

CULTURAL DEMOCRACY™

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September 1982

TAIL WAGS DOG: THE FALLACY OF AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Editors' note: The following is the text of a speech delivered to several theater conferences in past months by Ruby Lerner, executive director of Alternate ROOTS (Regional Organization of Theatres - South).

Some of you may remember me; I used to be an expert. These days I have only questions where answers used to dwell. How I fell from grace so quickly, how I had to toss all my assumptions in the air and start all over, what made me have to confront all those uptown skills I'd spent four years building as a specialist in audience development -- all these have to do with the new job I took about a year ago.

As some of you may know, I became the Executive Director of Alternate ROOTS, a rather ameoboid coalition of small, professional, community-based performing arts organizations located all across the South, devoted to doing original work and work indigenous to the region. ROOTS is a group of theatres primarily concerned with reaching the 98% who don't go to "Theatre," and with building a kind of art that will be integral to people's daily lives.

I began to wonder if I knew anything that would be helpful to someone trying to build an audience in Whitesburg, KY, a town with a population of 1199 friendly people and 1 grouch, as a local sign proudly proclaims. I began to realize that my skills were not only pretty urban, designed to reach a mail-responsive type; but that much more crucially, those skills were part of a whole package of prescriptions for helping organizations grow in a very specific way.

It was clear that Roadside Theatre did not aspire to be the Manhattan Theatre Club of Whitesburg, KY. And it was pretty irrelevant whether package mailings pull better than brochures, or precancelled stamps better than bulk rate indicia. It was about that time that TCG's newsletter (the Theatre Communications Group) had the article by Michael Kustow observing that the American theatre doesn't have an audience -- it has *customers*.

And that is when the *BIG* questions began to trouble me. I want to share them with you, partly because I've been to too many marketing seminars where they don't

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D.C. UPDATE

NEA on 'LAAs'--Again

Since 1969, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has conducted a plethora of inquiries into the question of "community arts" support from the federal government. In the early days, the "community arts" question focused on the community-based cultural work that NAPNOC's members pursue as well as the question of Endowment support for "local arts agencies" -- arts councils and commissions. In the mid-70s, the debate shifted to the latter question exclusively. It has dragged on, unresolved, ever since.

It appears the NEA is about to take some action on what's now called the "local arts agency support question." At the August meeting of the National Council on the Arts (NCA), the presidentially-appointed advisory board to the NEA, Kate Moore of the Endowment's Office of Policy, Planning and Research (Moore was formerly special assistant to NEA Chair Frank Hodsoll) presented an "options paper" which outlined 5 approaches the NEA might take in support of "local arts agencies" (LAAs). Judging (continued on page four---)

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get asked and I've come away with sinking feelings; and partly because I hope some of you may be grappling with the same issues and have arrived at some answers....

Management techniques have gotten increasingly sophisticated. This has produced several problems. Let me first stress that I'm not talking about returning to the days of sloppy fiscal management, nonexistent record-keeping or lack of sophistication in utilizing a tool as powerful as direct mail.

But when does the tail start wagging the dog? There are now volumes on board development, capital fundraising campaigns, subscription campaigns. Techniques for successful art cannot, however, be imparted in 2-day seminars. As Micki Hobson observed in an excellent article she wrote for Theatre Crafts a few years ago, in this country we have prized organizational ability over the creative impulse -- prized and rewarded it. I fear we may be forgetting our mission, which is to serve the vision of the artist.

I repeat -- *serve*. I have sat in rooms filled with marketing directors who wished nothing kinder than death for their erratic artistic directors, contempt emanating from their pores. Now, nowhere is it written that it is the role of the artistic director to make our lives easy. I have also heard one marketing director rather casually toss off the following: *"So, I said to my artistic director, we have 3 choices for December: we can do A Christmas Carol or we can do A Christmas Carol or we can do A Christmas Carol."*

Everybody at the conference thought that was very funny. I was ready to run out of the room. I've got nothing against A Christmas Carol, but the thought of a marketing director programming a season really disturbs me. Because it doesn't take a genius to tell you what will sell. But if you cannot support the artistic vision or if you feel you cannot sell it, leave. If you think you could program a better season, apply for the job or leave and start your own theatre.

The larger problem that has come about as a result of increased management sophistication is that very basic questions often become obscured, like : Are the style and methods of support for the vision consonant with the vision itself?

