January–February 1988

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forward motion

Organizing in the Changing South

Black Theology and the Southern Church

Stopping Black Land Loss

Forward Motion

January-February 1988
Vol. 7, No. 1

FORWARD MOTION is a magazine of socialist opinion and advocacy. We say socialist opinion because each FM presents analyses of important organizing work and reviews of political and cultural trends. We say socialist advocacy because FM is dedicated to a new left-wing presence in U.S. politics and to making Marxism an essential component of that presence. We share these purposes with other journals, but we seek for FM a practical vantage point from within the unions, the Black and other freedom struggles, the women's movement, the student, anti-war, and gay liberation movements, and other struggles. We also emphasize building working people's unity as a political force for social change, particularly through challenging the historical pattern of white supremacy and national oppression in the capitalist domination of this country.

In this Issue

The U.S. political system is heading toward a new reckoning with the South. It has been a decade and a half since New Right theorists put forward their "Southern Strategy" for the Republican Party. But this decades's Black electoral stirring in the South--notably the 1984 Jackson campaign--is altering the political landscape for both Democrats and Republicans once again. As we move toward the 1988 elections, the South is the most politically volatile section of the country, capable of swinging a close election one way or another.

U.S. capital has been carrying out a Southern strategy of its own, steadily expanding operations in a non-union South and Southwest over the past several decades. But almost a generation after the unions rolled over in the face of Taft-Hartley and the regional right-to-work, organizers are trying to make a new start. A Black movement-based labor strategy for the South could galvanize a labor revival nationally.

This pivotal role is not new to the South. The "peculiar institutions" of Afro-American national oppression originally based in Southern racial slavery have greatly determined this country's political and economic framework. In normal times, it has been the anchor of capitalist domination; in abnormal times, it has contributed mightily to political instability and popular hopes for basic social change.

With these factors in mind, we have prepared this special "Southern Strategies" issue. It surveys key areas of Southern political life and provides organizing perspectives *from* the South on both regional and national politics. The issue is special not just in its focus, but because to do this issue, *FM* collaborated with two Southern-based collectives. The Amilcar Cabral/Paul Robeson Collective is a predominantly Black Marxist grouping with a long history of work in the Black liberation movement, including the National Black United Front. It has played a major role in building Black Workers for Justice, a regional labor organization which publishes *Justice Speaks* newspaper. Our other partner is the Black Workers League, an African-American revolutionary collective based in eastern North Carolina which also participates in Black Workers for Justice.

Rather than an extensive introduction to the issue by *FM*, we start with three short perspectives on the wider significance of a battle for reincorporation in Keysville Georgia, on the continuing importance of the Black nation concept, and on Rainbow politics and the South. Feature articles in the issue include an overview of Southern politics by Gordon Dillahunt, an interview with three Southern ministers active in the Black Theology movement, and a first-hand report on responses to Southern Black land loss, as well as other reports and perspectives. Also in this issue--an appreciation of Chicago Mayor Harold Washington by *FM* associate Peggy Baker.

Contents

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Keysville, Georgia

New Black Reconstruction Government

The following is an edited version of a speech by Saladin Muhammad in Keysville, Georgia. For many years, the Black majority town of Keysville has existed without regular local government. Recently, people there organized, marched in the state capital and brought suit for legal recognition of the local government. This speech was given October 24, 1987, at a political conference in Keysville to set a political program for the town. Saladin Mohammad is a member of Black Workers for Justice and a national co-ordinator of the Black Workers Political Platform Campaign. The Black Workers League contributed this speech to FM.

The Black citizens of Keysville, Georgia, like the majority of Black people in the South and many outside the South, have a historical and human right to political power and governmental control over this land and territory known as the Black Belt South. The blood of our people is in the soil of their territory. For over two hundred years prior to the Civil War, Black people were forced to work as slaves on the plantations, without making one penny for their labor. In the early 1800s, three fourths of all the world's cotton was grown and picked by Black labor in the Black Belt South.

The major cities and universities in England and Europe were built with profits from the textile industries which depended on slave-grown cotton from this Black Belt territory. Yet Black people did not benefit from the wealth created by their labor. Today, despite our hard work on the farms and in the factories, many Black communities and towns like Keysville are without water and sewerage, nearby hospitals, paved roads, schools and other important resources for survival and growth. The Black Belt South is an American colony.

The reactivation of the Keysville local government is further crystalizing the meaning of the struggle for Black political power. We see the re-emergence of the unfinished stage of the Black Freedom Struggle begun by the Black Reconstruction governments after the Civil War in 1864. Those governments of our forefathers and their allies attempted to chart a course for Black liberation and justice for all.

Keysville is a poor community, lacking many services. Black residents hope restoration of local government will enable them to begin to change this.

The Black Reconstruction governments relied greatly on support from the federal government, support which had been promised to Black slaves for their military alliance with the North against the South. While very young and barely consolidated, those governments made important changes aimed at eliminating the social evils of slavery and empowering Black people for self-determination. They established a public school system, institutions for the blind, mentally disabled and for orphans; they made public improvements such as new roads and bridges; and they defended people in the Black Belt territories militarily from the Klan and other racists financed by the former slave owners. And the Black Reconstruction governments were not racist toward whites.

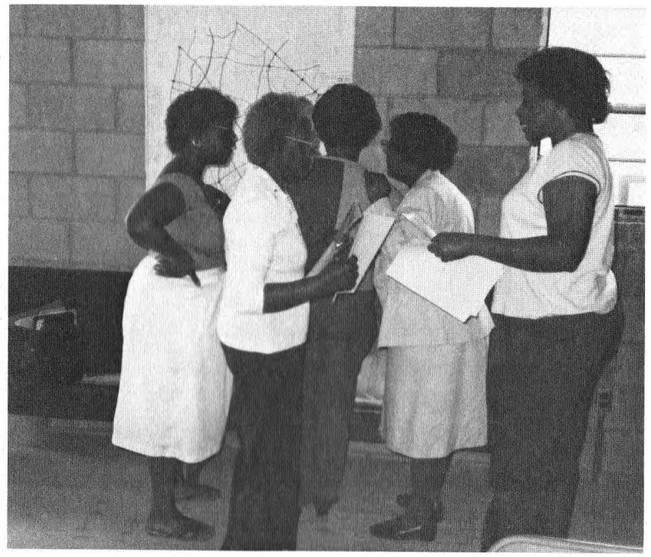
The course of history set by the Black Reconstruction governments in the South was reversed when those governments were overthrown by the former slave owners. The Northern industrialists in control of the federal government did not step in. They only meant to support the Black Reconstruction governments until the South became economically dependent on Northern capital to finance the plantation agricultural system.

