When we concentrate on the human problems of accomplishing technological, social or other kinds of community reform, as we do in this book, we are forced to conclude that successful reform is not so readily accomplished by attempts to reform others as by helping others to reform themselves" (Goodenough 1963:17).

The training program the Appalachian Volunteers devised for us amounted to a thoroughgoing indoctrination
in the techniques and qualities which Goodenough views as essential for the agent of social change. (Goodenough 1963:377-409). Extensive use was made of such training methods as role-playing and sample exposure to field situations to make us aware of the elements of ethnocentricity in our own attitudes, and to prepare us for the different cultural values we would encounter in the field. We were given a comprehensive background on the structure and workings of the state and local governments, of the historical development and current state of industrial exploitation of the state's natural resources, and on the nature and effects of the state's tax structure. Strong emphasis was placed on the attitude of the volunteer toward his community, in agreement with Goodenough's view that "his acceptance of and respect for his clients as fellow men, moreover, must be unconditional" (Goodenough 1964-378).

My assignment to Tioga proved to be extremely fortunate as my working conditions there were all but ideal. I had the good fortune to be able to live in the home of a miner and his wife who accepted me into their home as part of the family. In addition to being of invaluable assistance in explaining many community affairs to me, they were among the most enthusiastic participants in the community action program which was eventually organized. Communication was often a problem during the first weeks, and an understanding of the intricacies of the local dialect proved to be equally as indispensible as the knowledge of the native language in studying a completely foreign culture. It was
often almost as difficult to obtain, and my hosts proved to be of great help in this area.

By far the most gratifying aspect of my work in Tioga was the fact that, after passing an initial inspection period during which I was received rather coolly by the community, I was able to develop a relationship of mutual respect and friendship with almost every resident. These relationships ranged from that of a "big brother" with community children to acceptance as an equal by most men of the community. Needless to say, the rapport thus established was invaluable in often enabling me to sense moods of the community as a whole which affected its response to my organizing attempts. In addition, the experience was to me a massive reaffirmation of the faith which led me to undertake it.

In the study which follows, I have made every effort to maintain a scholarly objectivity in my account and analysis of the behavior of the residents of Tioga. I present this personal and subjective material, and mention my emotional attachment to the Tiogans and to the cause of the people of Appalachia, in the interest of making clear my own personal bias for the use of the reader in evaluating the presentation which follows.
TREATMENT OF THE DECISION-ACTION PROCESS IN THE LITERATURE

Various investigators have described the ways in which many different communities come to a decision and take action on problems which face the community as a whole. In considering the decision-making and action-taking process, to which I shall refer hereafter as the decision-action process, in Tioga, I mention three such studies, the first two by way of contrast, the last by way of comparison.

Banfield has described the village of Montegrano, in southern Italy, as characterized by what he calls "amoral familism" (Banfield 1958:85-104). Each family jealously guards its own interests (interesse) against the rest of the community (Banfield 1958:115). In this atmosphere, there is an absence of community-wide decision-making process or collective action. It is assumed that anyone who suggests such action does so for some hidden ulterior motive. The community differs from Tioga in that it is highly traditional in its social stratification and in the residents' fundamental outlook on life. In tioga the observer finds neither the uncompromising self-interest of amoral familism nor the utter lack of any communal action which Banfield describes in Montegrano.

Cancian describes Zinacantan, another highly tradition-oriented community, which is located in the Chiapas highlands of Mexico (Cancian 1965). Life in this community revolves around the religious cargos, a highly
structured civil-religious hierarchy. Decisions and actions which involve the entire community are made and directed by the upper orders of this hierarchy, and Cancian views such actions as functioning to maintain the system in equilibrium with the outside Ladino world (Cancian 1965:140-143).

Miller describes another Chiapas highland community, that of Yalcuc (Miller 1955). Community decisions are made by a general assembly which is led by the commisariado who is the executive of a small administrative body of the community. Miller views community decisions and action as the superposition of individual decisions enforced by various social controls (Miller 1955:54).

It is this last community which most closely resembles Tioga, and more importantly, it is Miller's model of viewing collective decisions as the aggregate of decisions of individual members of a community which is most useful in discussing the decision-action process in Tioga. In addition to this debt to Miller, I follow the trend toward viewing social structures and mechanisms as being part of the dynamic of ongoing processes of change (Barth 1967), (Vogt 1960). I present Tioga's existing decision-action mechanisms in the perspective of their historical development and attempt to show the effects on them of my activity as a community action organizer.
ETNOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Descriptive Data:

The subject of discussion in this paper is the tiny community of Tioga, West Virginia. Tucked into a pocket of the coal rich Appalachian mountains in the center of the state, the clump of forty-six families clusters around the crossing of the B & O railroad spur which continually siphons off the wealth of the mountains and the one-lane hard road winding fifteen miles to the nearest town. Tioga lies in the extreme eastern corner of Nicholas County, just over the line from Webster County, and about sixty miles east of Charleston, and seven miles north of Highway 41, a minor road which runs east-west across the state.

The community experiences a considerable physical isolation from the rest of the county, a fact which has led, directly or indirectly, to an accompanying political and social isolation. As is characteristic of many other small communities in the Appalachian region, it is surrounded by steep coal-laden hills, and the resident has an inescapable sensation of being physically hemmed in all over. The only access to the outside is by means of the hard road around which Tioga centers and which threads its way through the hills to the highway. The road is unsafe, as the one lane of pavement is of dubious quality, and there is little provision made for meeting oncoming traffic; in the winter it is murderous. Consequently, no one ventures into the town unless they absolutely have to. The one exception to this
is born of the fact that being within running distance of the county line, and being the residence of the county's most notorious bootlegger, Tioga is the ideal place for the rowdy element of the county to congregate. Drunkenness and reckless driving are common place, and hence, the road becomes even less safe. The problem is thus self-regenerative, because the sheriff refuses to provide any substantial law enforcement because the road is bad and the people too dangerous, and the road commission claims that if they improved the road, people would drive faster. A similar problem exists with Tioga's school, which, although potentially well equipped by West Virginia standards (four classrooms and a lunchroom) has been operating for the past year with only one teacher. The school board claims it is too difficult to staff and supply the school since it is inaccessible, and instead runs school busses over the same inaccessible road and moves students to already overcrowded schools where their presence is resented. In general, the county government shows a marked reluctance to take into account the desires or needs of the community, both because Tiogans represent a small number of votes and because it is difficult for them to make their wishes known effectively. As a result of all this, Tiogans have gained a widespread reputation as ill-educated rowdies, and it is often on the basis of this reputation that the sheriff refuses to send deputies to patrol there or that county officials justify short-changing the community in distributing public funds and services.
Historical Data:

Tioga is very much a community which has seen its day and is on the decline; Tiogans recall the past with great nostalgia, and speak with some bitterness of its present state. My first encounter with a resident was with a spry elderly woman of about eighty, whom I stopped along the road to ask if I had finally reached Tioga (there are no recognized boundaries and hence no markers). "Oh yes," she said. "This is Tioga--what's left of it."