By *style* I mean internal management structure of the organization. Structure is power. For instance, the business model is the only widely publicized and extolled management model. Everywhere there are people who can help you fit into that model. But what are you supposed to do if you're a 1- or 2-person operation? What if, maybe -- God forbid -- you don't want to fit into that mold; if you have no aspirations to have a marketing person with 13 assistants, a development person, etc.? Is the business model the best? Is it the best for you? Is it the only? Where do you look for other models? Where, for instance, would you go to get a workshop in

collective decision-making?

Is one of the reasons we don't have other models because we have not been able yet to redefine success and failure with regard to alternative models? Is survival, the sheer act of continuing, success? The business model, it seems to me, is successful at self-perpetuation. But are alternative models perhaps more responsive to organization as organism, to a process of birth, growth -- and even death? Isn't there an assumption that as you *grow up* institutionally, you will adopt a more authoritarian mode of operation? I would hope that we will see a multiplicity of management styles evolving and that in this room today are some of the new models.

What intrigues me about the business model is that at least some enlightened businesses are now looking to new models which are less rigidly hierarchical, more participatory. Now, they're not doing that out of corporate magnanimity, but out of self-interest because worker productivity has sunk to new lows. Wouldn't be ironic if in the arts we've bought into a model that our mentors have discovered is obsolete?

What worries me further is that we may have bought into that model to make ourselves attractive to the corporate community. "Hey, look, we're just like you -- why don't you give us lots of money?" (Of course, I should add I'm very skeptical of corporate support for those of us doing anti-corporate art.) We've adopted the business model so successfully that we've reduced ourselves to economic impact studies. I heard Hugh Southern (now Deputy Chair of the NEA) say, "Look folks, the arts are subversive; they tell us what we don't want to hear." I don't think the goals of art are the same as those of business, and I'm concerned about the impact on the art itself of appealing so strongly to that community. Will we have corporate art for Corporate America?

In theatre, it distresses me that the so-called regional theatres aren't, for the most part, the least bit regional. All around the country they have virtually interchangeable seasons -- very convenient for a society of corporate nomads. What you would have seen at the Guthrie you can catch at the Indiana Rep if you happen to get transferred.

Now, you are probably wondering what the hell all this has to do with building an audience or direct mail. Well, one of the problems is that we've been encouraged to think about direct mail and building audiences out of context. And you need a context to decide if bigger is necessarily better, and to decide if there is an optimum size audience for the kind of work you want to do. If you determine that growth is desirable, how do you determine the most sensible way to plan for that growth?

An image that was useful to me in thinking about how to build an audience is the idea of concentric circles, with the inner circle being the known -- the current supporters -- moving out through potential users to the ardent non-user. Direct mail (continued on page three--)

TAIL WAGS DOG

(continued from page two---)

and marketing in general are brilliant at helping to identify and target the most likely prospects (or suspects) in an effort to minimize expenses and maximize resources. But what happens as you begin to move beyond the inner circles?

Take an example: The Manhattan Theatre Club's 77-78 season. We almost doubled our audience with our subscription campaign. Great, right? Wrong. The administrative nightmares were not to be believed. I was on the phone from the minute I walked in the door 'til I went home trembling--talking to people who were furious, long-time supporters who felt betrayed and duped. But we hadn't changed a thing! The system that had people up in arms was the same one we'd always had. But the fact was that what worked for 1700 subscribers was totally unwieldy for 3000.

We had not prepared them for our growth. We hadn't prepared them because we hadn't prepared ourselves. So we sent out questionnaires to subscribers along with a cover letter that said, in essence, "We screwed up, we weren't ready; if you can just hang on, with help and suggestions from you we'll try to do better." This was the truth. And that is a very important point. *Be honest with the audience.* Every time we were in "trouble" we went to the audience.

We revamped the offer -- the system -- cleaned up the act administratively. The 77-78 season was, fortunately, artistically fabulous. But the next season, while solid in terms of the subscription season, was unexciting artistically. Except for a volatile play we did in our second series in the spring -- Losing Time with Jane Alexander and Shirley Knight. Cardiac arrest nightly. Honest. People were furious.

We opened the Mainstage series with it the following season. At long last, we'd gotten it together administratively, but the artistic woes were now beginning. How could we do such trash? Maybe we should move the theatre to 42nd Street. How could we not only do it once, but twice? More letters, phone calls, cancellations of subscriptions.

