

ABSTRACT

Established in October 1974, People for Economic Survival (PES) was a Socialist group based in Northampton, Massachusetts, first organized with the short-term goal of pressuring local banks to sell food stamps. The group's vision for the longer term, however, was to stimulate change that would result in the replacement of an economy based on corporate profit with one based on people's needs. After two and half years of community activity, including working for lower utility rates and against cutbacks in welfare, human services, and unemployment benefits, PES disbanded.

The PES collection consists of flyers, meeting minutes, and a full run of *Take It*, the group's newsletter.

ACCESS

The collection is open for research.

LANGUAGE:

English

**Special Collections &
University Archives**
UMass Amherst Libraries
154 Hicks Way
Amherst, Mass. 01003-9275

V: 413.545.2780

W: scua.library.umass.edu

D: Credo

E: scua@library.umass.edu



PEOPLE FOR ECONOMIC SURVIVAL RECORDS

1974-1978

3 BOXES (1.5 LINEAR FT.)

CALL NO.: MS 535

BACKGROUND ON PEOPLE FOR ECONOMIC SURVIVAL

Based in Northampton, Massachusetts, People For Economic Survival (PES) was formed in October 1974. As a self-proclaimed progressive Socialist group, PES dedicated itself to community organizing in an effort to unite working people in their "struggle for control of social and economic institutions." With the ultimate goal of ending capitalism nationwide, PES focused on local issues that affected the everyday lives of the working class and unemployed. Their first issue, pressuring local banks to sell food stamps, was quickly resolved. As the numbers eligible for receiving food stamps rose in western Massachusetts as a result of the weak national economy, many who qualified discovered that they could not obtain food stamps in Northampton because local banks were slow to offer for them for sale. On November 29th, 1974 about 40 people marched through downtown and into the banks demanding they participate in the food stamp program. The tactic worked, and by the following week, most local banks were selling food stamps. With an established presence in the community, PES sought to continue their work as a community action group focusing on a suite of basic issues in economic justice, ranging from utility rates to childcare and welfare cutbacks.

By the summer of 1975, PES was producing and distributing a twice-monthly newsletter, *Take It*, providing information about local issues to the community and highlighting the activities both of PES and of other local progressive organizations. Despite their early success with the food stamp campaign, however, many of the issues of interest to the group, such as welfare reform, required an extraordinary commitment and patience to see a long struggle through to its completion, as well as a well-defined philosophy of how to create social change. PES was instead plagued by problems in leadership, membership, and direction. Serious differences of opinion and personality conflicts resulted in a call for a weekend retreat in 1976 aimed at refocusing the group. PES emerged from the retreat with a renewed sense of its mission, and members agreed to be more constructive in their criticism of each other, to integrate study sessions into their regular meetings, and to distribute more evenly the work required to produce *Take It* on a regular basis. The group members also committed themselves to recruiting new members.

In spite of these efforts, PES decided to disband in 1977. Not wanting to disappear without

sharing their lessons -- good and bad -- with other progressive groups in the area, PES assembled a critical self-study report, very much in the tradition of the self-critical analysis practiced by a other groups on the political left. In this report, the PES members analyzed their motivations, successes, and failures to help other local activist groups to negotiate their organizational struggles.

CONTENTS OF COLLECTION

A local group with interest in national and international issues, PES hoped to be part of worldwide movement away from capitalism and towards socialism. Their motivation, ideology, and agenda are revealed in both their public records (published leaflets and newsletter) and in their private records (minutes of meetings and readings). Of primary importance is the final report they wrote just after formally disbanding PES. As their last contribution to the community, and perhaps their most lasting, this report offers a unique behind-the-scenes look into the process of organizing and sustaining a small activist group. With no topic off limits, the former members of PES review the success or failure of each of their campaigns, their interactions with other local socialist organizations, and their internal dynamics. Hoping to share their lessons with other activists, PES constructed a report that today provides an extraordinary opportunity to reflect on the challenges, internal and external, facing local political activists and reformists during the 1970s.