Around the turn of the century, the entire stretch of hills through which Tioga's road now runs was purchased by one of the land development companies which flourished in the state at that time. The hills were dense with virgin stands of oak and maple, and between 1900 and 1910 a sizable sawmill and lumberyard were built on the present sight of Tioga. By 1909 the lumber industry had reached peak production throughout the Southern Appalachian region (Ford 1962:117). There is little accessible official information, but as nearly as I have been able to discern, this lumbering industry was the main source of income in the county, and Tioga held a position of great importance and esteem in the county. The present railroad spur was built to service the lumberyard, and probably it was at this time that the road to Tioga was built. The lumber boom continued until the end of the war, when it stopped abruptly; with the end of the demand for war supplies, the lumber industry declined sharply throughout the Southern Appalachian region, and by 1920 it had disappeared altogether (Bowman
1963:57-62). By this time the town had a population of about three times its present size, and there were at least two stores, a community center, two churches, and a functioning town council. The withdrawal of the lumbering industry left most people penniless, but since hard times were widespread, there was no place better to go and most remained in Tioga. A limited amount of agriculture sprang up on the surrounding hills which had been cleared for lumber, and the town remained alive, if not prosperous. The few remaining residents who remember this time speak with great pride of the unity and tenaciousness which they say characterized Tioga then.

Coal companies began to develop the county's resources in the late twenties, and took advantage of Tioga's existing railroad facilities. Four major mines were opened surrounding Tioga, and the companies headquarters and miners' quarters were centered there. As was typical of the operation of coal companies of this era, the company bought the town lock, stock, and barrel, tore out the lumberyards and built a large number of cheap three-and-four-room dwellings which it rented to miners. After the period of hardship following the end of the lumber boom, the subsistence wages and living conditions offered by the mining company seemed a boon to Tiogans, and the town became a mining center. Over the span of the next fifteen years, Tioga enjoyed a period of relative prosperity and autonomy. Albeit at their own prices, the company offered virtually all of the services the residences felt they needed. By 1940, Tioga apparently supported three general stores, a movie house, its own doctor, and
constable, a school, a recreation hall which also served as a community center, church, and later a union hall, a volunteer fire department, a provisional sort of community council which negotiated with the company for improvements, and even a jewelry store. The advent of the United Mine Workers union served to unify the town even more, and during this period there was extensive participation in community activities, such as Boy Scouts, school outings, and athletic teams.

In the late forties and early fifties, however, the coal industry began to decline. Companies all across Appalachia were beginning to replace miners with machines and to close down the smaller mines in which it was not practical to use machinery (Caudill 1962:219-248). Virtually worthless property was sold to residents for what little savings they had, and the company closed the mines without warning and moved out. Just as when the lumber industry had moved out, people were left penniless and a period of hard times followed. This time, however, there were two factors which kept the experience from being the unifying one it had been in the twenties. Firstly, in the course of the coal boom, the rest of the county had been developed, and the towns of Richwood and Summersville had grown large and diversified enough to better withstand the decline in the coal industry; also there were still mining jobs available in the larger more automated mines near Richwood. Consequently, those who were able moved out of Tioga in hopes of finding work elsewhere. Secondly, in the early fifties, a small
local mining company was formed, and it began to operate the smaller mines which had been abandoned by the giant out-of-state companies. Thus, a limited amount of work was made available in two of Tioga's mines. The effects of these two factors on the community were the following. 1) The town's stores and entertainment, unable to survive without company support, went out of business one by one. The doctor, constable, and fire department all disappeared. 2) Consequently, Tiogans were forced to depend almost completely on Summersville and Richwood for all of their necessities and services. 3) Jealousies which lead to deep-seated animosities and feuds developed due to the fact that some men were able to find work and others were not. Apparently, the limited number of jobs available had led to extensive favoritism in the administration of the mining company. 4) Virtually all forms of community-wide cooperation ceased. The union died out as workers were in no position to bargain with the company. Community action of any kind was nonexistent, since those who had jobs were saving money in order to move out, and those who did not were generally too distrustful and bitter to work with the others. Social functions were impossible because of the animosities which raged between various members of the community.

There is some degree of theoretical debate as to whether the presence of such interpersonal conflicts in a community hinders collective action by the community. In discussing the dyadic contract in Tzintzuntzan, Foster
claims that the gains of the neighbor are jealously resented by the villager, because the pie being constant in size, exceptional prosperity is realized at his expense. "People consistently are reluctant to work with others toward group goals." (Foster 1961:1190). Balikci, on the other hand, feels that this is not necessarily the case. In his study of the Balkan village of Veliko Selo, he found that "the evidence indicates that under economic pressure the villagers can engage in reciprocal cooperative activities and this without being hampered by jealousies and hostilities." (Balikci 1965:1462)

From this time on, Tioga's population has been on a constant decline. At least two or three families leave each year, and scattered throughout the present community are vacant houses, or lots where houses have been torn down for lumber or firewood. Most of the heads of families remaining in Tioga have found jobs in nearby mines, and the animosities, although still present in the form of traditional family grudges, are no longer immediately apparent. As the community distills down to a hard core of those who refuse to leave, there has been a rebirth of some community spirit.

As is obvious in the description above, Tioga is a community in the midst of continuing change. The following description of its present structures is meant to be viewed only, as Vogt puts it, as one would view a single frame of a motion picture. Tioga's present sit-
Evaluation is the "intersection in time and space of ... ongoing processes of change and development." (Vogt 1960:19-20).

The Tiogans:

For the purposes of this study, I identify three general social categories which I shall call 1) the non-participants, 2) the active core, and 3) the active fringe. Groupings of families into these categories is based upon the extent of their participation in collective action by the community. The essential characteristics of the categories are summarized in Table 1 and elaborated below.

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<th>Characteristics of Social Categories</th>
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<tr>
<td>Non-participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approximate income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of families owning home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of families renting home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of homes in nuclear area</td>
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<tr>
<td>number of homes outside nuclear area</td>
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The non-participants consist of the four families which consistently avoid virtually every aspect of public life in the community. The heads of three of these households hold preferred jobs with the railroad, while the fourth has a high level job in the coal processing operation nearby, and supplements his income by the operation of a farm and of Tioga's Post Office; consequently these families have the greatest and most secure income of the community. These four all own their own houses, which are located in the cluster of homes near the railroad crossing where Tioga's one presently operating store and schoolhouse are located (henceforth referred to as the nuclear area). Although it is these families who have made the most extensive improvements in their homes (central heating, modern kitchens, and the like), they all plan to move out of Tioga in the near future. In a social sense, the move has already largely been made, as the four families maintain social contact outside the community and keep their minglings with Tiogans to an absolute minimum; two of the four have even been sending their children to a different school than the one attended by the rest of the Tioga schoolchildren in preparation for a move away from the community.

Members of the active core are all regularly employed miners. Their income is sufficient for them to live comfortably, but leaves little to spare for savings or emergencies. With one exception, they own their houses
and have lived in them for at least several years, investing considerable effort and money in improvements and hence having no intention of moving. Most of these families live in the nuclear area, and the three who do not live outside it on small farms nearby by their own choice.