I can't help but wonder if a few years earlier that play would have been viewed as an interesting failure. Had we reached out to embrace an audience that wasn't really our audience, one that expected to get Ain't Misbehavin' every time? Had we, in our desire for growth, misled people? It comes down to this question: How can you communicate your vision to the audience -- and how can you know whether that vision is shared? How can you best use your successes (of course, you shouldn't hide or deny them) and at the same time prepare the audience for the failures, prepare them to take risks along with you, some of which will not pan out?

Of course there will be constant interplay, and it can be productive. I don't mean to suggest that "art" happens in a vacuum, nor do I think artists should be

oblivious to audience concerns or self-righteous about their art. But maintaining equilibrium in the face of massive audience criticism is extremely difficult. So these are the questions: Is the vision shared by the audience? How is the vision shaped by them? When is this good? How do you know when it isn't?

I have been guilty of contempt for the audience and have seen this in other artists and administrators too. I think this has been due in large part to the homogenized audiences that our subscription successes have built. If you can be successful at it, subscription is the easiest. But the emphasis on subscription has relieved us of the responsibility to create drama in our audiences, to encourage in the audience a conflict of values, one which is resolved by the shared act of participation in the event. Once, at the Manhattan Theatre Club, one of our long-time patrons (a contributor, a 3-piece-suited older lawyer) came up to me at the intermission and asked "Whatever happened to the young people in blue jeans I used to see in the audience? I miss them."

How do we create this audience mix? How do we reach those outer circles? I say beg, borrow and steal what works. Get good at marketing techniques; the point of that is to spend as little on reaching those inner circles as possible. But remember marketing is only one tool, one technique, and that we must look elsewhere for complementary techniques to reach new audiences.

As a for instance, I've been considering some of the principles and techniques of community organizing, one of which is just "hanging out." If you want more students in your audience, go hang out at student unions around town for a few weeks, go locate strategic people in that community, ask them for advice, enlist their support. Now, I'm not naive; I realize this would mean a lot of new work. But it's work I think we've not done and must do if we are interested in redefining our relationship with the audience.

Editors' note: Ruby's talk is aimed at an audience of more conventional theater people, and she tells us it has been very well-received. It's interesting to note that the idea of theater goes as "customers" is beginning to wear a little thin even with these champions of the "audience development" fad. We would be interested in running other members' articles on this major theme of the relationship between artist or arts organization and audience; if you have thoughts, please write us.

If you'd like to get in touch with Ruby, she can be contacted at Alternate ROOTS, c/o Nexus, 360 Fortune St. NE, Atlanta, GA 30312 or call 414/577-1079. ROOTS' bi-ennial performance festival -- its third, is coming up on October 3-10.

THERE'S STILL TIME TO REGISTER FOR NAPNOC'S 6TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND MEMBERS' MEETING. SEE PAGES 5 AND 6 FOR INFORMATION. REGISTER TODAY!

D.C. UPDATE: NEA on LAAs
(continued from page one---)

from the remarks Hodsoll has made at several recent meetings with state arts agency (SAA) and LAA representatives and the tenor of the NCA meeting, the NEA is likely to embark on a test of 3 of these options -- but s-l-o-w-l-y.

Briefly, the options are as follows:

(1) Maintain the status quo At present, there is no funding program specifically designed for LAAs. An earlier version of Moore's paper estimated, however, that LAAs receive somewhere between 1 and 2.4% of NEA funds through its discipline grants programs ("Theatre," "Visual Arts," etc.). Though Nan Levinson was assigned to serve as a community arts agency liaison person in the Office of Partnership last year, this position has been vacant since her resignation this past spring.

(2) "Program enhancement" for LAAs This means that the NEA would "encourage (regular NEA discipline) Programs to become more open to applications from LAAs." Though NEA planners claim this would "ensure that LAAs receive focused and welcoming attention" in programs where they are already technically eligible to receive grants and "perhaps expand the categories where LAAs might be eligible," no specific implementation measures have so far been discussed. The inherent problems in such an approach are noted: Planners point out that this "(r)isks resistance of Endowment programs already pressed by fiscal restraints." It also raises an old complaint: LAAs will compete for grants funds with producing arts groups in their own constituencies.