More important, the Black Reconstruction governments were overthrown because both the Republican Party representing the Northern industrialists and the Democratic Party representing the Southern planters (former slave owners) did not want any guidelines or restrictions whatsoever on their ability to exploit and drain the life out of Black workers and their communities and to keep all labor cheap in the South. They did not want to be accountable to Black political power in helping to build schools, decent low income housing, water and sewerage systems or to meet those democratic goals embodied in the programs of the Black Reconstruction governments.

Today we see the Democratic and Republican parties, despite their different approaches, both opposed to Black political power. The leadership of both parties at all levels has not supported the fight against the at-large voting system, forced annexations and second primaries--practices which serve to weaken the electoral base of Black political power. Jesse Jackson's challenge to these practices at the 1984 National Democratic Convention was rejected. And the Republican Party is even more up front with its racist opposition to Black political power.

In a number of cities throughout the country, including here in the state of Georgia, we see Black majority governments place profits for the multinational corporations before the human needs of the citizens they profess to serve. These are big business-controlled governments, not real Black political power for the people. They must not be the models defining the policies and direction for Black liberation.

As Keysville and other towns and cities in the Black Belt South win Black majority governments, they must



Keysville women meet in a local church.

become the new Black Reconstruction/Black Liberation governments. From this territorial base of control by Black political power, the Black Freedom Movement along with millions of other working class people throughout the country and the world will make its greatest contributions in challenging the destructive course of America.

The struggle in Keysville to reactivate its government under Black majority control must become a goal not just for the citizens in Keysville, but of the Black Freedom Struggle and of all justice-minded people throughout this country and the world. This is not wishful thinking, it is not impossible; it can and must be made into reality by a movement dedicated to Black liberation and justice for all. A movement not centered around big personalities but around the leadership of organizations consisting of committed everyday Black working class people.

Our presence here today is a statement of our collective efforts to build a movement for Black political power and liberation based on working class needs and humane values. We are no longer just individuals, local organizations or local Black majority governments anymore, we are united as the Black Workers Political Platform Campaign and we now have many common objectives, transforming us into a collective force for the liberation of Black people.

The Black Reconstruction governments of old were forced by historical circumstances to rely on the liberal wing of the white power structure as their main allies--today what some would consider the Democratic Party. By contrast, the new Black Reconstruction/Black Liberation governments can rely on the organized strength of the Black working class and their allies. We need to work for a politically conscious Black working class with a platform developed by the masses themselves, a platform based on their needs and struggle for democratic rights, political power and liberation. It was with this goal in mind, that the Black Workers Political Platform Planning Convention was held on September 26 and 27 in Enfield, North Carolina.

The Platform Campaign will work hard to educate and organize workers in the factories and on the farms, as a strong base of support for Black political power. Black workers must play a leading role in organizing unions in the Black Belt. Under the leadership of Black workers from the towns and cities struggling for Black political power, unions become a major ally for Black majority governments like Keysville. This alliance will help increase the power of the new Black Reconstruction/Black Liberation governments and zones like Keysville, to make demands and progress in the midst of state and federal policy controlled by the big corporations. ■

Background to the National Question

The following is an edited version of a longer paper by the Amilcar Cabral/Paul Robeson Collective, entitled "The National Question: Once Again?"

The turn-of-the-century view of the radical democrat W.E.B. Dubois rings loud and clear today: the problem of the twentieth century is indeed the problem of the "color line." It is the color line which continues to give the U.S. capitalist class its tenuous rule over the North American working class, oppressed nations directly under U.S. domination and oppressed nations around the globe.

The development of the African-American or Black nation in the U.S. South had its origins in the period when the plantation slave economy prevailed in the Southern states. Slaves from different African tribes and nations were brought together on the same plantations and began the transformation from Africans to Africans in America or Afro-Americans.

Though forced to speak the language of the oppressor, the emerging Afro-Americans continued to think and secretly speak in their own languages as long as possible. From that period to now, the result has been English colored by the grammar and syntax of African languages. Today this Black English is used universally by Blacks, including middle class Blacks in certain settings.

The homeland or territory of African-Americans has consistently been the South and in particular, the plantation regions in Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, Arkansas and Texas. When the plantations were broken up after the Civil War, Blacks largely remained on the land as sharecroppers. In spite of the massive changes in agriculture and years of outmigration, a majority of Blacks continue to live and struggle for a better life in those areas. And in recent years, there has been a significant reverse migration from the North, Midwest and West.

From the outset, the majority of Blacks have been engaged in similar economic activities, with little class differentiation among slaves, sharecroppers, or most recently, wage laborers. Still, stratification within the African-American people started even before the Civil War and grew more prevalent after the breakup of the plantation system. Differentiated status developed between artisans, skilled laborers and agricultural workers; later, teachers, clergy, lawyers, physicians and many entrepreneurs emerged as a developing middle class. There has even been the emergence of a small, restricted and economically weak bourgeoisie which has maintained some allegiance with other classes in the African-American nation.

Monopoly capitalism will not permit the development of an independent national bourgeoisie among Black people. Instead, certain communications and banking functions are left to Black folks; standard areas include insurance, dry cleaning, beauty products, and funeral services. Some Blacks have broken out of this restrictive arena, but in no statistically significant way. On the other hand, many white companies recognize no boundaries when it comes to making profits on the sale of goods and services; they will dry clean Black people's clothes, sell them beauty products, and so on. Perhaps the last frontier is the burial business and even here many white morticians will bury Blacks.

The collective experience of African-Americans, originating in slavery and wending its way through history, has served as the material basis for a shared outlook on racism, white supremacy and national oppression. Notwithstanding geographical distance, class distinctions and some integration into the U.S. mainstream, Blacks in the United States reflect a common outlook in their various forms of music, literature as well as child-rearing and other social practices.