Families I have grouped in the active fringe include both the six elderly households (couples over sixty-five who no longer work and whose children have moved elsewhere) and the eleven families whose heads work occasionally as miners, do menial labor at a dollar per hour under the Aid to Dependent Children of the Unemployed Act (ADCU), or who do no work at all. The older couples support themselves by pension or social security payments and live very simply; the other families, having children to feed and clothe, support whatever they able to earn by welfare payments and by raising small garden patches, flocks of scraggly chickens and an occasional pig. Although four of the elderly households own their home, all but one of the active fringe members live outside the nuclear area. The families with irregularly employed heads rent a number of poorer houses in varying degrees of disrepair which have been vacated by owners who have already left the community. Most of these are located on the two adjoining ridges which overlook the nuclear area, and are accessible only by two virtually impassable roads. All but two of these (there are about fifteen
such houses in all) are too high to be connected into the community water supply which services the homes of the active core and non-participant families; these houses have their own individual wells. Although most of the members of the active fringe have lived in Tioga for several years, there is a considerable flux of tenants among the available empty houses. One family's moving to a slightly better house precipitates a shift of several families into houses vacated by the former tenant. Owners undertake no upkeep of the houses, and families who move into a rundown house have little motivation to improve it significantly, since they have no intention of extended residence there. Consequently, living conditions are usually significantly poorer among these homes than among those of the nuclear area.

The social contacts of members of both of the active categories are almost solely within Tioga. Very few families have any significant contact with outsiders, and as there is little social stigma attached to being unemployed or to living outside the nuclear area, close friendships are formed between the two categories freely. In general, however, since their housing coincides and since they spend much of their time traveling to and from work together, members of the active core associate mainly with each other; contact between fringe and core members occurs mainly when the fringe member initiates it by coming into the nuclear area. There is no social con-
straint against the unemployed head of a fringe household finding a job and moving to the nuclear area. There exists considerable jealousy and animosity between members of the non-participant families and the rest of the community. Since they choose not to associate freely with their neighbors and since their plans to move out are well known, they are regarded by others as "stuck-up" and not to be trusted. It would seem reasonable to regard these animosities as vestiges of the universal distrust which gripped Tioga in the early fifties.

These groupings are my own construction from my own observations of group and individual interactions, particularly with respect to collective action. They are not recognized as such by Tiogans, but I think they will be of some use in examining the dynamics of the process of decision-making and action-taking in the community.
Bases for Collective Action

In the previously cited studies, one finds that either 1) collective action is initiated and implemented by a locally recognized decision-making body, or 2) the absence of such an accepted body is accompanied by the absence of any effective collective action or response to pressures from the outside.

In Yalcuc, matters concerning the community as a whole are discussed and acted upon in a general assembly. Residents recognize the assembly as the decision-making body of the community, and actions taken collectively by the community are initiated and implemented by the assembly. Banfield characterizes Montegrano, however, as devoid of any locally recognized decision-making entity beyond that of the individual families, each of which looks out for its own interests. In the resultant selfishness and distrust, no support can be mustered for any kind of community-wide activity, and in fact very few residents even think in terms of the community as a whole.

In Tioga, however, neither of these alternatives holds. Before the advent of volunteer efforts at the onset of this study, there was not only an absence of any body recognized as capable of making decisions for the entire community, but there was no widely accepted leadership or authority figure at all. Yet the community was quite able to mobilize and take action
effectively on issues affecting everyone. There are however two basic cultural facts about Tioga which are, in addition to the ethnographic material already presented, essential to the discussion of the process by which the community decides upon and takes collective action. These are 1) what I will call a "crisis orientation" to action basic to the psychology of most Tiogans, and 2) the lack of any action-oriented community organization in Tioga which has followed the withdrawal of lumber and coal company leadership and capital.

**Crisis Orientation:**

I use this term to refer to the fact that Tiogans will generally put off action in any sphere until they perceive the situation as unbearable. Thus, I use the term "crisis" not only in the sense of disaster or discreet catastrophic event, but also in the sense of the gradual accumulation of events which together make a situation seem unbearable and action unavoidable. And by "crisis orientation to action" I refer to the extreme reluctance of Tiogans to take any positive action other than that which is necessary to patch up a chain of events which has become intolerable.

Consequently, the community rarely takes any immediate action when confronted with a problem. Rather, Tiogans view the forces arrayed against them, those of nature, of an unsympathetic government power structure, of external economic developers upon whom they must depend and over whom they can
have no influence, with an almost universal defeatism born of too many defeats. "Why act when you don't absolutely have to, they say, when the chances are so great that your efforts will only be wasted?" Many of them lost all they had when, in taking the initiative of buying their own homes from the coal company, they were victimized by the company's evacuation. Disabled miners with families to feed have lost the welfare payments they depended on when they took the initiative of finding a job to supplement their meager checks. Inquiries into tax bills have resulted in harassment and higher assessment. Again and again, both in their own experience and in the wealth of stories passed down from father to son and between families, attempts to significantly better their lot have been wasted effort.

My comments above mention only action in terms of dealing with pressures from outside the community, pressures which can be ignored in everyday life, except on those days when the tax bill comes or the welfare inspector visits. But in fact, so deeply is this crisis orientation ingrained that it is characteristic of the Tiogan's basic approach to everyday life. Typical of this approach is the attitude of the resident who explained to me as I helped him pour a new cement porch that he had been contemplating the action for better than a year, but had waited because he feared that the winter might crack it, or that he might be cheated when he tried to buy cement. The action was precipitated when his old wood porch rotted completely through, i. e. became intolerable. As a temporary (I thought) measure while
fixing the porch, we propped up the roof in a haphazard way with the remains of the former porch, and discussed the possibility of building cinder block supports. When I asked him a month later when he planned to improve on the rotting wood props, he replied that he allowed as how he would have to fix them if the weight of the snow on the roof that winter collapsed them. He refused to take any action until his situation had become completely intolerable. So basic is this crisis orientation that virtually any agreement between friends that amounts to a commitment to action, or even to meet at a later time, is accompanied by the folk-saying "I'll be there, God willin' and the crick don't rise," signifying a sort of universal acceptance of the fact that unforeseen powers may at any time invalidate any action, even a promise between friends.

Lack of Action-oriented Organization:

It is implicit that collective action in a community made up of such crisis-oriented individuals is quite improbable. One would expect such a community to take no sort of preventative action against community problems, and to take corrective action only when the problem has become intolerable. This is in fact exactly what has taken place in Tioga. As I have already outlined, the disappearance of coal company support signalled the decline of the leadership and decision-making bodies that then existed in the community. Tioga was brought to its present condition by a combination of the processes of decreasing population, increasing dependence on
external sources for necessities, buildup of interpersonal animosities, decreasing economic independence, decreasing influence over county affairs, and appearance in individual residents of a crisis orientation toward action. There is no recognized leadership and there is no organization capable of making decisions for community-wide action. The only continuing organizations which currently exist are those of the church and of the school, and the functions of these are at most tangential to community action. How then does the community manage to mobilize to meet the various crises which have confronted it? This question will be discussed in detail below, but the answer is basically that the community responds to crises in much the same way that its individual members do, when in following their crisis orientation, they are forced to take action to remedy an unbearable situation. In the course of day-to-day life, residents will grumble about such community problems as rowdyism and reckless driving, insufficient fire protection, or lack of a good water supply, but will put up with them rather than support a town council or similar body to deal with them as they begin to manifest themselves. When a crisis arises, that is, when the situation becomes unbearable for enough individual residents as to constitute the bulk of the community, some sort of ad hoc body forms for the sole purpose of alleviating the specific problem involved which immediately disappears when the crisis has been dealt with, and the community dissolves to its previous state until a new crisis appears.
MECHANISMS OF THE DECISION-ACTION PROCESS

In considering the ways in which Tiogans make decisions and take action as a community, it is necessary to distinguish between crisis situations which are purely internal, the origins and solutions of which can be dealt with by Tiogans without reference to any external political or economic power structure, and crisis situations which necessitate negotiations with these outside powers. The Tiogan approaches each of these two situations with a markedly different attitude, and consequently, the decision-action process is different for each. In general, Tiogans regard the former as soluble and the latter as virtually hopeless, and the chances that collective action will be taken on a problem which involves conflict with an external power structure, such as the county school board, are drastically less than if the problem could be acted upon purely internally.

