THE WAY BY MILLIAM CHOCK

Address by William H. Crook, Director of the Southwest Regional Office of Economic Opportunity, at the War on Poverty and Migrant Labor Conference, McAllen, Texas, November 27, 1965

It is the policy to eliminate the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty in this nation by opening to everyone the opportunity for education and training - the opportunity to work, and opportunity to live in decency and dignity.

What I have just quoted to you could be a statement of purpose by the AFL-CIO. It could be the theme song of LULAC; it could be the rallying point of the GI Forum; it could also be the major concern of PASO, and it is! Obviously the exact words and phrases of this quotation belong to the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. But the theme, the message, if you please, belongs to the AFL-CIO, PASO, LULAC, and the GI Forum. For more than 70 years organized labor has fought the problems of poverty and much good has been done. From the early New Deal days and to the mid-1950's substantial progress was made in lifting the incomes of our neediest families, and this progress was not accidental. New Deal social and economic programs like minimum wages and fair labor standards, social insurance and welfare aids for the aged, unemployed and indigent were purposely designed to help the neediest. And labor played a major role in these reforms. Then the impact of the war in generating full employment further speeded inroads on poverty.

For many years Latin-Americans have looked up to LULAC, one of the oldest non-political Mexican-American organizations in the U. S. LULACs, too, have done a good job. LULACs believe in democratic principles of individual political and religious freedom, in the right of equality of economic opportunity; LULACs have labored toward the development of an American society wherein the cultural resources and integrity of every individual and group constitute basic assets of the American way of life. They have successfully and actively promoted suitable measures for the attainment of the highest ideals of the American society. In fact, the concept of the Head-Start program for which the Office of Economic Opportunity is responsible, was precluded in history by the "Little School of Four Hundred." This school was founded by the late Mr. Felix Tijarina, who rose from grass roots to be a successful business man and a leader in LULAC.

The Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations, or PASO as we know it, is also concerned and has been concerned with the

plight of the poor of our country. When it comes to such matters as wages, decent streets, playgrounds, education and opportunity, PASO sees that the Mexican-American is not a forgotten man.

The GI Forum, characterized by young leadership, vigorous leadership, has fought poverty throughout the southwestern part of the United The Forum has taken part in Civil Rights cases, school segrega-States. tion issues, and acts of employment discrimination. It has done an outstanding job in developing leadership among American citizens of Mexican descent, and has attempted to solve the many social, economic and political problems that affect all citizens generally, and particularly Mexican-I had the pleasure to meet Dr. Hector Garcia, founder of the Americans. GI Forum, on a recent trip I made to Corpus Christi, Texas. encouraging to me to see the role that this distinguished man is playing in the Corpus Christi Community Action Program. Thus, in some way or another the GI Forum, LULACS, PASO, and the AFL-CIO have all been interested in the problems of those in poverty -- whether from a particular ethnic group, whether from the laboring class of our country, whether

from a particular geographic area of our country -- they all have been concerned with the problems of poverty.

All of these efforts to combat poverty on the part of all of the groups represented here today have been successful in their own right; however, it is now our task to combine these resources into one major attack. The big war is at hand! The War I am speaking of, of course, is the War on Poverty. The major tool with which we plan to fight this war on poverty is the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. I believe, and I know you believe, that this is a program which if effectively and energetically carried forward will end in the final elimination of poverty from the United States. There are those who say that the poor will always be with us. President Johnson does not believe it, I know that the members of Congress do not believe it, I do not believe it, and I know that you do not believe it. This country with its enormous productivity, its advanced technology, the mobility of its people, and the speed of its communications has both the resources and the know-how to eliminate poverty. Furthermore, we as a nation now have a far greater understanding of the complex causes

of poverty -- what makes people poor and what keeps them that way, too often from generation to generation. From your efforts along these lines I realize that you, too, must know the problems of poverty and see the need for an attack in which every sector of our society must join. This is a war in which business, labor, voluntary organizations, and all levels of Government must join together to fight a common enemy -- Poverty.

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 is a new program, not new in ideas, perhaps, but new in the sweep of its attack, and new in the specific programs it recommends. This is a prudent program; it insures a dollar's value for each dollar spent at the present. Of course, the final rewards should make the dollar value achieved far exceed the dollars spent. The present program is a comprehensive program; it attacks all the major causes of poverty, not just one or two of these causes. This is a focused program, focused on the pocr. Other programs of the Federal Government are concerned with education, health, employment and economic climate.