In all these areas of social and cultural life, the white U.S. ruling class dominates the African-American people. African-Americans are prevented from developing their own social and cultural life to any meaningful extent, much less hold any real control over it. To us, so much

Jerry Savage

Creative and tactically sound work must be done to foster a national and socialist consciousness.

of this is evident in the real world that it does not have to come from books, journals or libraries. Living and working in the Black Belt and the South in general underscores the existence of national oppression. Denial of political rights in Keysville, Georgia, white domination of Black schools in Halifax, North Carolina and attempts to crush the unity of Black trade unionists organizing in conjunction with the struggle for Black empowerment in Mississippi are all contemporary evidence of a pattern of oppression that is more than discrimination against a racial minority. It is more than bad housing in a ghetto or job discrimination. It is a lack of political rule over the territory, the economy, social institutions and the military that belong to a nation. It is lack of self-determination.

Ideologically, creative and tactically sound work must be done to foster a national and socialist consciousness. We call for projecting a vision of national liberation and socialism and tying it to people's everyday lives. How will a new society change these things in a practical way? This is what we must answer for the people.

Practically, the struggle to unite the masses against the recent increase of right-wing violence is of utmost importance. Unionizing the South and supporting electoral efforts on the local level and the work of the Rainbow Coalition including the Jackson Presidential campaign on the national level are crucial. We would say to those who do not support our outlook on the South and on African-American freedom: you cannot ignore the South's importance to the U.S. economy and politics in this period. You too must devote maximum effort to the struggle in the South if you expect to have any political impact. ■

Black Liberation Today

The following is excerpted from a longer policy paper by the Freedom Road Socialist Organization, Nationalities Commission.

In or around 1967 the "Civil Rights Movement" stalled. True to the predictions of Malcolm X, as long as the Black freedom movement saw itself in the exclusive terms of a civil rights struggle, the parameters of that movement and its objectives would have to be narrow. Malcolm appealed to that movement to see itself as an Afro-American movement for human rights. To a great extent this meant viewing the struggle for Black liberation within the context of the world-wide struggle against imperialism and for national liberation.

The contradictions of '67 have continued to haunt, or perhaps more positively, to shape our movement: that between a revolutionary politics which tests the limit of bourgeois democracy and reformist politics which accept the framework of the capitalist system; between a notion of Black freedom tied to constitutional rights and that which looks at Black freedom as linked with an international struggle against imperialism and dominationism; and that between a vision of Black freedom emphasizing the trickle down of rewards won by the Black middle class to the working class and poor and a vision which sees the forward motion of Black freedom shaped by the wave of creativity and activism of Black working people. These contradictions will not cease until Black liberation is finally achieved. A failure to grasp these contradictions today, however, can lead to demoralization and confusion, particularly among the youth who have no clear enemy to fight.

One need only have open eyes to realize that Black America today is in a state of crisis. The political gains of the 1960s were followed by some limited economic gains, only to have those come to a grinding halt in the early 1980s. By the first year of the Reagan era, Black incomes reached a sixteen-year low! Compared with the beliefs of so many whites that Blacks have gained substantially, the actual situation is startling. Take, for example, the changes in the cities. In the fifty largest cities, the total population declined roughly 5% in the period 1970-80. In that same period, the population in those cities with income below the poverty line increased by 11.7%. Poor whites declined by 18% while poor Blacks increased 18%. In a word, the cities have become poorer and Blacker. In 1979, prior to the Reagan era, Blacks made up 31% of the poor, compared with 25% of the poor in 1959. Today, that 31% figure remains essentially the same--roughly 7,163,631 people, of which more than 2 million are *not* on welfare. Of Black female headed-households, 51% live below the poverty line.

The revolutionary politics of the Black perspective have something to say about the direction for all progressive and revolutionary politics.

This is the political and social context in which the Black electoral upsurge of the 1980s and the Jackson campaign of 1984 arose. In Manning Marable's words, "The essence of the Jackson campaign was a democratic, anti-racist social movement, initiated and led by Afro-Americans, which had assumed an electoral mode." (*Black American Politics*. London: Verso, 1985; p. 247)

That this "Rainbow Rebellion" (Marable's slogan) took place within the context of the Democratic Party largely reflects the realities of US electoral politics. Insurgencies which attempt to operate within the electoral arena face big difficulties in the United States. For the revolutionary Left, the main question should not be where the insurgency takes place, but the *tendency* of that insurgency. That the Democratic Party is not a workers' party or even a people's party is obvious to most on the Left, and probably to most progressive peo-

ple. Taking the step from that realization to the actuality of a people's party in U.S. conditions is not a matter of rhetoric or intentions, but one of a cold, hard analysis of conditions and a strategy which follows from that analysis. The Jackson campaign advanced certain democratic, anti-racist issues within the context of the Democratic Party, and in so doing received national attention. It was correct for the Left to operate within and support the Jackson effort. It was unfortunate that more of the Left did not seize on that opportunity.

The Rainbow Coalition symbolism is grounded in two realities. One, that Black people on a national level need allies in the struggle for Black liberation. Two, that the struggle for Black liberation (and against white supremacist national oppression) represents the key political struggle for the advance of a progressive political agenda for the US. The Rainbow is therefore not an amalgamation of political issues in the proverbial laundry list which many of us on the Left are used to seeing on flyers for demonstrations. It is more the Black liberation movement welding together a Left-Progressive political bloc which makes central the demands for equality and political power.

The Jackson campaign of '84 and the work done to lay the basis for the Jackson '88 campaign show that conditions exist for the Black Liberation Movement to lead other progressive social movements. We need to demonstrate that Black leadership is not simply a matter of having a charismatic leader. Instead, the revolutionary politics of the Black perspective have something to say about the direction for all progressive and revolutionary politics. We must particularly guard against attempts to build a broad coalition of progressive forces on bread and butter issues which ignore the national question (a type of economism). What needs to be demonstrated to whites in the various progressive social movements is that the leadership which can arise from the Black movement is directly related to the historical contradiction which has fused the United States into a social formation. That contradiction is between white supremacist national oppression, on the one hand, and the forces led by the oppressed nationalities against that oppression on the other.

Justice From Out Of The South

The struggle in the South is crucial. As Rev. Jackson often points out, social justice and democracy will come out of the South. The Black united front must address itself to the continued fight in the South for land and political power.