(3) Taking the "CityArts" approach This would mean following the model established by the Expansion Arts Program by routing money directly to LAAs. But NEA discussion papers do not say whether these funds would be offered for the purpose of re-granting them to neighborhood arts groups, as City Arts funds have been. One statement made in a May planning document implies that existing NEA grantees (rather than smaller community-based groups that don't receive money directly from the Endowment) would be the main recipients of these devolved federal grant funds: it notes that a potential obstacle would be "convincing Program constituencies that they could be better served through the LAAs" than directly through NEA programs. In plain talk, this means shifting some of the NEA's grant application load off on the LAAs.

(4) Routing money for LAAs through SAAs by competitive application This approach is reminiscent of the old "Community Development" program at NEA and is more popular with many SAAs than direct devolution of funds and decision-making authority from the federal government to LAAs. States would be required to consult local agencies in preparing their plans. Proponents of this alternative tout its "national approach" in contrast to the spottier, city-by-city trials of the 3rd option (though grants would be awarded on a competitive basis to only some of the states which apply). NEA bu-

reaucrats who fear opening the "floodgates" to hundreds of LAAs see this as a way of routing small and middle-sized local agencies to their states rather than dealing with them directly. Endowment planners note that this alternative might open the NEA to criticism from states that resent federal decision-makers making "qualitative judgments" about how they manage their relations with local agencies.

(5) A "State/Local Challenge" or "Incentive" program This is, simply, a combination of options 3 and 4 with the addition of the magic words ("newly-appropriated/raised local government/private sector dollars") and the magic formula (3 "state/local/private dollars" to every federal one) so popular in today's Endowment. Hodsoll seems fascinated by the "leveraging" capability of the Challenge Grant (in which the grantee is required to raise a number of non-federal dollars for each dollar NEA grants). He has promised to look into opening this program to SAAs and LAAs regardless of the outcome of the "LAA funding question." Besides Hodsoll's enthusiasm there's also Congressional pressure: active lobbying by the National Assembly of Community Arts Agencies resulted in a Congressional directive in the NEA's 1980 Re-authorization Bill to extend Challenge funding to community arts agencies.

Hodsoll went on record at the NACAA (now called NALAA -- "Local" instead of "Community") meeting in June as favoring a test program which would try out the last three of the above options. This sentiment has been echoed by Hodsoll at other meetings over the past few months. While the discussion at the last NCA meeting was inconclusive and drew some opposition from the likes of Theodore Bikel (his last meeting as a Council member) -- who once again warned that LAA support threatens the quality of art in the U.S. (see issue #6 for more of Bikel's anti-local feelings) -- it seems that the Chair's favored course will be approved at the next National Council meeting in November.

In general, this course would have some of the larger LAAs applying directly to the NEA for funds, satisfying the feeling of many such agencies that their SAAs would not sub-grant them large enough sums; smaller LAAs would apply to their state agencies for funds granted them by the NEA. The first year of the program -- Fiscal Year 1984 -- would see the aggregate figure for LAA support programs at \$1 million, assuming the overall NEA budget was set at \$100.8 million; Kate Moore's NCA paper said "At higher (NEA budget) levels, \$2 million would be so allocated."

According to the timeline presented for the "Local Initiatives" challenge grant program, guidelines will be reviewed by the Council at its November 5-7 meeting and distributed in December. There will be a panel review of preliminary proposals in June, 1983, with selected proposals fleshed out into final application for a second panel review that September. Grants would be announced in December of 1983 for projects to commence in July, 1984.

So don't hold your breath. It will be 1984 before these programs show any results.
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PRELIMINARY AGENDA

"PRACTICING CULTURAL DEMOCRACY: ARTISTS AT WORK IN COMMUNITIES"

NAPNOC's 6th ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND MEETING

Milo Bail Student Center
University of Nebraska at Omaha

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 15, 1982

- 11:00 AM - Registration, coffee, perusing literature tables
- 1:00 PM - 1:25 PM Opening Remarks: Welcome from President Philip Arnoult, Doug Paterson (on behalf of UNO); Conference logistics from Co-Directors Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard
- 1:30 PM - 2:45 PM Keynote Session: Practicing Cultural Democracy: Cultural Work as Organizing. Featuring John O'Neal of the Free Southern Theatre, New Orleans, LA; Phyllis Jane Rose of At The Foot of The Mountain, Minneapolis, MN; and others to be announced
- 3:00 - 4:30 PM Community Arts Work and The Movement for Cultural Democracy in Great Britain, featuring Andrew Duncan of the Free Form Arts Trust, Ltd, London, England (tentative session -- to be confirmed)
- 4:40 - 6:00 PM Continuing The National Brainstorm: an open discussion taking off from the results of the First National Brainstorm on support for progressive arts work. Copies of the Brainstorm results will be available before the discussion.
- "The Self Employed Artist - First Rights or Last Rites?" Aleane Carter, a solo performer from Omaha will share her knowledge and expertise concerning self-production and promotion with novices and other experienced solo artists.
- 8:00 PM This time will be available for additional workshops and discussions, for participants to gather into small groups by discipline, and for participants to have dinner. A list of restaurants will be available.
- 8:00 PM John O'Neal will perform his one-man show: Don't Start Me To Talking or I'll Tell Everything I Know: Sayings from The Life and Writings of Junebug Jabbo Jones. The performance will be followed by a party for Conference participants.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16, 1982