These programs are important, but too often the people at the very bottom

of the economic scale are missed. The least goes to the lowest. This program is directly concerned with the job of raising 35 million Americans out of a condition of poverty. It represents the concensus not of any one group, but of business and labor, of farmers and scholars, of interested private institutions and education private citizens that this job can be done. This is a new program, not because no one has tried to help the poor before, but because no one has tried to do it with a singleminded attention to the basic causes of poverty by enlisting all of our natural resources in the effort. It is new in the extent of its reliance on local leadership and initiative. It is new in the force of its thrust. The CAP program that it proposes calls upon local leadership and local initiative to formulate long-range comprehensive plans to eliminate poverty in each community. The Office of Economic Opportunity reviews these plans and helps to finance them; but the initiative to determine and execute plans, to call upon local and state resources and institutions to carry the plans forward, depends upon the will and the energy of each community. The present program is new in its emphasis on providing incentive to every sector of our society to join in the War on Poverty. It

creates a partnership between the Federal Government and the communities of this nation. It also creates a partnership with business and labor, farm groups and private institutions and organizations. All of them have a role in the fight against poverty. This Bill provides incentive for businesses to create new jobs, and to establish new enterprises to employ the long-term unemployed. It provides incentives for labor to use its resources in pension and trust funds to the same ends. vides incentives for farm groups to strengthen the pattern of family farming and to cooperate in drawing up plans to eliminate poverty in rural areas. It provides incentive for private institutions, hospitals, community centers, Y's and Four H Clubs and all the rest of our rich abundance of private organizations devoted to human welfare to join in community action plans and focus their efforts more effectively on the problems of those in poverty. It provides incentives and opportunities for dedicated citizens to volunteer as soldiers in the war against poverty. The Federal Government will recruit and train these volunteers but most of

them will work for local and private organizations. This is a new program also in its new emphasis upon youth. We want to give the young people a chance to escape from the cycle of poverty, to break out of the ruthless pattern of poor housing, poor homes, and poor education which condemns them to an unproductive life without adequate income. We want to give them a way out; we are doing this through the Job Corps which will take young men and women from crippling environments and put them in camps and centers where they will receive a blend of useful work, job training, and basic education. They are graduating from these camps and centers better able to earn a living and to play a useful role in society. are fighting this war on poverty through work study and work training programs which provide part-time jobs for hundreds of thousands of young men and women allowing them to finish their schooling and receive a substaining income while they learn the discipline of work. This new program is a completely voluntary program; no one is required to enter into any of its parts. It gives new opportunity to those who want to help themselves.

But the choice is theirs; it is not forced by the authoritarian discipline of the Federal Government, or of any Government. Every section of this program has been designed to give maximum help to those to whom this help will mean a real chance to escape from poverty. This program is a comprehensive program; it offers new opportunities and offers them immediately to millions of Americans -- to almost half a million young Americans who would enter the Job Corps and the Work Study and Work Training Program, to the farmers covered by the rural economic opportunity program, to the citizens of every community with the initiative to establish community action programs, to the long-term unemployed hired by those businesses assisted by this program. For these people, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 offers immediate hope to develop their skills and capacities, to get and hold jobs, to maintain their farms or small businesses. It is comprehensive because together with other programs already enacted it strikes at the basic ills which underlie long-term poverty in America. It strikes at lack of skills and the lack of basic knowledge; it attempts

to provide new motivation and a sense of direction to the young. The tax cut and the civil rights bills have provided new exits from poverty. The Poverty Program will give Americans now locked in poverty the chance to use those exits.

Separate sections of this bill are isolated measures each standing by itself; but they are designed to complement one another. They form a careful pattern in which different groups in the population are given the opportunity that best suits their needs. (Like any carefully constructed building, the destruction of one of its parts would jeopardize the entire project and deprive many of those in poverty of the chance to escape.) But most important of all concerning the poverty program is the fact that it is a program that will work! It represents the hope of our government that in the years to come the poverty program will be viewed as the starting place for an effort which brought new hope, new opportunity, and a new life to those of our fellow citizens who have not been able to share in the abundance of American society.

This War on Poverty is not going to be fought in the tradition of emotional crusade. As Willard Wirtz, Secretary of Labor, said, "The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 is a carefully worked out battle plan, based less on praising the Lord than on passing the ammunition."

There are some who say that the program is trying to go too far too fast. And others are saying that it offers too little too slowly.

And mistakes have been made. But there is total commitment here, no compromise with principle, and only the sensible adjustment to the pace at which principle can be advanced most rapidly can be accepted.

The object of the Economic Opportunity Act should be the object of all of us here today. This object is not to make poverty more endurable but to get rid of it!

I personally believe that one of the greatest achievements of the Poverty Program, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, is in the identification of a great social problem. The end is important -- the elimination of poverty -- and the means to this end are important as well, but the

mere identification of poverty is a great step forward. Too often the people of our nation have attempted to hide their guilt about the problems of poverty by seeking solace in the fact that this country is experiencing a period of expansion unprecedented in its history. We are now in the 58th consecutive month of economic expansion. That makes this expansion the longest, as well as the strongest, in the peace-time history of the Unemployment is still too high, but it is lower than it United States. has been any time in the past seven years. The labor force is larger than ever and wages are at a constantly high rising level. This is a remarkable record, and it didn't just happen. This record is a tribute to American industry and to free American labor with the Federal Government as a partner. It is a tribute to President Johnson that he was not content to let this overall prosperity serve as the index of our progress. He was acting in the spirit of another great President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who said, "The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who already have much, it is whether we do enough

for those who have too little." That's what the War on Poverty is all about -- doing enough for those who have too little.

