

DECEMBER, 1967
VOL. 3, NO. 12

VISTA

VOLUNTEERS IN SERVICE TO AMERICA
OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

VOLUNTEER



The red-coated
joker never
makes it
to the
slums...

Page 3

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506
OFFICIAL BUSINESS
PRINTED MATTER

OFFICE OF ECONOMIC
OPPORTUNITY

POSTAGE AND FEES PAID
OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY



"HEY, CHARLEY, WAIT'LL YOU HEAR
WHAT BILL CROOK WANTS US TO DO NOW!"

THE DAY THE MONEY STOPPED CONTINUED

cities the telephone company offered to postpone billing of the VISTAs and in one large northeastern city an electric company offered free electricity. Even landlords, so often the target of criticism in the slums, promised not to evict VISTAs who couldn't pay their rent. In Kentucky, one landlord donated two months free rent to a VISTA. In McKeesport, Pa., the Housing Authority came through with free accommodations, and in Franklin County, Me., a local hotel offered two Volunteers rent-free quarters.

With the spectre of a payless Nov. 14 looming, VISTAs throughout the country were making emergency plans. In Baltimore, Md., Warden Hiram L. Scoonfield readied the city jail with an open-door policy for needy VISTAs and promised to provide food and clothing. Although VISTAs working with the Philadelphia Bar Association were also offered the use of the jail, their sponsor, Ed De Paul, refused, saying, "We don't want our VISTAs behind bars." The Bar Foundation subsequently authorized a grant to support the VISTAs for two weeks if necessary.

Similar offers poured in to tide the VISTAs over for a few uncertain weeks. But two Denver Volunteers reported they were well able to survive "Congress's slow decision." Word traveled quickly, said the letter, and "during the three days that we have known that we won't receive funds for a period of time, we have had enough offers of food and lodging to keep us here without checks for a year."

Not all offers of help came from slum neighborhoods. Word reached city halls and state capitols, bringing pledges of support from the governors of several states, and from Mayor Lindsay of New York City and Mayor Barr of Pittsburgh. Churches of all denominations rallied to the cause. In

Atlanta, Episcopal Bishop Randolph Clairborne promised to mobilize the entire Christian community in the event of a crisis. In New York a Jewish congregation pledged \$300, and throughout the nation small church groups volunteered to house and clothe Volunteers.

Support came at the most unexpected times and in the most unexpected places. On the morning of Nov. 8, Florida Governor Claude Kirk was at Cape Kennedy to witness the launching of the Saturn rocket when he happened to see a local newspaper article about six Brevard County Volunteers who were worried about paying the rent. The Governor presented the Volunteers with his personal check for \$75 and invited the six to be his guests for dinner at the Cape Kennedy Hilton Hotel.

Concerned citizens throughout the country formed *ad hoc* committees to see the Volunteers through the crisis. In New York, a businessmen's group headed by William Haddad pledged to raise \$100,000 for a revolving loan fund, slightly more than half of which

would be apportioned to New York City VISTAs and the remainder to VISTAs in other areas of the nation. Block Communities, Inc., voted to lend \$2 to its 12 VISTAs for every \$1 they borrowed from the revolving fund.