**Internal problems:**

When faced by a purely internal problem, the community usually responds through the following sequence of five events. 1) General recognition that the problem exists and is worth worrying about. 2) Decision by one or two individual residents that the problem has become unbearable and that a specific action must be taken to remedy it. 3) A period where community discussion of the problem focuses on this specific action and other residents become convinced that it must be taken. 4) Formation of some sort of
coalition to carry out the action. 5) Disappearance of the coalition as soon as the action is completed. Tiogans do not recognize these steps as such, but they follow this pattern of action almost invariably, with members of each of the categories described previously behaving in a characteristic fashion during the process. Each of these steps is discussed at length below, and I include by way of illustration the example of the community's decision to organize and build a communal water system.

1) Recognition of problem: An important factor in the life of every Tiogan is the way in which information is transmitted and shared among members of the community. Most Tiogans have no form of recreation other than the exchange of idle talk with friends and neighbors, and hence, both story telling and malicious gossip are practiced continually. The recognition of a problem by the community is a natural consequence of the free flow of information in the endless round of everyday conversations, since each member of the community is aware of the affects the problem is having on the others. This exchange of information takes place almost exclusively in one or the other of the five general types of situations in which Tiogans encounter one another: conversations between miners who work together, conversations in the store or on the store porch, telephone conversations, "beer joint" conversations, or conversations between those attending church or school functions.

A significant part of the miner's working day is spent in traveling to and from the mine site, and into and out of
the mine itself. Most of Tioga's miners drive to work in one of several car pools, and consequently, spend about three hours daily with from two to six other residents. I questioned sixteen miners as to how they spent this time, and all agreed that they usually talked most of the way to and from work.

A great deal of information is exchanged in this way, and members of the same car pool are with few exceptions intimate friends. Obviously, this type of exchange is limited to members of the active core: non-participant men never have the opportunity for this kind of interaction, and the few members of the active fringe who sometimes work as miners rarely work the same shift and the same mine as the regular miners.

The store, being centrally located and the only available gathering place, is the center of most of Tioga's daily social activity, and consequently, much of the information exchange takes place there. The local teenager who tends the store acts as a sort of clearinghouse for community information; each new customer picks up the day's news from her and adds his own contribution. The children of the community spend most of the days when they are not in school pitching pennies and exchanging stories on the wide wooden porch which runs along two sides of the building. The unemployed with time on their hands congregate here for a chew of tobacco or a rub of snuff, and are joined by miners who are on their off-shift or are waiting for rides. Children of the non-participant families gather along with the rest, but their parents take their trade elsewhere and seldom make an appearance. Almost every family of the active categories, however, is represented at some time during the day.
These storefront encounters are the main means of access men of the active fringe have to community information.

The telephone has become an essential element of the life style of most Tiogans; the average housewife in Tioga talks daily with at least two other women of the community, and much information is exchanged in the course of those various calls. All of the telephones are on party lines with several other residents, so the information exchanged in this way soon becomes general knowledge. There is telephone service, however, only in the nuclear area and in the homes of the three active core families who live outside the nuclear area. This form of exchange, then, takes place almost exclusively among active core members; non-participants rarely telephone, and are rarely telephoned by, other Tiogans, and families of the active fringe do not have access to telephones.

The town's two "beer joints" are the scene of much weekend activity by the men and adolescents of the community. Men of the non-participant families are rarely seen here, but men of both active categories engage in heated discussions of the state of the community or of the difficulty of making ends meet, as men are wont to do over several beers. This constitutes another important means of access fringe families have to community information.

Both the regular services of the local Methodist congregation and the occasional meetings of parents called by the administration of the Tioga school provide occasions where a relatively large number of residents are gathered together. In addition to their explicit purpose, these gatherings serve
the additional function of initiating contact between residents who otherwise would have little occasion to see each other. As the gatherings usually result in simultaneous conversations among all those present, there is a significant exchange of community information. Table 2 gives a breakdown of the number of families in each category involved in such gatherings. Non-participant families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-participant</th>
<th>Active Core</th>
<th>Active Fringe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number families attending church</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regularly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number families attending church</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occasionally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number families with children in</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tioga school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

take no significant part in these gatherings. The majority of families present is of the active core, but a significant number (65%) of the fringe families attend church and school meetings at least occasionally.

In each of these five modes of information transfer, members of each category participate to an extent characteristic of their category (Table 3): non-participant families neither have access to nor contribute to the
community information. Members of the active core are constantly in touch with each other, while fringe families are usually slightly behind on the most recent information.

**TABLE 3**

**Extent of Participation in Information Sharing Process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of conversation</th>
<th>Non-participant</th>
<th>Active Core</th>
<th>Active Fringe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>between miners</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>great</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>store</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>great</td>
<td>great</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>telephone</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>great</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beer joint</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>great</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>church and school functions</td>
<td>minimal</td>
<td>great</td>
<td>great</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the case of the water problem which led to the establishment of the current community water system, informants accounts of community awareness of the problem closely fit my description of information transfer. Following an exceptionally dry summer three years before this field work was done, Tioga suffered an acute water shortage. Several of the miners told me of how it was sometimes necessary for a car pool to make a twenty mile detour while returning from work in order to obtain water from the nearest town which was not affected by the shortage, and one remembered a discussion which ran for several days among members of his car pool as to whether the town should hire
a diviner. At this time the town's water supply consisted of individual family wells, and by the end of the dry summer most of these had gone dry, leaving the residents to rely on the one or two wells that happened to have water on any given day. Every day Tiogans seeking water would stop at the store, where the clerk had the most recent information as to which wells could be used that day. It was at this time that at least five of the core families had telephones installed so that they could keep in touch with the other residents about the latest water situation. The owner of one of the beer joints told me that his business has never been as good as it was during the dry spell. All of the miners stopped for an hour or so on their way back from work to learn if water had begun to rise yet in any of the wells. Some informants claim that church attendance even picked up as a result of the drought, and the preacher recalls one service of the time being devoted to prayer and discussion about the situations the dry spell had brought about.