The struggle for land and political power in the South is at an important juncture where they can be combined with the struggle for economic power in the form of unionization. The current crisis within the trade union movement is forcing some re-examination of Southern organizing by the labor movement. The only way in which it can be successful is in alliance with the Black Liberation Movement. If this is true, the Black movement is in an ideal position to place demands on the labor movement as a condition, of sorts, upon which an alliance can be hammered together. The Black liberation movement has rarely shied away from alliances with the white dominated labor movement. This was the case in the 1930s, and it was true again in the late 1960s when the Southern Christian Leadership Conference allied itself with unions such as 1199 and AFSCME in Southern organizing.

A revolutionary Marxist current within the Black liberation movement means basing ourselves within the Black radical tradition first and foremost. It means thinking of our Marxism in terms of that Black radical tradition. In grounding ourselves in Black radicalism, we must build Black radical institutions. Such institutions and organizations must have a place for nationalists and non-nationalists alike, but they must be Black. ■

Photos on pages 7, 20 and 28 were taken by Durham, NC free lance photographer Jerry Savage. Savage was born in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. Before moving back to North Carolina, he lived in New York City for eighteen years, receiving a BFA degree in photography at the School of Visual Arts. He owned and operated the Yohansu Studio in New York and has been featured in numerous publications and exhibitions.

Dedication

To Abner W. Berry

This issue of *Forward Motion* is dedicated to the memory of Abner W. Berry who died in North Carolina on June 24, 1987 at the age of 85. Brother Berry was a humble man of vision who remained a revolutionary activist despite the twists and turns of the Black Liberation and workers' movements during this century. He was convinced that organizing the Black Belt South was a key task of Black revolutionaries.

Abner Berry was a founding member of Black Workers for Justice (BWFJ), an anti-imperialist mass organization in North Carolina which promotes workplace and community-based empowerment of Black workers. Brother Berry, also known as Baba Sufu (wise teacher) was the guiding inspiration behind the Workers' School established by BWFJ in 1985. He was a plaintiff in the recent voting rights suit against the city of Rocky Mount, NC. This suit resulted in a ward system for election of the city council and allowed Black representation for the Black majority areas of the city.

Abner Berry was born on June 12, 1902 in Beaumont, Texas. He was the older brother of the famous Berry Brothers dance team of Cotton Club fame. He grew up in New Orleans and Chicago, where he worked in the Armour meatpacking plant. He was largely self-educated, having formal schooling only through the sixth grade. He returned to Texas in 1929 where he was a reporter for the Black newspaper, *The Houston Informer*. There he came in contact with the Communist Party and soon joined the Party because of its support of the right of Black and Latin American people to fight U.S. imperialism. He led efforts to form Unemployed Councils in Texas and later Kansas City. The Unemployed Councils fought for national unemployment insurance during the depths of the depression in 1930-32. For this he was often jailed and beaten. In 1930, Brother Berry was the Communist Party candidate for the U.S. Senate from Texas.

In 1934 Brother Berry was elected to the Central Committee of the Communist Party. He moved to New York and became the Party section leader in Harlem. During this period the Communist Party was leading powerful movements of Black and poor people in Harlem. Berry pulled together Black nationalists and anti-fascist Italians in Harlem to forge an active anti-imperialist movement opposing Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia. Also under Berry's leadership, some Harlem pharmacists organized what was to become Local 1199, a union of hospital and health care workers.

Berry began working as a reporter for the *Daily Worker* newspaper in 1940. In 1942, he was drafted into the Army in retaliation for an article exposing the U.S. Surgeon General's secret memo stating that Blacks were to be placed last on the list for procurement of doctors during World War II. After the war, he returned to the *Daily Worker* where he covered many events relating to the Black Belt South and the civil rights movement, including the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott. Berry resigned from the Communist Party in 1957.

Abner Berry went to work as a correspondent at the United Nations for Antara (the Indonesian news service) in 1960. In 1966, he began his own news service focusing on Africa and the Third World. He supplied many articles to *Muhammad Speaks*, the newspaper of the Nation of Islam.

Berry was very moved and influenced by the rise of the Black liberation movement in the 1960's and the leadership of Malcolm X. Always wanting to be on the frontline of struggle, Brother Berry sought out groups of young Black students and activists, and he became affiliated with the African People's Party and became one of its leading members. He was a prime organizer and a speaker at the major African Liberation Day rally in May 1974 in Washington, D.C.

Berry moved to North Carolina in 1981 because he saw the focus of struggle emerging out of the Black Belt South, and again wanted to be on the frontline. Despite his advanced age, Brother Berry played a significant role in the establishment of Black Workers for Justice.

In his last years, Brother Berry would say that more than any of his many accomplishments in the struggle, his greatest achievement in life was his close friendship with Paul Robeson. He wanted everyone to investigate this great man and live like him in commitment to the struggles of Black and working people. We say the same to our readers concerning Abner W. Berry.

--Adapted from *Justice Speaks*, 7/87

Maxine Mills-Donnan

Key to Social Change

A Southern Strategy

by Gordon Dillahunt

In every period of U.S. history, the Southern United States has been a critical, if not the critical, factor in the determination of national events. In years past, chattel slavery, the Civil War, sharecropping, lynching and the Civil Rights Movement all drew national and international attention to the South. Events of the 1970s and 1980s have also prompted a similar focus on the region. Major efforts by both the Democratic and Republican Parties, either to make new gains in the area or to flex their muscles in the 1988 presidential race, reflect this emphasis.

Third World At Home?

The changing contours of the U.S. economy can be seen in the regional economies of the South and Southwest. It is inaccurate to see the flight of U.S. capital only to the Third World. Capital has also headed South to an internal version of the Third World. As the country's Midwest industry base deteriorated, U.S. business' Southern activities have escalated. Between 1975 and 1984 alone, the Southeast gained 5.2 million jobs--a 32% rise--and it is projected that over the next thirty years, there will be another jump of 50%.

In agriculture, the national crisis of the small farmer has had strong Southern implications. After World War II mechanization and the breakup of the sharecropping system in the South led to massive removal of rural people from the land, corporate control over Southern agriculture, and Black land loss. Struggles with the Farmers Home Administration and efforts to stop foreclosures which preceded the Reagan era have now accelerated. Today, Southern farmers not only have to contend with local and national financial institutions, but with corporate owners from the North and West, Japan, Italy and West Germany.