- 8:30 AM - Registration, coffee and simple breakfast available
- 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM Reclaiming Our Stories, featuring Fred Whitehead of Midwest Distributors and Quindaro magazine, Kansas City, KS; John Pitman Weber of the Chicago Mural Group; Aleane Carter of Omaha, NE; and Doug Paterson of the Dakota Theatre Caravan.
- UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies: A Report and Discussion of Policy Issues; featuring a presentation by Dave Forsythe of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, who attended the Confence in Mexico City this summer.
- 10:45 AM - 12:15PM Rural America and Cultural Democracy, featuring Bill Pratt, Montana Arts Council; Katharine Pearson, Appalshop, Whitesburg, KY; and Larsen, Rural Arts Services, Mendocino, CA.
- An Approach to the Working Class: A New Assessment, a workshop/discussion featuring John Crawford of West End Press, Minneapolis, MN and Fred Whitehead of Quindaro, partners in Midwest Distributors.

Name	Organization Name (if any)		
Mailing Address	City	State	Zip
Contact Phone			

I want to register for the Conference. Check one: NAPNOC member \$20
(for information, phone NAPNOC at 301/323-5006) non-member \$30

PLEASE ENCLOSE CHECK OR MONEY ORDER
PAYABLE TO NAPNOC.

I wish to become a member
and register \$45
 UNO student \$15

Please complete this side and the reverse and mail before October 8 to Doug Paterson, Dramatic Arts Department, University of Nebraska, Omaha, NE 68132. After October 8, please register in person at the Conference.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16, 1982 (continued)

- 12:15 PM - 1:30 PM Sack Lunch provided for Conference participants
- 12:45 PM - 1:30 PM Rosa Parks and The Montgomery, Alabama Bus Boycott, a one-woman show by Aleane Carter of Omaha, NE
- 1:45 PM - 3:15 PM Dilemmas of Distribution, featuring Philip Arnoult, Baltimore Theatre Project; John Crawford, Midwest Distributors and others to be announced.

Form and Style in Community Arts Work, featuring Mike Mosher, muralist, San Francisco, CA; Martha Boesing, At The Foot of The Mountain, Minneapolis, MN; and Liz Lerman, The Dance Exchange, Washington, DC.
- 3:25 PM - 5:00 PM A Movement of Ideas: Networking, Analysis and Criticism, featuring Arlene Goldbard, Cultural Democracy; David Olson, Theaterwork; Tim Drescher, Community Murals Magazine and others to be announced
- 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM This time will be available for additional workshops and discussions, for participants to gather into small groups by discipline, and for participants to have dinner. A list of restaurants will be available.
- 8:00 PM - 8:45 PM The Gathering: Thoughts of Harvest, Acts of Planting, a showing of this film on the seminal meeting/festival held in Saint Peter, MN in August 1981; introduced by Bob Foucault of Blue Heron Productions
- 8:45 PM - 9:30 PM Closing Session: A panel on the future of the movement for cultural democracy featuring David Olson, Cherry Creek, St. Peter, MN; Arlene Goldbard, NAPNOC Co-Director; John O'Neal, Free Southern Theatre, New Orleans, LA; and others to be announced.
- 9:30 PM - Reception for Conference participants

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 17, 1982

ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING AND ELECTIONS

Only NAPNOC members may participate in this meeting though others are permitted to attend and observe.

- 9:00 AM - Registration; a simple brunch will be available throughout the meeting
- 9:30 AM - Meeting, called to order by President Philip Arnoult
A complete agenda will be available at conference registration; for items to be discussed, see memo to NAPNOC members of September 17, 1982.
- 12:30 PM Scheduled adjournment of members' meeting
- 12:40 PM Board of Directors convenes to elect officers and take action on new business
- 1:40 PM Scheduled adjournment for Board of Directors meeting

Additional sessions may be added to this agenda before the Conference.