Another source of history for the group is contained within issues of their twice monthly newsletter, *Take It*. Documenting all of the movements in which PES was involved, from food stamps to welfare cutbacks and from utility rates to childcare, *Take It* chronicles not just the group's political and social activity in Northampton, but their view on larger national and international issues affecting the working class. In their articles, the members of PES wrote about topics of global importance that had an impact on the local community such as sexism in the workforce and racism in society. As such the publication was an important tool in illustrating how large-scale national problems could be addressed locally on a smaller scale.

Finally, the collection includes minutes of meetings and other administrative materials shedding light on how the group itself functioned. While the notes kept during their meetings capture the debates and motivations of PES in the moment, the final report includes a reflective and analytical description of the group's activities more than 2 years after they organized. Taken together, these materials offer insight into how a community action group sees itself both during the time it is active and after it has disbanded.

Announcements	1976	Box 1: 2
Audiocassette	circa 1975	Box 4
Audio recording of PES on a local t.v. program.		
Clamshell Alliance	1977	Box 1: 3
Coalition on the Economic Crisis	1976	Box 1: 4
Committee for Childcare in Crisis	1976	Box 1: 5
Correspondence	1975-1978	Box 1: 6
Financial Records	1975-1978	Box 1: 7
Flyers	1975-1977	Box 1: 8
Flyers: food stamps	1974	Box 1: 9
Flyers: Ford Jerry	1976	Box 1: 10
Flyers: International Workers Day	1976	Box 1: 11
Flyers: Puerto Rico	1976	Box 1: 12
Flyers: S-1	circa 1975	Box 1: 13
Flyers: tax bill	1976	Box 1: 14
Flyers: Tax Day Rally	circa 1976	Box 1: 15
Flyers and brochures: welfare	1975-1977	Box 1: 16
Food stamps	1974-1975	Box 1: 17
Hampshire County Employed/Unemployed Council	circa 1975	Box 1: 18
Haymarket People Fund	1975	Box 1: 19
July 4th Coalition	1976-1977	Box 1: 20
Mailing list	circa 1976	Box 1: 21
Massachusetts Rehabilitation Program	circa 1975	Box 1: 22
Massachusetts State Legislature: welfare	1975	Box 1: 23
Membership lists	circa 1976	Box 1: 24
Meeting minutes	1975 Jan-Apr	Box 1: 25
Meeting minutes	1975 May-Aug	Box 1: 26
Meeting minutes	1975 Sept-Dec	Box 1: 27
Meeting minutes	1976 Jan-Mar	Box 1: 28
Meeting minutes	1976 Apr-Sept	Box 1: 29
Meeting minutes	1976 Oct-Dec	Box 1: 30
Meeting minutes	1977 Jan-Mar	Box 1: 31
Meeting notes	circa 1975	Box 4
Group notes taken during meetings of PES on oversize sheets of paper.		
National Hard Times Conference	1975	Box 1: 32
New Unity Workers Alliance	circa 1975	Box 1: 33
Newspaper clippings	1974-1975	Box 1: 34
Newspaper clippings: welfare	1975	Box 2: 1
Organizational structure and membership	1976	Box 2: 2
<i>People's Alliance for Care and Treatment Newsletter</i>	1975	Box 2: 3
Project proposals	1975-1976	Box 2: 4
Notes	circa 1975	Box 2: 5
Notes: retreat	1976	Box 2: 6
Photographs: Boston homeless	1975	Box 2: 7
Posters	circa 1975	Box 4
Rahar's boycott	circa 1976	Box 2: 8
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Rahar's was a local restaurant and bar that refused to hire female bartenders.		
Readings	circa 1976	Box 2: 9
Report, draft	1977	Box 2: 10
Report	1977	Box 2: 11
Master copy of report PES wrote immediately after disbanding.		
Report	1977	Box 2: 12