Gordon Dillahunt is President of his American Postal Workers Union local in Raleigh, North Carolina. He is a participant in the Black Workers Unity Movement and a member of Black Workers for Justice.

Southern labor's historic problems have also become a focal point again. In this era of declining numbers, union-busting, and a widespread anti-labor climate, the trade union movement has been forced to confront its decline. After so many years of inaction, the slogans "organize the South" (originally the call of progressives in the CIO) and "organize the unorganized" are once again more than ceremonial pronouncements.

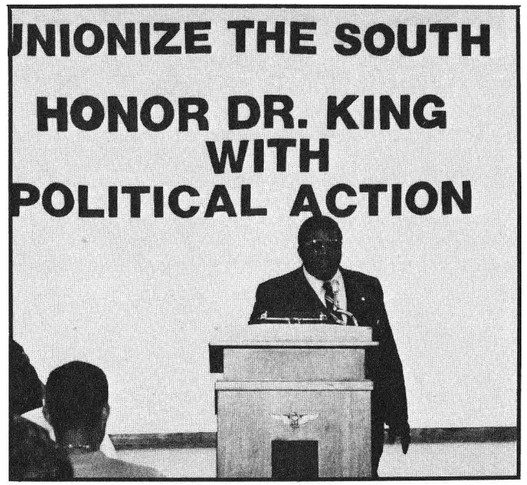
Even in the absence of the massive campaign activists would like to see the AFL-CIO and its national affiliates launch, there has been some progress. You can find it hidden deep in Bureau of Labor Statistics charts on union recognition elections. Sometimes evidence of progress shows up in the pages of the movement or labor left press. On occasion, a major breakthrough--like the recent victory in the Mississippi Catfish processing industry--has an immediate impact on other regional plants in the industry. More often, union recognition is won at a small parts shop, a nursing home, warehouse or apparel plant.

But the battle is an uphill one, as Southern union membership rates show:

Maryland	22.6%
Alabama	21.8%
Tennessee	19.1%
Louisiana	16.4%
Mississippi	16.3%
Arkansas	16.0%
Georgia	15.0%
Virginia	14.7%
Florida	11.7%
Texas	11.4%
North Carolina	9.6%
South Carolina	7.8%

With the exception of Maryland, Alabama and Tennessee, which rank 25th, 28th, and 29th in the nation, the Southern states are in the bottom fourteen states nationally as far as per cent of working population that belong to labor organizations.

These figures hint at a more fundamental political problem confronting anyone seeking to organize the Southern working class. The South as a whole and the Black Belt region in particular have lacked the expected or common forms of bourgeois democracy. The majority does not hold the reins of political power. Voting rights violations, police and racist violence coupled with fascist-like labor laws serve as underpinnings for the grip



In the South, it is essential to build an alliance of the trade union movement with the struggle for Black empowerment. Here Pres. John Leonard of Burkhardt Furniture Workers local in Henderson, North Carolina.

U.S. corporations and their government operatives have on the oppressed people of the region.

Yet too often, Southern union organizers and workers alike view Right-to-Work laws--a provision of the infamous Taft-Hartley Act generally limited to the South--as separate phenomena from the overall social, economic and political climate in which they live. At the center of this convergence of problems and institutions is the glaring need for an alliance of the trade union movement with the struggle for Black empowerment.

"An Excellent Business Climate..."

With U.S. capitalism in crisis at home and abroad, corporate leaders daily eye the South as a last chance to shore up the American dream--the economic battle ground on which to defend "free enterprise" and make the country more competitive internationally. Consider the basis on which this effort rests.

Super-profit and super-exploitation have long been the norm. What is readily conceded about export of capital to developing nations is denied in relation to the South. This oversight has been rationalized in so many ways--the natural unevenness of regional development, remnants of slavery, institutionalized racism, etc. Rather than looking at the per cent return on investment dollars

Pat Bryant

Supporting a strike by poultry workers in Laurel, Mississippi. The job base in the South consists largely of low wage sectors.

in the South compared to other U.S. regions and overseas markets, look at the "human toll" side of the economic equation to find evidence of super-exploitation.

"An excellent business climate" and "best region or city in which to live" are categories usually measured. And there is always a not-so-hidden meaning behind them. The better the "business climate," the worse it is for working conditions. The more ideal a place to live for middle class professionals, the more likely it is to be hell for laborers.

On all indices that assess the well-being of working people, the Southern worker comes up short. While the South has shown the greatest potential in job growth, it is next to the bottom in wage growth and at the bottom in personal income. The industrial job base consists largely of low wage sectors like lumber and wood products, apparel, rubber, plastics, leather and tanning. The national wage level in these industries is less than $8 per hour. The high tech jobs touted by Southern governors and chambers of commerce only provide high wages on the research and engineering side with low wages and hazardous conditions on the manufacturing side. Poor education exacerbates the problem by not preparing Southern workers for the technical jobs, and then passing them by for workers migrating from other regions.

The service sector of the Southern economy has also grown a lot. Georgia, ranking number one in 1985 in job growth, experienced a 33.5% increase in service sector employment; Florida gained 37%. These jobs, generally reserved for Black women, are again the lowest paying jobs, with the least statutory protection. And since many are in the public sector, they also do not offer full collective bargaining rights and their attendant protections.

The nightmare goes further. The South's statistics include the highest rate of poverty in the nation (24% in Mississippi), the highest rates of Black poverty (45% in Mississippi), and the highest rates of the working poor (from 7.7% in North Carolina to 12.7% in Mississippi).

Such a state of affairs would give the marching orders for a class conscious, militant labor movement. For the U.S. trade union movement, however, the emphasis has remained on the traditionally white male Midwestern industrial regions and a chauvinistic campaign against foreign workers in the guise of saving U.S. jobs.

Not So Solid South

Since the defeat of Reconstruction the "solid South" has figured in U.S. politics as a firm Democratic Party bloc. In an unlikely coalition, Southern racist and anti-labor leaders have delivered this region's votes to labor and Northern liberals.

Today the political landscape is changing considerably. Economic crisis has provoked mass defections from the party popularly identified with Blacks, women's issues and labor. Despite positions and candidates that directly oppose their personal interests as working people, many white Southern workers have gone for the "race bait" and lined up with the Republican Party both in national elections as well as numerous state and local races.

