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Strange Bedfellows

Lobbying for the

Nation's Cities

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AT THE HEIGHT of the House battle over antipoverty funds, 11 borderline Congressmen were visited by two lobbyists unaccustomed to linking arms in any joint endeavor.

One was the top Washington representative of an automobile manufacturer; the other speaks to Congress for the United Automobile Workers. All 11 Congressmen represent districts in which the motor company is a large, if not the largest, employer. All have constituents in the UAW.

The talk was not of car sales but of poverty. In a soft-sell approach, the visitors asked support for the \$2.06 billion authorization for the antipoverty program and urged the doubtful Congressmen to resist efforts to cut it back.

The unusual confrontations ("It's the first time in my nine years in Washington I've gone into a Congressman's office with a UAW man," observes the industry lobbyist) marked the first significant drive of the Urban Coalition, a fledgling organization devoted to pressing legislation it hopes will solve the crisis of the cities.

In the argot of Washington politics, it is a campaign with great potential "clout" because it is loaded with the names of big business, labor, civil rights, religion and city politics. It puts Walter Reuther on the same bandwagon with Henry Ford II, and links moderate civil rights leaders with General Electric, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. and the Chase Manhattan Bank.

The key is business support, for without it the Urban Coalition is little more than an assemblage of liberals, city hall politicians and civil rights leaders who have lobbied for social welfare legislation for years.

One spokesman familiar with the Coalition's founding observed that in such fields as poverty, model cities funds and rent supplements, Congressmen are accustomed "to hearing from civil rights people and labor. But they have rarely, if ever, heard from business."

Is business really on the bandwagon? The signs are far from clear. Besides the automobile lobbyist, a few others acknowledge they called or wrote certain Congressmen, but are reluctant to discuss details.

Alfred Eisenpreis, vice president of Allied Stores Corp. of New York, said he talked to "several" Congressmen about the poverty bill. His list included some whose districts contain Allied stores and others with whom he is acquainted.

Had he changed any votes? "I don't know . . . I would have no reason to say if I knew," Eisenpreis replied.

J. Irwin Miller, chairman of the Cummins Engine Co. of Columbus, Ind., wrote to his Congressman and Senators on at least one issue, but has "not been as active as I hope to be."

On only one issue besides the antipoverty funding has the Urban Coalition attempted to exert concentrated pressure—the emergency jobs legislation that drew a surprising amount of Senate support in the face of stiff Johnson Administration opposition.

The best evidence available indicates that labor provided the most direct lobbying for the employment bill, other than the Senators who sponsored it.

One industry leader active in the Urban Coalition said his firm did not support the emergency jobs program although the Coalition's legislative

committee had endorsed it. It was feared, he said, that the bill had too little support and might saddle the Coalition with a publicized failure just as it was getting started. Also, he said, the Senate bill did not offer as many jobs as the Coalition's platform proposes and therefore might have "falsely raised the hopes of the poor."

The Urban Coalition sprang out of meetings sponsored by Urban America, a relatively new Washington organization specializing in research and analysis of urban problems.

It was largely a paper committee until last summer's big-city riots rocked the country. In the aftermath, the Coalition held an "emergency convocation" in Washington, laid out a list of urgent needs and set about organizing the political framework.

The movers in the Coalition were persons profoundly discouraged by the national reaction to the riots. Mayors and civil rights leaders who had pleaded for appropriations for model cities and rent supplements found Congress in no mood to spend more money. The poverty program appeared destined for a quick trip down the drain. The White House let it be known that no new urban-aid programs would be advanced this year.

Experienced lobbyists and nose-counters in the United States Conference of Mayors had long noted one particularly disappointing fact—the persistent opposition of Congressmen from suburban areas. Their ranks growing with court decisions requiring congressional redistricting, the suburban Congressmen were proving to be nearly as uninterested in central-city programs as their rural counterparts.

Such complaints are illustrated by an independent analysis of 1967 votes on key urban issues such as model cities, the control of rats, rent supplements and antipoverty funds.

There are, at latest count, 56 Congressmen whose districts are predominantly composed of people living in what the Census Bureau describes as the "urban fringe."

On almost every peculiarly urban issue, about half of the suburban Congressmen voted against the Administration's bills or appropriation requests. Twenty-four of them, for example, wanted to eliminate all funds for the fledgling model cities program. Twenty-six joined the majority last July to kill the rat control bill, later revived.

Using a wider target, the Urban Coalition pinpointed 110 Congressmen from districts in 52 metropolitan areas who are considered "negative" on major urban legislation.

Strange Bedfellows Aiding the Cities



"There! That should keep you in the way to which you're accustomed."

"They particularly hurt us on money bills," observed one Coalition spokesman. "They are conservative and they don't like to spend money—even though they might not be opposed to the legislation per se."

The Coalition's strategy called for approaching these targets through businessmen who own the shopping centers or manage the suburban plants of big business. The unstated tactic is to convince them they have an interest in a healthy downtown and that they should advise their Congressmen of their feelings.

"We have got to convince the shopping center guy that he has a basic interest in urban legislation—if only in seeing that the city is not burned down," said one strategist. "And to be blunt, it is worth pointing out that in Detroit there were fires five miles outside the ghetto."

With the legislative season nearly

over, the Coalition is now concentrating on founding local counterparts—metropolitan coalitions that include representatives from business, labor, local government, church and civil rights groups.

The model of local coalitions is the "New Detroit Committee," which was formed independently of the national coalition after the riot last summer. With a leadership ranging from Reuther to all three big auto companies, the Detroit committee lent some support to the national fight over poverty funds but has directed most lobbying efforts at the Michigan Legislature in support of Gov. George Romney's fair housing bill.

In Washington, a local coalition is being formed with the impetus coming from Patrick Cardinal O'Boyle of the Catholic Archdiocese of Washington and the Health and Welfare Council of the National Capital Area.