2) **Individual Decision that a Certain Action Must be Taken:** As is characteristic of Tiogans' "crisis orientation" to action which I have described previously, the community will remain inactive in this state of general awareness of a problem until one or two individual residents perceive the situation as having become absolutely intolerable. This perception consists, in fact, of their visualizing and proposing a specific course of action which they feel must be undertaken to remedy the situation; while all of the residents will
proclaim vehemently during the course of the information exchange described above that the situation is unbearable and that something must be done, they will in fact tolerate the state of affairs rather than undertake any concrete action to alter it; and the only way of distinguishing between conversational rhetoric and the actual perception of the problem as unbearable is by the willingness of the individual to take action against it. The decision that action is actually necessary, and the formulation of the plans of action usually come from the same three or four members of the active core. These four are all relatively volatile personalities, and are regarded by most other Tiogans as being impatient and a little hot-headed. It is probably because of this impatience that they are the first to decide that they are unable to put up with the problem any longer.

As in the first step of the decision-action process, it is the active core which takes the lead. There are, to be sure, volatile personalities in the active fringe, but in general they are more pressed by the business of finding food for their families and are willing to let a problem situation exist beyond the point where it becomes intolerable for one of the four core members. As might be expected, non-participant families play no part in this step since they have had less contact with the problem and its effects on other Tiogans, and they are planning to move out of the community anyway.

It was one of these four core members who first proposed
the eventual solution to the water problem. His home is set back from the hard road on the top of a small hill, and the path leading out to the road is steep and slippery. At the time of the water shortage he had five children, all younger than eight years old. By his own account, and by the accounts of several other informants who have told me the story of the formation of the community water system, he became increasingly angry as the drought stretched on at the hardship the lack of water imposed on his family, and in particular on his wife, then pregnant with his sixth child. He was particularly irritated by the fact that one of the only wells which had not gone dry all summer was located on the site of an abandoned house, at the edge of the nuclear area and at one of the highest points of the town. He thought it extremely unfair that not only did the well do no one any good, but it caused everyone the inconvenience of having to climb the hill for water. "Now I thought on that well quite a time," he told me, "and I decided that if there's not somebody else around here's goin' to do somethin' about it then I'll set out to. So I did." I would surmise, having seen what I have of the man's personality that he took the location of a well in such an inconvenient place as a personal affront. He came up with the idea of building a storage tank on the site of the well and piping the water down into the nuclear area, and this is what eventually took place.
3) Discussion of the Proposed Action: Clearly, before any collective action can be taken, the other members of the community must also come to perceive the situation as intolerable and to agree on the desirability of the suggested action. After an individual resident has formulated a specific course of action, two facts begin to influence the community. The first of these is the fact that the suggested action becomes common knowledge by means of the same process of information exchange discussed above, and community discussion now centers around it. There is an important distinction, however, between this step of the decision-action process and the first step: whereas the information exchanged earlier was largely descriptive, and community thinking was oriented along the lines of complaining about the various effects of the problem, now residents are thinking and talking in terms of action, and the information exchanged involves various modes of action. The mere appearance of a concrete suggestion for action and the resultant discussion of it forces Tiogans to reorient their thinking in terms of action rather than merely in terms of complaint.

The second fact which begins to influence the community is the strength of the feelings of the resident who suggested the action; before having decided action was necessary, he will have become extremely upset. Consequently he makes an effort to talk with more of the other residents than he usually does, and he is usually vehement
and emotional in his conversations. Usually he has a friend in the active fringe whom he convinces that things have become very bad indeed and that something must be done, and enlists his friend's aid in talking to other fringe families. The more he and his friends talk with others about how bad the situation has become, the more other residents also come to perceive as unbearable the same accumulation of events which before they were content to let pass with only complaints.

As in the case of the initial step of the decision-action process, the non-participant families play no part. The activity centers in the core families, with members of the active fringe lagging somewhat behind. The important function of this phase of the process is that it serves to orient the community for action. At the same time residents are spending more of their time discussing modes of action rather than merely exchanging complaints, they are coming to perceive the problem as unbearable. Thus the chances that the community will take action suggested by an individual resident depend upon the degree to which he sways other residents to his perception of the situation as intolerable.

In the case of the community's decision to form a communal water supply, the man who suggested the building of a storage tank and piping network is a skilled mechanic who works repairing mining machinery, and hence has considerable practical intuition. His suggestion was well received as a good idea, and there was considerable discussion as to various kinds of tanks, types of piping, and the like, but
very little opposition to the basic plan. When excited, the man is a very forceful speaker, and he took every opportunity to impress on his listeners what he considered to be the urgency of the situation. After a week or two of discussion, he had apparently convinced most of the other residents that the threats of fire and of disease from water pollution were imminent, and they were ready to put his plan into action. In this case most of the fringe families took little part in the discussion: since the outlying ridges where most of them lived are higher than the well site, the proposed water system would not benefit them directly. The discussion of fire and disease, however, alarmed them considerably when they heard of it, and most of these families supported the plan for this reason.

4) Formation of a Coalition for Action: By the time the community has moved through the first three steps of the decision-action process, members are convinced of the necessity of the suggested action. It is then a relatively easy matter for them to organize some sort of coalition for the purpose of implementing the action. The exact nature of this coalition depends, of course, on the nature of the problem, but in general it consists of the agreement of residents to contribute either labor or money or both to the communal effort. Various individuals are recognized and trusted by the community as having special knowledge or abilities, such as money handling, construction, purchasing shrewdness, or the like; they are agreed upon with no
question as provisional heads of the various aspects of the plan of action for which their skills are necessary. In the course of the action, it is these provisional heads who see to it that the jobs are completed or the money is collected. Once the community has mobilized to this extent around an internal problem, there is rarely any difficulty securing cooperation. Residents who have promised to do a job or to contribute will usually do so with little or no prodding; once such an internal collective action is initiated, it is almost always completed with considerable efficiency.

It is in this phase of the decision-action process that the greatest degree of participation of all three of the general categories I have mentioned occurs. Non-participant families, who have played little or no part in the process up to this point, are often asked to help out. One of these men has considerable talent as a carpenter, and the wife of another has had experience as a commercial bookkeeper, and their skills are sometimes essential to a particular plan of action. In practice, their participation is usually limited to that of an advisory capacity and the actual work is done by a member of the active core. Cooperation is equally widespread in both of the active groups. In fact, participation is governed less by their willingness to contribute to the community effort than by the resources and particular skills individuals have to offer: it is accepted that members of the active fringe are less able to contribute financially than are the miners, while core
members have less time available to work on a project than the unemployed men of the fringe.

When the water system was installed, informants insist, no organization was formed and no meetings were held. Rather it appears that each aspect of the construction fell under the supervision of a resident who had some special knowledge or skill relevant to it. During the course of discussing the proposal (Step 3), it was learned that the oldest resident of the community had built a similar water storage tank for the lumberyard during the lumber boom. He was consulted, and agreed to design and supervise the building of the tank. The man who first suggested the plan, having considerable knowledge of various types of machinery, found and arranged the purchase of a used pump which the mining company was planning to replace. Another miner, who works underground as a pumper, used his knowledge of pipefitting and plumbing to handle the purchase and installation of pipes. Other men of the community contributed labor during their free time and the use of trucks and farm equipment to bring in supplies. Even members of the active fringe, whose homes would not receive water from the system, cooperated in building it, and in return a communal spigot and fire outlet were installed on the side of one ridge at the level of the storage tank. Residents of the nuclear area agreed to contribute an initial amount of money to cover the costs of installation (interestingly, none of my informants could recall the exact amount) and to continue to pay a nominal fee
regularly (§2 every three months) for operation and main-tenance, with the agreement that the cost of major repairs would be shared by the users. The only account of any lack of cooperation in this regard I found was by one informant who told me that two of the non-participant families had at first refused to make the initial contribution, but were eventually convinced or pressured to do so.