The citizens of our country have not been allowed to forget that poverty exists in our country. And this, while at the same time experiencing the greatest economic growth of our history. In the short time since President Johnson declared War on Poverty the American people have come to know, to believe, to be concerned, and to be ready to serve in this war, this great crusade. The American people have come to learn that there are 35 million Americans, one fifth of this nation, living in poverty. There are over 8 million families living at an average income of 18 hundred dollars per year, less than 35 dollars per week. And most of these families are large. It is precisely because the country is so rich and getting richer every year that this degree and extent of poverty is thoroughly inexcusable. The condition of the poor, this social cancer, has to become everybody's concern. This, then, as I have already stated, is what I will consider to be the first great victory in the War against Poverty -- the mobilizing of America's conscience and heart.

The very fact that the GI Forum, LULAC, PASO, and the AFL-CIO are participating in this conference shows me that you all have a desire to cooperate with one another in this one great effort. All of your organizations have been structured on the concept of unity, the idea that "united we stand, divided we fall." I trust that the spirit of this meeting embodies this concept.

Parenthetically, I might add that I know of one recent incident of cooperation between two of the groups here. The American GI Forum and LULACs got together in New Mexico two weeks ago today. At this time your organizations agreed to come together and work up plans for a five-state, \$3.5 million proposal for Job Placement and Training Centers.

Gentlemen, I will be watching the progress of this proposal with much interest. This is the type of cooperation that is needed.

The poverty program will not be effective, its scope will be limited, if the support of the working man in the local communities is absent. The organization which represents the workers of America -- the

AFL-CIO -- has a major role to play in the poverty program. leaders have published a booklet called Labor's Role in the War on Poverty which outlines many areas of responsibility. Members of the AFL-CIO, and the affiliate locals have been challenged and directed to actively participate in all phases of the War on Poverty. I wholeheartedly endorse the points outlined in the book, and would like to emphasize particularly the directive which assigns an obligation to labor to work in active participation with the local communities, with other local agencies and interested parties, to eliminate local community poverty problems. Labor has always been, and will continue to be, concerned with the plight of the poor working man. It is my hope that labor will now branch off into concern for the poor unemployed area of our society. If employment is to rise and if the local community action committees are to be effective parts of this increase in employment, the unions must become even more involved. You have the tools; you have the knowledge; you have the organization; and you have the will.

To be more definitive of labor's role in the War on Poverty, let me tell you where I think you can be a big weapon against poverty. Job Corps Centers are releasing graduates from the training programs. The number of the graduates is increasing daily at an increasing rate. The Office of Economic Opportunity needs assistance in finding jobs for these once unskilled, now highly skilled, young men and women. think of no more strategic organization than the AFL-CIO to accept responsibility for the placement of these young people. Here is a chance for labor to help itself, to help poverty-founded youth, and to help the nation. The Regional Administrator of Job Corps in my office in Austin tells me that he has been in contact with several Texas AFL-CIO officials, Mr. Hank Brown and Mr. Roy Evans, to name two, with this problem. We are going to renew our efforts to solicit your help.

I might make brief mention of the Citizans' Crusade Against Poverty which was established by Mr. Walter Reuther and headed by Mr. Richard Boone, a former OEO official. The role of the Citizens' Crusade is vital to the

the most good is achieved for the least dollar. Some have dubbed this

Citizens' Crusade the "watchdog"; I prefer to view it as a conscience.

If constructive criticism is to come to the poverty program, local Citizens' Crusade organizations should serve the purpose. We know that criticism will be forthcoming from many sides as the results of our efforts are examined. But it is my concern that the criticism we receive be constructive. Obviously, my office cannot be sufficiently staffed to act as check on all the local communities and their use of funds. But this does not preclude the fact that we are concerned.

To summarize, I would personally challenge each of you here today, and the organizations you represent, to cooperatively join together your formidable resources, talent, and energies to eliminate the social blight that exists in our great nation. It is not important which organizations or persons receive credit for the results of this effort. What is important is that the cause - the War on Poverty - supercede organizational and political

boundaries. Be <u>identified</u>, yes, but <u>identify</u> with the local communities in the work at hand. This is where the battle will be won. The many communities and rural areas form the battlefront.

I challenge the Mexican-Americans to volunteer in these local community wars as you have in past World Wars. I challenge labor to roll up its sleeves and pitch into the local community battle with the same intensity and enthusiasm that you demonstrated in the '30's. Your support is needed. In the name of 35,000,000 people, I ask you for it.