Schedules	circa 1976	Box 2: 13
<i>Springfield Woman's Union Newsletter</i>	circa 1975	Box 2: 14
Study sessions	1976	Box 2: 15
<i>Take It</i> , no. 1	1975 Aug 11	Box 2: 16
<i>Take It</i> , no. 2	1975 Sept 1	Box 2: 17
<i>Take It</i> , no. 3	1975 Sept 15-29	Box 2: 18
<i>Take It</i> , no. 4	1975 Sept 30-Oct 13	Box 2: 19
<i>Take It</i> , no. 5	1975 Oct 14	Box 2: 20
<i>Take It</i> , no. 7	1975 Nov 11-25	Box 2: 21
<i>Take It</i> , no. 9	1975 Dec 9-23	Box 2: 22
<i>Take It</i> , no. 10	1975 Dec 23-1976 Jan 6	Box 2: 23
<i>Take It</i> , no. 11	1976 Jan 20-Feb 3	Box 2: 24
<i>Take It</i> , no. 12	1976 Feb 4-18	Box 2: 25
<i>Take It</i> , no. 13	1976 Feb 17-Mar 2	Box 2: 26
<i>Take It</i> , no. 14	1976 Mar 2-14	Box 2: 27
<i>Take It</i> , no. 15	1976 Mar 16-29	Box 2: 28
<i>Take It</i> , no. 16	1976 Apr 6-19	Box 2: 29
<i>Take It</i> , no. 17	1976 Apr 13-26	Box 2: 30
<i>Take It</i> , no. 18	1976 Apr 27-May 10	Box 3: 1
<i>Take It</i> , no. 19	1976 May 18-31	Box 3: 2
<i>Take It</i> , no. 20	1976 June 1-14	Box 3: 3
<i>Take It</i> , no. 21	1976 June 15-28	Box 3: 4
<i>Take It</i> , no. 22	1976 June 29-July 13	Box 3: 5
<i>Take It</i> , no. 24	1976 Aug 3-16	Box 3: 6
<i>Take It</i> , no. 24	[1976 Aug]	Box 3: 7
<i>Take It</i> , no. 25	1976 Aug 17-31	Box 3: 8
<i>Take It</i> , no. 26	1976 Sept 1-14	Box 3: 9
<i>Take It</i> , no. 27	1976 Sept 21-Oct 5	Box 3: 10
<i>Take It</i> , no. 28	1976 Oct 5-19	Box 3: 11
<i>Take It</i> , no. 29	1976 Oct 19-Nov 2	Box 3: 12
<i>Take It</i> , no. 30	1976 Nov 3-17	Box 3: 13
<i>Take It</i> , no. 31	1976 Nov 16-22	Box 3: 14
<i>Take It</i> , no. 32	1976 Nov 23-Dec 6	Box 3: 15
<i>Take It</i> , no. 34	1977 Jan 4-18	Box 3: 16
<i>Take It</i> , no. 33	1977 Jan 19-Feb 5	Box 3: 17
Issues 33 and 34 are misnumbered on originals.		
<i>Take It</i> , no. 36	1977 Feb 9-23	Box 3: 18
<i>Take It</i> , no. 37	1977 Apr 11	Box 3: 19
<i>Take It</i> , duplicates	1975-1977	Box 5
<i>Take It</i> : administrative	1976-1977	Box 3: 20
Utility rates	1975	Box 3: 21
Welfare and unemployment	1975	Box 3: 22

Administrative information

PROVENANCE

The collection was donated to Special Collections by Jan Nettler, 2007.

PROCESSING INFORMATION

Processed by Rachael Avery, May 2008.

COPYRIGHT AND USE (MORE INFORMATION)

Cite as: People For Economic Survival Records (MS 535). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Search terms

SUBJECTS

- Food stamps--Massachusetts
- Northampton (Mass.)--Economic conditions
- Northampton (Mass.)--History
- Public welfare--Law and legislation--Massachusetts
- Socialism--Massachusetts
- Unemployment--Massachusetts

NAMES

- People For Economic Survival