5) Disappearance of the Coalition: Upon completion of the specific plan of action undertaken by the community, the coalition formed to carry out the action simply ceases to exist. Since the coalition consisted merely of an agreement by residents to cooperate in carrying out the action, the obligations of that agreement are concluded when the action is completed. Whatever authority a provisional head had in ordering jobs to be done for his particular aspect of a community project is at an end as soon as that aspect has been finished. Members of the community were brought to action by the perception of a problem as un-bearable. When the action has been carried out, the problem has been alleviated, or at least residents once again perceive the situation as bearable, and return to the normal activity of everyday life.

When the water system had begun to function, the small amount of community organization which its construction had necessitated disappeared. Residents simply accepted its existence as part of everyday life. The only remnant of this organization is the fact that the nominal maintenance
fee is still collected, although no effort is made to enforce its payment, and residents pay it once or twice a year when they happen to remember it.

Although I have focused on the particular case of the water system in my discussion of the five steps of the decision-action process, it is by no means the only case in which the community behaves in this manner. I saw many instances, both by my own observation and through the accounts by informants of past actions, in which the community came to perceive a situation as intolerable and mobilized to take collective action to remedy it. As a result of this same decision-action process the current church building was built after its predecessor burned to the ground, a playground was built, a swamp was filled in after the drowning of a community child, and numerous community "socials" have been conducted.

Problems Involving Confrontation with an External Power:

Weller has characterized the typical Appalachian as living a life filled with fear and apprehension (Weller 1965:44-50). In particular, he describes the Appalachian as the victim of extreme lack of self-confidence born of fears of failure and rejection. "Never having been taught to face and overcome difficulties, but instead to retreat and 'keep out of it', mountain people often have no confidence in their abilities." (Weller 1965:46). This is certainly the case for Tioga residents with respect to social or political situations outside of Tioga. They are extremely sensitive
to their reputation in the outside world; when dealing with strangers, and in particular with officials, outside of Tioga, they feel they are looked down upon and are constantly afraid they will make fools of themselves. Again and again Tiogans recoil from situations involving any kind of direct encounter with officials of the school board or road commission, police officers, or other functionaries of the external power structure, pleading lack of knowledge, lack of education, or lack of speaking ability, and explaining that they want to avoid "getting jumped on." "Getting jumped on" is apparently a misfortune measured by purely internal standards, for it includes anything from being told politely by an official that one is in error to being directly harassed.

This fear of outside contact has a profoundly debilitating effect on the decision-action process when the community is faced with a problem which involves an external power, such as the school board or the road commission. The process includes the same steps of recognition, proposal, and formation of a coalition for action which I have already described in the case of purely internal community problems, but this fear of outside contact gives rise to a number of obstacles which render the process much less effective. I discuss these obstacles below, as they affect each step of the decision-action process, and illustrate them with a description of the community's response to the school board's decision to close all but the first three grades of the Tioga school during the year preceding my
1) **Recognition of Problem**: The community recognizes an external problem which it faces by means of the same information exchange network which operates in its recognition of an internal problem. In the case of an external problem, however, the presence of widespread defeatism and of a great deal of misinformation, both of which are also propagated by the same information exchange network, badly obscure the community's perception of the problem.

Tiogans believe that the politicians and public servants of the county have no interest in the welfare of Tioga, and assume that in any clash with the county power structure they stand only to lose. This defeatism results partly from the recent history of the county, in which it appears that Tioga has indeed been the last to be considered when school and road improvements are made, and partly on their own ignorance of the workings of government and of the limitations imposed on public officials by lack of funds. Whenever the community is faced with a problem which involves dealing with a county organization or official, there is a strong sentiment among residents that nothing can be done and that the problem is hopeless. This feeling is reinforced as it is expressed again and again in the course of the conversations which constitute the information exchange network.

A second obstacle to a clear perception of the problem lies in the fact that there is seldom any authoritative
information about it easily accessible to Tiogans. Their fear of contact with the outside prevents them from obtaining the facts of a situation directly from an outside agency, and consequently each resident may believe a different version of the causes and effects of a problem situation. The result is the presence of a great deal of erroneous or distorted information about a given problem. This information is all transmitted and further confused by the process of information exchange, and by the time a problem had been discussed in a week's conversations, it is virtually impossible to sort out factual information from rumor and exaggeration. Consequently, an external problem is recognized much less efficiently by the community than is an internal one.

Tiogans were faced with just such an external problem when, at the beginning of the school year previous to my stay there, the school board announced that the seventh and eighth grade children of the community would be bussed to other schools in the county and that the school would operate for only the first six grades with two teachers, instead of the previous eight grades with four teachers. After six weeks of classes, the teacher of the upper three grades failed to appear to teach his classes. Nothing was heard from the school board until two weeks later, when it was announced that these children would also be bussed to other schools outside Tioga. It is an indication of the extent of Tiogans' fear of dealing with the outside, that during these two weeks no one would contact the school
board for an explanation of the missing teacher, or of what was to be done with the children missing classes. Even eight months later, when I spoke with residents about the incident, there was no clear understanding of exactly what had happened and accounts of different informants varied widely. There was much complaining about the situation, but when I questioned informants as to why the school board was not contacted, the response was without exception that it "would have done no good."

2) **Individual Decision that a Certain Action Must be Taken:** As is the case with internal problems, the community will not begin to move toward collective action until an individual resident perceives the situation as intolerable and proposes that a specific action be taken. Since the problem involves contact with an outside power, however, this means that the resident must be sufficiently upset to overcome his fear of such outside contact. Consequently, the community will put up with this type of problem much longer before taking any kind of action than it would put up with an internal problem.

In the case of the school stoppage, the decision that action had to be taken came from the mother of eight children, six of whom were school age, and a member of the active core. (She is the sister of the man who initiated action on the water system, and shares his volatile temperament.) After the school board decision to bus the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade children to another school, she had children attending four different schools. Some
of these had to arise at 6:15 in the morning in order to
get to classes which began at 9:00, and some did not return
from the school day until 5:30 in the evening. "Well
buddy, I seen that as more as a natural woman could bear,"
she told me, "so I figured we had to 'tention 'em. We had
to do somethin';, and I didn't see nobody else doin' it, so
I started a paper 'round..." With her brother's aid, she
drew up the petition protesting the school situation which
was eventually presented to the superintendent of schools.

3) **Discussion of Proposed Action:** In the case of an
external situation, a suggested action receives a great deal
more open and strong criticism than does a proposal for
action on an internal problem. By the time any action is
suggested, the feeling that it "will do no good" has be-
come widespread. Many members of the community will refuse
to be connected with a plan that involves contact with an
outside power, fearing loss of welfare, higher taxes, or the
possibility of "being jumped on." Others ridicule such a plan
as foolhardy or dangerous, and at best doomed to be a waste
of effort. Clearly it is much more difficult to gain the kind
of community-wide support which is found in the case of
collective action on internal problems. The beginnings of
community action on many problems die at this stage of the
decision-action process, and these problems become as facts
of existence in Tioga.