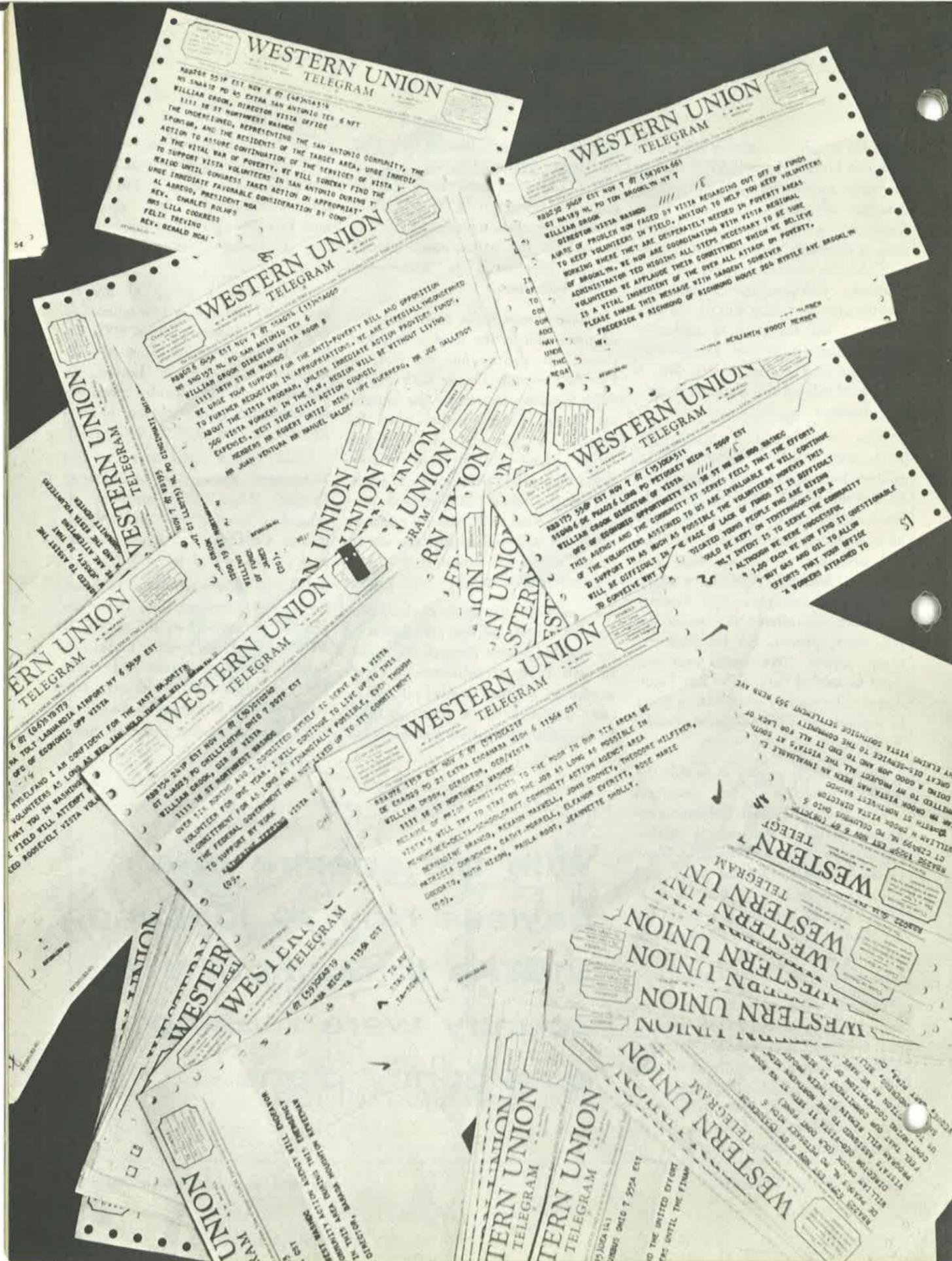
In Arizona, a group of lawyers pledged \$2,000 and in Louisville, Ky., three local citizens pledged \$900 for their 15 Volunteers. A group of businessmen in Baltimore headed by Chamber of Commerce president Mercer Smith joined together to raise \$10,000 for that city's 94 Volunteers.

Civic groups also came to the Volunteers' rescue. In Montgomery County, Md., YWCA members arranged to provide food and lodging, and in Paducah, Ky., Kiwanis members offered to "adopt" a VISTA.

Colleges, too, were eager to house homeless Volunteers. Ohio University pledged its support to the state's 72 Volunteers. Pennsylvania State University offered to house and clothe the more than 100 Volunteers currently serving in Pennsylvania.

As popular support mounted, news-

With the spectre of a payless Nov. 14 looming, VISTAs throughout the country were making emergency plans.



THE DAY THE MONEY STOPPED CONCLUDED

**"Her government recruited her,
her government trained her,
her government assigned her—and
after a little more than two months,
her government left her flat."**

papers across the country took up the cry. The *Chicago Daily News* led one story with, "It seems everyone loves VISTA Volunteers except their government."

In a column she called "A Dim Vista for VISTA," Rose DeWolf of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* pulled no punches. "She signed up for a year of 'service to America,'" the column says of a young VISTA with the Philadelphia Bar Association. "Her government recruited her, her Government trained her, her Government assigned her to Philadelphia. And after a little more than two months, her government left her flat."

VISTAs across the nation were de-

termined to stay on their jobs no matter what the cost. Rather than move in on the already crowded poor, many offered to ask their parents for money, and several lined up part-time jobs.

Most, however, did not have to go so far to continue their fight against poverty. Having received votes of confidence in the most unexpected places, they were still determined to continue what they had started. Said one letter from a group of Volunteers, "We intend to continue our Volunteer work until all sources of revenue have become exhausted—and then some."

Former VISTA Volunteers shared their optimism. In a telegram offering

support for local Volunteers, the VISTA Alumni Association of New York said, "Our commitment did not end with our year's service."