Another curious development is taking place--the coming of age of Black Republicans. While they are not a deciding factor in any elections in this region, they have emerged as a Black counterpart to the religious Right, opposing gay and lesbian rights, opposing sanctions against South Africa, supporting Jonas Savimbi in Angola and so on. Black Republicans can be found in all social classes and among most age groups. They hold what might be seen as contradictory values compared to "typical" Republicans. On foreign policy questions and some family values issues, they fall in line with most other Republicans. But they part ways on wholesale opposition to abortion, and they tend to reflect a more liberal outlook on federal social spending.

Though prime targets for GOP recruiters, the Black Republicans, along with groupings of Black independent voters, are not enthusiastic Reagan supporters. In their view, another Republican administration would be much better. Some of these new Republicans and would-be Republicans are largely motivated by the notion that the Democrats have taken Blacks for granted and that involvement in the Republican party will put pressure on both. More than likely, these Black Republicans will play a greater role in Southern politics in the coming years.

Super Tuesday as Southern Strategy

On the "other side of the aisle," the Democrats are abandoning almost all pretense of representing labor and Blacks. The Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) has taken on the job of stemming "white flight," temporizing Black resistance and reformulating the party platform. DLC leadership mainly consists of Southern whites, including such figures as Sam Nunn of Georgia, Charles Robb of Virginia, Bob Graham of Florida, and John Breau of Louisiana. Moderate Blacks like Pennsylvania Rep. William Gray as well as veteran Black mayors Ernest Morial, Tom Bradley and Maynard Jackson have also joined their ranks.

The Democratic Leadership program is a no-holds-barred, aggressively pro-capitalist 1990s pitch. They push worker-management cooperation. They want a strong military and more cuts to domestic entitlements. Throw in a pinch of "workplace democracy" and a program of national service, and you have something that ominously fluctuates between populism and neo-liberalism, while ultimately tied to much more reactionary politics.

Super Tuesday has been the main brainchild of the DLC. After the last presidential election, a regional presidential primary was put together to demonstrate Southern strength in the Democratic Party, influence the Republicans to de-emphasize the South, and win back the waverers. But by October of 1987, the DLC was worrying about a colossal backfire.

The dilemma? Their favorite son, Sam Nunn, has not entered the race and Tennessee Sen.. Al Gore still trails Jesse Jackson. Gore may now also be hurt by his admission that he smoked marijuana in college and Vietnam. With so many candidates running and a projected heavy turnout by Blacks and labor supporters of Jackson, it is possible that Rev. Jackson could win the Southern primaries or at least garner enough votes and delegates to influence the Convention in July in a way that other Democrats, especially our modern Dixiecrats, cannot tolerate. On top of that is the risk that white conservative Democrats will see no candidate to support among the Democratic pack and vote Republican in both the primaries and the November elections. So now the underlying goal of the DLC--and the Democratic National Committee, for that matter--is to stop Jackson. We can anticipate that they will try all manner of tactics to do this, including slander, scandal-searching, red-baiting, or worse.

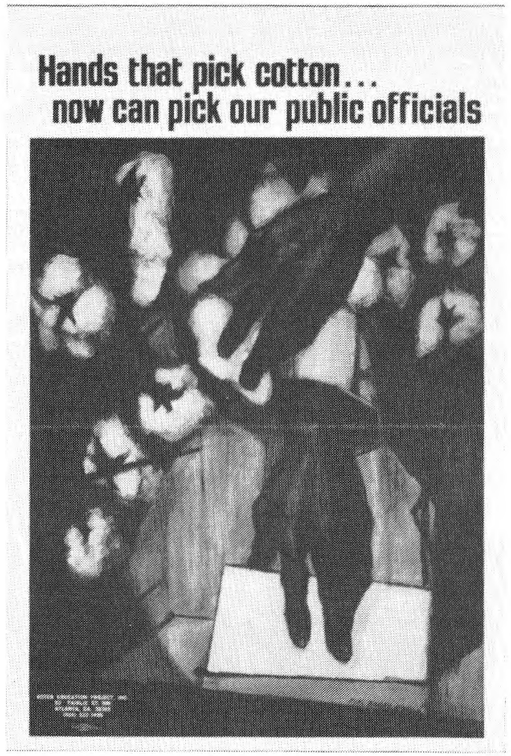
Black Empowerment

It is in this environment of maneuvering and machination that an earnest struggle for Black empowerment is taking place. This term forced its way into the political lexicon during the last ten years or so. Since 1982 or so, it has become the rallying cry of various politicians, civil rights activists and others. But Black empowerment means different things to different people: Andrew Young and socialist activists have little in common when

they share the slogan of Black empowerment.

Overall, Black empowerment aims for maximum participation of Blacks in the electoral process--more registration, more voting and more Blacks running. For those operating in the framework of the status quo, an implicit goal is greater leverage inside the Democratic Party (and maybe the Republicans as well) for programs addressing Black concerns.

There are also those who know from history or almost instinctively that "Black faces in high places" cannot change a social system inherently exploitative and based on white supremacy. Useful educational work has been done in Black empowerment campaigns by those who have dedicated their lives to bringing about a new political and economic system. But Blacks entering public office in many areas of the Black majority have immediately been confronted with holding political office without controlling the economic institutions.



Poster used in the 1970s by the Voter Education Project.

In Alabama, the Tombigbee Waterway presents a challenge to Black Belt politicians. In Mississippi, Black political leaders have to contend with auto parts plants which in the past were held like an ax hanging over the head of Northern auto workers. (Now their managers threaten Southern workers with moves to Mexico.) In North Carolina, the Black community finally has a representative on the Morrisville Town Commission. But Morrisville adjoins the Research Triangle Park so now all of the old and new corporate and banking interests in the area must be taken on as the community tries to stop developers from destroying it. And in Fremont, North Carolina, town commissioners are asking for an investigation of plants in their district for health and safety violations and discrimination.

In each case, Black leaders will try to build something that serves the needs of the majority (including whites in the area). In stark contrast, there are those like Charles Evers in Mississippi who gear their solutions to the middle class elites and have sold out the people at every turn.