An audio-visual room equipped with 35mm slide projector and screen and video playback equipment will be open throughout the Conference; members can sign up to show their materials.

A literature table will be set up in the coffee/gathering room through the Conference; you can bring copies of papers or publications with you for distribution to other participants. If you can't attend the Conference and want to distribute material send it c/o Doug Paterson at the address on the blank at the bottom of this page. We can't copy papers, so send along as many copies as you would like to distribute.

 Please send me a list of motels in the Conference area.

 I would like to be put up in someone's house.
Special needs? _____

 I am driving to Omaha and can share the ride with others.

 I would like a ride to the Conference is there's a carpool in my area.

Additional information: _____

D.C. UPDATE: NEA on LAAs
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Moreover, if current attitudes at the NEA prevail, these LAA-administered programs are likely to amount to little more than mini-NEAs -- biases and all.

Federal biases were sketched in quite clearly in Chairman Hodsoll's June address to NALAA: "The development of the American 'culture' we know today began with Europeans who settled our eastern shores and then began to move westward -- looking for new elbow space and new challenges -- mainly because the space was there and unknown. We have always been a nation of people going somewhere else."

Did anyone seek new elbow space in the ribs of the NEA Chair to remind him that we have always been a nation of people who came from every corner of the globe (including those who were here centuries before those European settlers)?

DA & AG

Sign of The Times

Cultural Democracy readers will have noted in the above article the change in NACAA's identity. The National Assembly of Community Arts Agencies is now an assembly of Local agencies and its new acronym is NALAA. (The organization's work hasn't changed since our description in issue #3, just the name.)

Part of the name change is explained by the fact that all the funding schemes described above partake of the *local* rubric. NALAA director Gretchen Wiest explained the rest to NALAA members in a recent issue of their Connection Quarterly: "*Wrong-minded as it may be, 'community arts' is synonymous with 'amateurs,' 'unprofessional,' and 'low quality' in the minds of many whose support and goodwill you need in order to survive in these difficult and highly competitive times.*"

Community-based cultural workers who have avoided the "community arts" rubric in order to distinguish their work from that of "community arts agencies" can now relax a bit. Might as well be hanged for a sheep as a goat.

No News Is...No News

Incredibly, Congress has taken the question of federal cultural budgets not one step further since our "D.C. UPDATE" in issue #23. Two committee meetings have been scheduled to "mark up" (arrive at actual spending recommendations) the spending bill for the Endowments, but each was cancelled. Whether the House or Senate figures for the two agencies (\$100.875 or \$143.04 million for NEA, \$96 or \$130.56 million for NEH) will prevail as the final appropriation -- or if some other compromise will be arrived at -- remains totally up in the air.

The Congressional Arts Caucus reports that a committee mark up is possible later in September. But a budget bill is not likely to emerge from the Congress before Fiscal Year 1983 begins on October 1. So a continuing resolution will be necessary for

the Endowments -- and most of the rest of the federal government as well. Congress is likely to adjourn early in October (to allow members to campaign for re-election fulltime) leaving the business of government to a predicted lame-duck session after the November elections.

Though the grants budgets of the Endowments were not included, the supplementary appropriations bill that Reagan unsuccessfully vetoed in September contained some arts-related monies: administrative funds for the Endowments' move to the Old Post Office Building on Pennsylvania Avenue this fall, as well as a direct appropriation of \$9 million and a loan of nearly that amount to finance the reconstruction of Wolf Trap, the outdoor concert facility in Washington's suburbs administered in part by the National Parks Service.

Queen of The Arts

The First Lady is "stepping out," in the words of an aide quoted in the Washington Post; she's feeling more sure of herself in the affairs of the nation's capital, they say. How can we know? By her acceptance of the honorary chair of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities (see issue #23). Though it is not expected that she will take the active role played by Joan Mondale in the Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities in the Carter administration, she will be attending Committee meetings. The first is slated for Washington on September 21.

Nancy Reagan is joined by another new Committee member whose interests and views were apparently not adequately represented by any of the other corporate and major cultural institution types previously named: he's Roger Stevens, first NEA Chair and current head of the Kennedy Center.