Nor does the current crop's commitment end with congressional funds. Despite the generous offers and the emergency resolution which saved their last paychecks, Volunteers have also discovered in the latest crisis the extent of their own dedication. The sanguine Kentucky Volunteer expressed it for all of them. "I am a VISTA Volunteer, I will remain a VISTA Volunteer, and will dwell secure in my friends in Crane's Nest, Calebs Creek, and Williamson Branch."

**Having received votes of confidence
in the most unexpected places,
VISTAs were still determined to
continue what they had started.**

Where Is This Life?

BY SARGENT SHRIVER



PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL MULLINS

Saul Bellow was probably right when he said in *The Adventures of Augie March* that, "The big investigation today is to see how bad a guy can be, not how good he can be." Everywhere today people are saying, "Things are so bad they could hardly get worse. We're living in a God-forsaken period of human history."

Violence—spiritual and physical violence—sweeps through the main arteries and into every recess of our being like a plague, an epidemic of bacterial madness. Governments have never been more remote from the people: opaque, resistant, self-glorifying. Churches have never been more irrelevant. Education has never been more impersonal. Bureaucrats—bureaucrats like me—we've never been more pompous. Business, profits and making money, it's never been so uninspiring, so boring, so lifeless.

So one answer is this: "The world's in a mess. We're scheduled for incineration." As Susan Sontag indicated in her new book, we're all carrying around our own "death kit."

Nihilism, absurdity, anarchy, these are the signs of our times.

Yet the very words, "things are bad," automatically separate the speaker—the onlooker—from the world at which he looks. When a man says "things are bad," he has almost stopped looking. He sees so much that's repulsive, he can hardly bear to keep his eyes open. And the worst part of the badness he sees is himself—the cop-out, the quitter, the fugitive.

Yet even in these times, unprecedented bursts—explosions of empathy

—have occurred. No other time than ours has seen so many turn-about, so many enemies embracing each other, old arguments being thrown away. We see people giving their lives to the movement for inter-racial justice. We see ministers, priests, nuns, rabbis, practicing not only a theology of the heavens but a theology of the streets.

So we see progress. And we see lots of failures. I see mostly the failure. Most of the time I feel as if I were living in the emergency ward of a big hospital because in my office all I see is the mess.

How do the poor look at America? Those words, "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." They just laugh. They say, "Where is this life? We don't see it, we don't taste it, we don't live it. Where is this liberty? We can't even live where we want." Instead of a guarantee of life, the poor get a guarantee of death. A slow death—a nibbling away of life.

A baby born today to poor parents in the United States has twice the risk of dying before he's one year old, as compared to the child of a rich family. He has four times the chance of dying before he's 35 as a rich kid. The incidence of tuberculosis among the poor in Alaska is ten times what it is for the rich. The poor everywhere—in or out of a ghetto—suffer more mental disease, more mental retardation, more death from pneumonia, scarlet fever, tuberculosis, diseases which for the well-to-do have almost ceased to exist in the United States.

And the rest of us, the well-to-do, we face death also. Not a physical death but a spiritual death. Thus, we

CONTINUED

"We're shocked every day in our personal lives. We feel lonely and loveless, even a little bit insane for trying to be human."

see the worst of all possibilities in front of us. The poor with their physical death and the rich with their spiritual death.

But we must begin learning sometime. And so far as I'm concerned, the surest way is to start asking questions. The kind most of us are asking right now—either in silence, or in shouts, or with guns.

Does America inspire or squelch the best hopes of humanity today?

Can we regain the spiritual leadership we exercised when all the world looked to us for our ideals and followed us, not because we forced them to, but because they wanted to?

Has America created the greatest variety of life the world has ever seen—only to forget the sacredness of life itself?

No honest man can pretend to have final answers to those questions. Often the shock of reality is too much for us. Yet, maybe that's what we need. The shock treatment—like psychiatry. And if that's what we need, we're lucky because we're getting the shocks every day. The daily shock of Vietnam on television. We announce the body count with the same precision we announce the Dow Jones averages. Up 200 casualties this week, industries down \$.25; 300 Communists killed, utilities up \$.80.

We have the nightly shock on television—seeing the tough guys gun down the bad guys. Our children watch this violence and the Nielsen ratings prove that we all love it. Over three million serious crimes were committed in our country last year. So with this pattern of life, why are we shocked when Rap Brown says, "Violence is as American as cherry pie"?

We're shocked every day in our personal lives. We feel lonely and loveless, even a little bit insane for trying to be human. As T. S. Eliot said, "In a world of fugitives, the person who runs in the opposite direction will appear as a madman."