Working in this context, Black empowerment for us has to mean raising issues of control of the state, the economy, and the military. In these real life confrontations now taking place, people can come to understand and respond, maybe slowly, to the challenge of achieving state power. Understanding the obstacles of the reform process here gives life and direction to the struggle for self-determination. Being involved in these efforts gives the people an appreciation of the vision of a political entity in the South, the borders of which have yet to be defined exactly. This regional entity would be ruled by the Black majority with democracy for the white minority within but free from the exploitation and degradation fundamental to capitalism.

The Jackson Factor

Jesse Jackson's goals in the 1984 campaign and his 1988 effort range from whatever personal ambition he may have to the generally accepted goals of Black empowerment.

Focusing on voter registration in the South, Jackson's 1984 aim to further Black Empowerment was well known and for the most part met. But some have challenged Jackson's impact on voter registration, turnout, and local Black candidates.

Adolph Reed, for example, argues in *The Jesse Jackson Phenomenon* that:

> ...the Jackson campaign's impact on black registration is at best ambiguous. Between 1980 and 1984, black voter registration in the South as a whole increased approximately 14 percent, ranging from highs of more than 37, 28 and 23 percent in Alabama, North Carolina and Mississippi respectively to lows of 3 percent in South Carolina--Jesse Jackson's home state--and five percent in Virginia and Florida. By far the greatest share of that increase appears to have occurred after 1982, a point which seems to buttress the campaign's claims to influence.

But Reed questions how much Jackson and the Rainbow can claim credit for the increase in registration, pointing out that growth in Black voter registration has been on the increase since 1970; there were significant gubernatorial and senatorial races in Alabama, Mississippi and North Carolina that influenced registration; suffering under Reaganism has spurred autonomous opposition; and last, voter registration activities were carried on by a number of local and national organizations. This last point highlights Reed's concern. He is not only looking at Jackson the politician and candidate but also at his organization and its success or failure to mobilize people.

While Reed's registration figures are right, surely the atmosphere created by Jackson's candidacy was responsible, even in tandem with the other factors, for thousands of registrations. The political climate in the country created by the candidacy and the debate on issues brought many people and entire communities forward. Reed concedes Jackson's impact on Black turnout in the primaries. In Alabama, for example, there was an 87% increase in Black turnout in the primary over the 1980 figure.

Then there is the coattails issue. Most of the pundits zero in on the fact that while Jackson won or ran strong in certain areas, other Black candidates were defeated. Such was the case with Ken Spaulding and Howard Lee who lost Congressional races to white incumbents. State legislative gains were minimal. From 1982 to 1983, the number of Black officeholders went up forty-five, from 330 to 375. From 1984 to 1985, there was only a net gain of seven from 385 to 392.

This slowdown, however, reflects factors separate from the Jackson campaign. In 1984, there were no state elections in five Southern states. Also, many Black majority districts already have Black representatives. Finally, in the fall 1984 elections, the Reagan landslide produced a coat-tail effect for Republican state legislative candidates.

On the lower levels, where Black empowerment finds its real purpose and meaning today, there were

The Jackson campaign could help promote unionization of the South in addition to being a voice for Black empowerment.

gains in the wake of the so-called Jackson factor. The national total of Black elected officials shot up from 5,700 in 1984 to 6,056 in 1985. Most of the increase was at the level of county officials, mayors, city council and school board members. There were net gains of 61 in Alabama, 21 in Arkansas, 36 in Florida, 39 in Georgia, 37 in Louisiana, 14 in Mississippi, 47 in South Carolina and 32 in Texas.

End the Southern Run-off Primary

The impact of the Jackson campaign came often in spite of the Jackson campaign organizationally, a fact evident in the aftermath of the election. The Rainbow has had no real relationship to the leaders, organizations and communities that were the core of Jackson's constituency. They have had to fend for themselves. Yet they could be seen at the Rainbow Coalition convention on their own initiative, checking out the announcement speech and the activities of the convention. The same can be said of the New South Coalition folks in Alabama who were strong Jackson people but have not received the level of Jackson support they deserved and needed. These outstanding activists make up the base of the New South Coalition battle, and by any measure have to be seen as the core of the Rainbow forces in Alabama.

All these factors come into focus in Jackson's Southern platform in 1984. He emphasized voting rights and the elimination of the run-off or second primary mandated in nine Southern states and Oklahoma. These two focuses have all but disappeared from his speeches. These issues, however, were addressed by many in the Southern delegation to the Raleigh Rainbow Convention and received support from many others. [Normally, the biggest vote-getter wins a primary; in a run-off primary system, unless there is a majority, a run-off is held, cutting the chances of Black candidates running in Southern districts without a straight Black majority-ed.]

It is clear that the run-off primary is a double-edged sword. In areas of Black majority, eliminating it could allow a white candidate to get in without the support of the majority population. But the opposite problem is what troubles Southern activists. In communities where Black people do not constitute a majority, even if they are close to it, if the elective body does not have a district form of representation (or if Black people are unfairly dispersed across various districts), Black people will never have any representation. Also, activists involved in the struggle against the run-off were aware of the pitfalls in eliminating it. Language had been developed that opposed unfair districting and related practices where they served to dilute Black voting strength.

In his dealings with the DNC since the 1984 primaries, Jackson traded away opposition to the run-off in order to gain another one of his goals--fairer delegate selection rules for so-called outside candidates. The existing threshhold of 20% of the vote required to receive any delegates has been lowered, but only to 15 or 16%, not that big a difference compared to the significance of the run-off issue. What a trade off!

For a Rainbow Outlook into the 1990s

The Jackson campaign can be made to deal with this shift away from the Southern run-off issue in a healthy and supportive way. Local communities fighting the run-off primaries have to continue their fight but at the same time let the Jackson forces know that they support his candidacy. This will put pressure on Jackson to reassert his support for the run-off battle.

Much has also been said about Jackson replacing the struggle against racial violence with the struggle against economic violence. This change of posture threatens to abandon the fight against racial injustice in order to win white working people to the position of "economic common ground." Actually white workers should and can be made to see that racial injustice and violence are what prevent all working people from facing the owners aggressively from truly common ground. Many observers attribute Jackson's questionable shift here to his desire to broaden the Rainbow and to bring in white workers. No doubt this is a factor, but his desire to become a mainstream candidate and not to run against the Democratic Party is as much a reason as the Rainbow argument.

In many ways, Jesse Jackson's importance to African-American people and the working class may only have a "shelf-life" of one year. Put another way, Jackson's greatest impact on the future of the struggle for transforming the U.S. must be manifested between now and November 1988.