The proposal of a petition to the school board initially
met with acceptance only by families with a large number of children who were directly affected by the school situation. Many residents, who are reluctant to sign anything at all, refused to be on record as publicly opposing the school board, and felt the situation should be handled "without raising a ruckus" but offered no alternative action. Others ridiculed the idea, saying that it would be impossible to gather "enough signatures," and that the superintendent would only laugh at the petition without even reading it. They joked that anyone who took such a petition to Summersville (the county seat) and presented it to the "educated men and fast talkers" there would end up making a fool of himself anyway. If it were not for the dogged persistence of the woman who drew up the petition, who was still cooking breakfast for her children at 6:15 every morning, the proposal probably would have died at this point.

4) Formation of a Coalition for Action: If they have not been totally squelched by the noncooperation and ridicule encountered during the course of discussion of a suggested action, the individuals in the community who support the action will decide to carry it out as well as they can unilaterally. Rarely, if ever, is an action on such an external problem participated in, or even supported by, most of the members of the community, as opposed to actions on internal problems, which have widespread participation and almost universal support. The supporters
of an action band together for moral support against the rest of the community. These supporters often drop out one by one, and in many cases what started out as an attempt at community action degenerates into the isolated action of the individual who suggested the action.

Supporters of the school petition were able to gather, as nearly as I can determine, between fifteen and twenty signatures. Although this constitutes a majority of the twenty-nine families with children in the Tioga school or involved in the bussing program, the representation was far from overwhelming, and opponents of the petition were quick to point this out. Three fathers of core families were decided upon to present the petition to the superintendent. Their agreement to do so was a highly significant gesture of support, for it meant not only that they had to overcome their fear of dealing with an outside official, but also that they had to subject themselves to the disapproval and ridicule of those who felt the plan was foolhardy. Their nervousness during the presentation is apparent in the fact each gives a different account of the encounter, and that no one knows exactly what became of the petition or whether the board ever took action on it. One of the men swears that the superintendent laughed in their face and threw the petition in a wastebasket. A second says that he "gave them the old runaround" and that they brought the petition back with them so that he wouldn't destroy it. The third has no
recollection at all of the petition, but can give a detailed description of the superintendent's physical appearance and mannerisms. It is doubtful that the school board ever saw the petition, and in any case they neither acted upon it nor acknowledged its submission.

5) Disappearance of the Coalition: For lack of general support, actions which are finally carried out to completion by an individual or a small group of supporters usually fail to alleviate the problem situation significantly. The coalition of supporters which formed to provide moral support against the rest of the community dissolves to the lines of normal friendship, and those who were affiliated to the others only through their support of the particular action return to their normal pattern of associations within the community. Other residents tend to blame the failure on the foolishness of the plan, rather than on any lack of participation; if the problem situation happens to become worse, many will blame this on the undertaking of such a foolish and dangerous action. Needless to say, many feelings are hurt as a result, and the animosities incurred as a result are sometimes longlasting.

As might have been expected, the presentation of the school petition failed to make any change in the school situation. Had there been more signatures or a more impressive show of community backing, some action might have been taken on it, but presented as it was, the superintendent
could easily ignore the petition if he chose to. There was considerable criticism of the project after the fact. Some felt the petition was poorly worded, and should have been stronger or milder. Others felt that the men who presented it must have done a bad job. When the school board announced in June without warning that the school would be discontinued altogether the following year, many interpreted this action as retribution by the board provoked by submission of the petition.
EFFECTS OF VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY
ON THE DECISION-ACTION PROCESS

As I have explained in more length in the introductory remarks, my primary role in Tioga, as well as my reason for being there, was that of a community organizer, not of an observer. My discussion of the decision-action process thus far has dealt with the process as it existed before the presence of my own activity in the community and of other volunteers like myself throughout the county. During the course of the summer I spent in Tioga, my work was directed largely at improving the effectiveness of this decision-action process, and in particular in enabling Tiogans to take significant collective action in response to pressures from an outside power, namely the school board. In discussing the effect my activity had on this process, I mention the major problems in the existing modes of decision and action, as I came to see them at the beginning of the summer, describe what it was I actually did in the community, and discuss the specific effects of both my presence in the community and my work there.

During the first several weeks of my stay in Tioga, I was, of course, highly interested in the ways in which the community took action as a unit, since this information would be invaluable to my work as a community action organizer. It was during this time that I gathered much
of the data upon which the foregoing presentation is based; and I began to see a number of weaknesses in the decision-action process which became increasingly clear when, during the course of the summer, I had to deal with them as problems interfering with effective action. They are as follows:

1) **Inefficiency of the sharing of information**: In the course of endless conversations described in the initial step of the decision-action process above, information often became hopelessly garbled. Each successive account of an event becomes slightly more dramatized and slightly more confused with prevalent rumors and the impressions of the speaker. In addition, the rate at which information travels in this manner is so slow that it is all but useless if the entire community needs to be notified of something in a limited time.

2) **Lack of consideration of alternative courses of action in response to a problem**: Community discussion centered almost solely around the strengths and weaknesses of the specific action suggested, with no attempt to formulate and evaluate alternatives to it.

3) **Lack of any feedback on the outcome of an action taken**: When the community completed an action, no attention was given to how it succeeded or failed, and consequently very little was learned which was useful in making the next decision.

4) **Lack of any confidence in the wisdom or strength of the community, and fear of encounters outside Tioga**: 
The interference of this fear with collective action has already been discussed.

5) **Lack of factual information:** Members of the community often did not know where, or were afraid, to find out such information as what their rights were under the law, the actions and appropriations of county bodies such as the school board or road commission, or even the names of the members of these bodies.

6) **Lack of perspective in viewing problems:** Tiogans had little awareness that other communities in the county and the state were experiencing many of the same problems, and had no awareness at all that their local problems were related to larger political concerns, such as basic inequities in the state tax structure resulting both in a disproportionate tax burden on them and in the lack of sufficient funds for public services.

My objective in working in Tioga was to lay the groundwork for future work by the county-wide Community Action Program (CAP), an agency established under the federal Economic Opportunity Act, and to establish a local Community Action group. My initial task was to overcome the community's cool distrust of strangers. "Every ethnographer, when he reaches the field, is faced immediately with accounting for himself before the people he proposes to learn to know." (Berreman 1962:5). Berreman's account of a community's initial hostility and suspicion
closely fits the situation I first encountered in Tioga. It was not until residents were satisfied that I was not in fact some odious undercover form of a welfare inspector or tax assessor that they would speak freely with me. I had good fortune to be taken in as a boarder by one of the families of the active core, and spent the first two weeks visiting every home in the community introducing myself as "staying for a while with the Canters." In the course of these visits, I learned that residents were upset at the closing of the Tioga school, and I seized upon the issue as an opportunity for convincing the community to call a meeting to talk the problem over. Although this first meeting was largely a fiasco, due to my misjudging who the community would naturally follow as its leader, and to the general reluctance of everyone to say anything as all when in a group, even a group of friends. "In meetings, no one wants to state his mind or offer a motion unless he is confident that such action represents the consensus of the group." (Weller 1965:46). Although I had resolved to take no active part in the meeting, I was obliged to lead it when the man I had gathered would be the most natural leader failed to appear. I ended by making an impassioned analysis of the plight of the Appalachian people and their hope in Community Action. Although I felt the statement was a disastrous failure at the time, I learned later that what I had said had impressed a number of those present. If nothing else,
the incident served to define my role in the community: my landlady, who had had some difficulty in explaining my work to curious relatives, described me henceforward as "a community action feller." The meetings continued, however, and the community gradually learned not only just what their rights were in dealing with the school board, but of similar problems with the school board suffered by outlying communities all over the county. Within a month, they had met with several of the school board members to discuss the problem, and by the end of the summer, were participating in county-wide meetings with other similar community action groups to organize to put pressure on this board to supply much needed services and facilities.