Is there a way out? Four weeks ago I asked William Styron, the author of that magnificent new novel, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, what he thought after having lived through Turner's revolution fictionally for five years. He said to me, "It may sound trite or corny to you, but the only power that will work is love."

We aren't used to hearing that word, love. Especially when love is mentioned as a power. In the corridors of world power, many things are more potent than love—money is power, consensus is power, votes equal power, military force is power, the Eastern Establishment is power.

Yet within a world of riots and murders and napalm and "burn, baby, burn," some men and women are turning to love—a love which teaches and practices self-sacrifice, self-effacement, self-respect.

Today Tolstoy or St. Francis or Ghandi or Tolkien or Martin Luther King all would agree that the essence of love can be simply expressed this way: "To put yourself into the skin of another man, to be weakened by his burdens, and heartened by his joys." That was the idea of the Peace Corps. That's the idea of VISTA.

I'll never forget in Malaysia, about fifty miles from Kuala Lumpur, going through a local hospital where we had two or three Peace Corps nurses. One of them was working in the leper ward. Like many people, I'd never seen a leper. But I'd read all those horrible stories. So when this girl said to me, "Mr. Shriver, you've got to come see my ward," I didn't want to see her ward. But how could I say no if that girl was in there? So I went in and she had the patients all sitting up in bed dressed in those blue things that they wear and their hands were stumps and they had these sores all over their faces. And she went down the beds patting them, introducing them to me. And they'd h—that stump out to me. I'll never forget

when I grabbed that first one and shook it. It felt to me just like a hot poker. I was scared. I shouldn't have been, but I was.

That girl was working in that leprosarium not because I told her to or anybody else told her to. She worked there for love.

I was up in Alaska over the 4th of July visiting VISTA Volunteers—the town of Nome. There isn't a paved street in Nome. Most of the houses are ramshackle, falling down places. But even Nome has a slum that is worse than the rest of the town, where some 500 natives from an island out in the Bering Sea called King Island live in the most abject poverty that I've seen anywhere in the world—including Africa, Latin America, India or anywhere else.

And down in the middle of this area was living one VISTA Volunteer. He had a house that wasn't as big as a modern American bathroom. He had one little stove in it. He had a wooden bed and one window. The shack was made out of corrugated tin backed up with wallboard or paper. And he lived there at 40-degrees below zero, day in and day out. You said to yourself, why? What's he trying to prove?

Suddenly I realized that that kid was a witness, if he was nothing more. A witness to an interest in those King Island fishermen. A witness who, if he did no more, brought me up there. As a result of my going there, a special committee's been set up in the government in Washington. Already hundreds of thousands of dollars, programs, medicines, additional Volunteers are going up to Alaska.

God knows, it's very little. But that kid by sitting, witnessing for a year in that frigid slum probably did more for those people than all the rest of us put together. That's what love is.

Of course, the trouble with the word "love" is that people use it for all the

wrong things. The folksinger Pat Hughes said, "The people over thirty years of age took a great word, 'love,' and turned it ugly. They used it for dogs and toothpaste and cigarettes and coffee and tennis and cars and lipstick, till love lost its meaning."

Then he went on to say, "They have yet to contaminate 'service.' It's so contradictory to what they hold to be important. Service has no money in it. Service is so slavish. Service is so degrading. Service will never get you anywhere. Can service support a family? Can it buy a car? But service is the most noble of words, because its meaning has not been destroyed."

Right now the only agency in the United States government with the word "service" in its title and with service as its only reward is Volunteers In Service To America. God knows we need thousands more like them. Lots of people criticize VISTA. Some of the graduates of VISTA have formed a wonderful organization called the "Veterans of Domestic Wars."

But in the war against poverty—and in the Peace Corps—we've learned

that the challenge before America today is not to become richer or bigger or stronger, but to become more human.

Instead of getting aroused by the unfed, which is what we should be aroused by, we get aroused by the unwashed. People worry less about the poor at Hunter's Point than they do about the hippies on Haight Street.

We worry more about violations of human convention than we do about violations of human dignity. We get upset about four-letter words on sex, but we don't worry about four-letter words on hate.

Our priorities are mixed up. We must change our priorities and move toward a world symbolized by a story from the early days of the Peace Corps which summarizes for me everything we've been attempting to do in that program and in all these other programs. It's the story of an African mother and child sitting on a rural road in up-country Ghana. As a figure strode down the road, the child said to her mother, "Look mother, there's a white man." And the mother looked up and said, "No, that's a Peace Corps Volunteer."

"The challenge before America today is not to become richer or bigger or stronger but to become more human."