The State Throws Its Weight Around

KENYAN POPULAR THEATER SUPPRESSED

Readers will remember the Third World Popular Theatre Network and the related liberating education movement discussed in Cultural Democracy #22 ("Popular Culture & Education"). NAPNOC member Ross Kidd has written us about a Kenyan popular theater that has been unusually successful -- and because of its success, brutally suppressed.

The complete story of the Kaririithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre will appear in an article by Ross in the upcoming issue of Theaterwork, available for \$9 per year from Cherry Creek, 406 S. Third St., Saint Peter, MN 56082 (and must reading). Here are a few highlights:

The Centre was built by the people of Kamiriithu, a village of 10,000 in a rural area about 20 miles from Nairobi. According to Kidd, Kamiriithu is typical of the "rural slums" the Kenyan economic and political situation has produced: unemployment is very high, wages very low, most people have lost their land and the village itself is without basic services of water, healthcare, (continued on page eight---)

KENYAN POPULAR THEATER

(continued from page seven---)

sanitation, and so on. Though Kenya officially became independent in 1963, in practical terms this has simply meant a change of shift in bosses for the poor, and not an end to conditions of extreme exploitation, poverty and repression.

In the mid-'70s, an alliance of peasants and workers on the one hand and progressive intellectuals on the other came into being. Two men who'd worked at the University of Nairobi became involved. Ngugi wa Thiong'o is a playwright and a leader in the movement for the development of Kenyan culture and against the domination of European culture, which holds sway in official cultural institutions. Ngugi wa Mirii is an adult educator committed to the liberating education practice described in issue #22. While "the two Ngugis" have been powerful catalysts for Kamiriithu, the project has belonged to the villagers and not individual leaders.

Kamiriithu began as an adult literacy program and immediately had startling success, attributed to the fact that the curriculum and structure of the program was from the first determined by participants. Dramatic skits were one activity, and from them evolved the idea of creating a play. Over some months, community members created a script, held readings and discussions, and altered the text to suit what they'd learned. The play, Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want) takes the history of the local people as its subject and utilizes many songs from the liberation struggles of the '50s, resurrected by a community-memory process. Equally important, the play was written in Gikuyu, the dominant spoken language, rather than English, the language of the elitist National Theatre.

The whole village was engaged in this process of culture-building. Together, they decided to build a large open air theater to house these and future performances; it would adjoin the Community Centre. After 7 weeks of full houses, Ngaahika Ndeenda was banned. Two months of heated protest followed, then Ngugi wa Thiong'o was "detained" by the government which hoped the loss of this key figure would destroy the Centre. (Both Ngugis subsequently lost their University jobs and have no hope of regaining them.)

While Kamiriithu was organized enough to survive this repression -- in fact, enrollment in literacy programs tripled -- Kidd's

assessment is that the greatest effect was on other communities where cultural and educational organizing had just begun. He says "They gave up out of fear."

After a special amnesty for political prisoners, Ngugi wa Thiong'o returned to the village to help work on a second play about Kenya's apartheid-like colonial laws of the 19th century. 400 people auditioned for 50 parts. The play was to be performed at the National Theatre, but was barred at the last moment; instead it ran for 10 nights to houses of over 1000 at the University before government pressure forced it to close. In quick succession the Centre's license was revoked, its governing committees dismissed, the theater and other programs evicted. A police squad smashed the open air theater.

Kidd points out that the principal lessons to be learned from Kamiriithu are not to be derived from its suppression, but from the exceptional success that prompted it: "In other popular theatre experiences in Africa the problem has always been: what happens next? An individual performance may spark a lot of discussion, participation and critical insight, but once it's over there is no organizational vehicle to take it further. People's consciousness may have been raised, but without an organizational base for follow-up action all the interest and momentum stops at the end of the performance. In Kamiriithu the creation of an organization has made it possible to make drama an organic part of an on-going movement...."

"Of course this kind of work doesn't go on with a reaction from the dominant class. ... (a) theatre which is rooted in and organized by the peasantry is more threatening. It isn't just the play and the exposure of corruption.... What worries the ruling class is the organization and the organizational capacity which lies behind the play.... What if this organizational power begins to challenge the roots of the neo-colonial structure?"

At the last word from Ross we learned that Ngugi wa Mirii has been forced to leave Kenya. Read Ross Kidd's article in Theaterwork for a fascinating analysis of this situation.

DA/AG

IT'S NOT TOO LATE! Register now and join us in Omaha for NAPNOC's 6th Annual Meeting...see pages 5 and 6 for details.

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