During the summer the establishment of community meetings with some degree of regularity served to rectify several of the shortcomings I had found in the decision-action process.

1) The sharing of information was greatly facilitated. Not only did residents learn new information first hand and with a minimum of distortion, but they learned it simultaneously, and often would move to act on it during the same meeting in which they heard it.

2) When gathered together, residents began to discuss various alternative courses of action before they decided to take one, weighing them against each other and combining the desirable aspect of several into the optimum plan.
3) The results of actions taken were now followed more closely, as reports of various actions would be made at the meeting following their implementation. The information thus gained was used in deciding the next action; Tiogans began to learn from their mistakes.

4) Confidence began to develop in the possibility that such a community action organization might be able to deal effectively with outside powers. Residents not only had the moral support of the other members of the group, and eventually of members of other similar groups across the county, but they could point to positive results of their actions and to their recognition by the school board as a power which must be dealt with.

5) As their confidence was built, residents took an increased interest in learning the facts of a matter before acting on it. They knew that the county CAP office would help them to find whatever information they needed, and they had met the members of the school board personally and would approach them for information.

6) Through their participation in the county-wide people's meetings which were organized during the summer, Tiogans learned of the problems of other communities in the county which were similar to their own. They came to know other concerned individuals from other communities, and discovered that many of the problems which they shared had the same cause in the county power structure and could be acted upon cooperatively. Although attempts
were made to familiarize Tiogans with the fact that many of their problems were shared by communities throughout Appalachia, and to introduce the concept of multi-county action, the period of three months was insufficient to provoke any significant interest on their part.

My hope was that the community action program which started in Tioga should be a self-sustaining entity, which would continue to function effectively after I left the community. To this end I tried to avoid taking any direct action for it, or exerting any direct influence over it. Rather, I sought to behave, as Goodenough puts it in his extensive work on community planning and development, "as a catalyst or helper in the change process." (Goodenough 1963:16). In practice, however, I often fell short of this goal, and many times it was merely my own presence in Tioga, as much as the community action program itself, which brought about the effects mentioned above. Much of my time was spent in simply relaying information, notifying residents of meetings or of the results of meetings they had missed. It is doubtful that this kind of information transfer could continue after I left the community. A large factor in the building of the community's confidence was my own presence as an outsider who didn't look down on Tiogans and apparently believed that what they wanted was right. This reinforcement was to have been replaced by the county CAP and the occurrence of county wide people's meetings when I left Tioga, but it is doubtful
that either of these could have the same effect of constant encouragement provided by my actually living in the community. At least some part of the community's increased ease in dealing with the outside was due both to the fact that they became used to me, an outsider, and to the fact that my presence occasioned the influx of an unusual number of non-hostile outsiders, namely various field support individuals and the other volunteers of the county. It is possible that the community's newfound ability to handle outside encounters will dwindle with the disappearance of these familiar and unthreatening outsiders.

At any rate, the basic fact remains that as a result of the initiation of a community action organization in Tioga, the community was able to mobilize and act successfully on the type of problem which, before the presence of such an organization, would not only have been insoluble to them, but which would probably have led to the rise of a number of prolonged internal animosities. Not only were Tiogans able to present their demands to the school board effectively and forcefully, but they also succeeded in convincing the board to rescind its decision and reopen the school. In addition, through the use of advertising and the pursuit of various contacts of members of the community, Tiogans were able to produce eight applications for a teaching post for which there had previously been none. In the process they gained not only
an increased confidence and self-respect, but an invaluable knowledge of the workings of the power structure which influences them directly.

In the interests of historical authenticity, it should be reported that most of the visible framework of the summer's community action organization disappeared after the departure of the volunteers from the county. During a visit to Tioga which I made six months after my work in the community, I found that community action meetings as such had ceased to exist. The director of the Community Action program in Summersville had apparently lost interest after the volunteers left their communities at the end of the summer, and there was no activity of a county-wide level. Tioga's school was in operation with six grades and two teachers, but the rumor was widespread that the school board planned to discontinue operation of the school altogether at the end of the current school year.

Several of the less visible effects of the summer's activity did remain, however. Tiogans had not forgotten what they had learned about the workings of the county government. They now knew the members of the school board and road commission, and hence had access to official information about the activities of both. In addition, they had not lost the confidence they had gained through dealing with forces outside their community. There was a new feeling of self-respect of which I had not been
aware during the summer, and in place of the widespread defeatism of the previous year there was now an attitude that the community was capable of dealing effectively with the outside power structure. Although meetings were not regularly held, a precedent had been set by the summer meetings. Women of the active groups had organized a group that met weekly to share homemaking and crafts ideas, and the channels for calling a community meeting if needed still existed.
SUMMARY

In order to respond as a whole to problems which face it, a community must have some process by which it decides upon and implements collective action. In many communities this decision-action process is carried out by a decision-making body recognized and accepted by members of the community. Such is the case in Yalcuc, where collective action is decided upon in a general assembly. Often when a community has no such recognized body, there exists no process of decision-making and action-taking, and the community is incapable of taking collective action against the problems which face it. This is true of Montegrano, where residents act in the interests of their own individual family to the exclusion of any community-wide action.

Although there existed no accepted decision-making body in Tioga at the time of this study, the community did follow a process of decision-making and action-taking which enabled it to mobilize and act collectively on problems which faced the community as a whole. This decision-action process consisted of five steps, and operated most efficiently when the community was faced with a purely internal problem. It began to break down, however, when the problem involved any sort of confrontation with the power structure outside the community.

In attempting to aid the community to organize itself
more effectively to act on problems involving external powers, I sought to modify this decision-action process in such a way as to increase the Tiogans' awareness of and participation in the workings of the county government with which they must deal. The net effect of the community action organizing which was successfully carried out seems to have been mainly in an increase of Tiogans' knowledge of the workings of the outside power structure, and an increase in their confidence in dealing with it.

The benefits of such community action programs are, it seems to me, unquestionable. Even if the specific short-range objective of the program is not obtained, the participants gain invaluable experience in working with one another, in evaluating a problem and examining alternative actions, and in dealing with the machinery of government. If communities such as Tioga are to move into the future as contributing members of society rather than as increasingly bitter and frustrated members of growing welfare roles, then they must be given the opportunity to take the significant part in deciding their own social and political affairs.
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