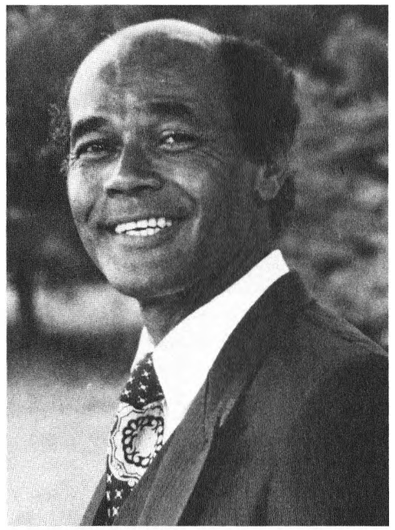
Jackson can and must lead the fight for unionization of the South. This has to be at the absolute core of his work in the South. Such a stand will affect Jackson's standing in the North as well, demonstrating how runaway shops can be challenged. At the same time, he has to be the main national advocate of Black empowerment, illustrating all along the line how it will benefit both Blacks and whites. Moreover, he should seek to encourage local Black struggles for political power to place unionizing local industries at the top of their agendas. In turn he must urge his labor supporters to put their muscle behind the electoral struggles in these regions.

In pushing such an agenda, Jesse Jackson can consolidate and firm up the Rainbow outlook such that it will be a viable coalition after the 1988 election and after Jackson for that matter. This is the most important contribution he can make to Black people, other oppressed nationalities and the working people of the U.S.

* * *

The South is the frontline in the struggle for a different kind of life for all the people of the U.S. It has a direct bearing on whether or not there will be freedom, justice and equality for Black people or the elimination of exploitation for all working people.

A liberated Black nation would certainly be an impetus for workers' rule in the rest of the country. Those who want this and live for it should consider heading South. Not, however, as missionaries, saviors or know-it-all revolutionaries. If you are not ready to live your life here, raise your family here, learn from the people and laugh and cry with them, stay where you are. ■



Black Land Loss In the South

And Then There Were None

by Gary Grant

Independence for Americans of any race or national origin has always been based on three primary factors: the right to vote, the right to an education, and the right to own land. While Black Americans are making notable strides in voting rights and in gaining an education, we are doing just the reverse in land ownership. Although most Black Americans today are one or more generations removed from the land, we all have our roots there. Black-owned land, clustered predominantly in the area known as the "Black Belt South," is the essential base of political and economic power guaranteeing Black independence, not only for Blacks now but for future generations.

According to the United States Census of Agriculture, in 1920 Black farmers owned approximately 15 million acres of farm land. By 1982, this figure had declined to only 3.2 million acres. Currently Black land owners are losing land at the rate of 9,000 acres per week. If this trend continues, there will be no Black-owned land by the year 2000.

Land Loss Rooted in Discrimination

Many so-called experts have argued that the losses by Black farmers are just part of the well-publicized farm crisis, resulting from the supposed obsolescence of the American small farmer. But this does not explain why Black farmers are losing their land at a rate 2.5 times faster than whites. Far removed from the "Black Belt South," these experts (and indeed most of the nation) have no understanding of the white-run network that Black farmers must confront in their day-to-day struggle to maintain their operations. Black land loss results primarily from the racism of private lenders, farm suppliers, and the government's own agency, the Farmers Home Administration.

In 1982 the U.S. Civil Rights Commission released a report which blamed Black land loss on discrimination "rooted in our nation's his-

Gary Grant was raised on a family farm in Tillery, North Carolina and is the founder and coordinator of the Land Loss Fund. He is also the Director of the Tillery community organization, Concerned Citizens of Tillery. Gary spends much of his time as a volunteer community activist.

Dan Bernstein

Currently Black land owners are losing land at the rate of 9,000 acres per week. If this trend continues, there will be no Black-owned land by the year 2000.

tory, especially in the South...There are indications that the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) may be involved in the very kind of racial discrimination that it should be seeking to correct." Despite these findings, federal policy hasn't changed. The report remains safely on the shelf, another victim of Reaganomics.

Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) and other federal lending institutions have consistently failed to provide Black farmers and land owners with the financial and managerial assistance that they were supposed to give. In 1982 over 85% of the Black farmers in eastern North Carolina were being threatened with foreclosure and bankruptcy. That same year, the FmHA offices in North Carolina returned 57% of their allocated "Limited Resources Loans" to the federal government. This loan program was specifically created for small family farms in trouble and for farmers just starting out.

A 1986 congressional study of FmHA practices in Holmes County, Mississippi, found that it took the FmHA nearly four weeks longer to process Black farmers' loan applications than for white applicants. Furthermore, they rejected more than twice as many Blacks' requests for loans as whites.

Blacks supposedly gained their civil rights in the 1960s and early 70s through major legislative action in Congress. But economic, political and social rights that would make civil rights a living reality cannot and will never be legislated. Although the current land crisis is greatly aggravated by the Reagan Administration, the oppression faced by Black America is not merely a racist backlash of the conservative 1980s. It has been institutionalized since the beginning of the slavery system in America. Afro-American people have been oppressed by systematic miseducation and economic deprivation, dutifully upheld by a racist judicial system.

Black land loss is the most recent encroachment by this structure. It threatens the Black Belt South, the area that constitutes a homeland for Afro-American people and serves as a base in the struggle for Black independence.

Centuries of poor education and poverty have left Blacks unprepared to combat the loss of Black land. Matthew Grant, a Black farmer from Tillery, North Carolina, states it succinctly: "The Black farmer, all he was educated for was working." Due to the lack of proper education, Blacks are more likely to sign unfair agreements which they cannot read and less likely to have wills which will ensure against the vulnerability of inherited land. The poverty of rural Black families often times prevents them from paying local property taxes on their land.

Community Disintegration

It is also becoming increasingly common to have "absentee heirs," children who have moved off the land to search for ways to make a living in the cities. One study shows that in Mississippi, the state with the largest amount of Black-owned land, more farmland is owned by Blacks living in Chicago than Blacks still living in Mississippi.

The deliberate dismantling of rural Black people's economic and political power is resulting in the disintegration of rural Black communities, the exodus of homeless Black families to the cities, and the ever increasing rate of Black-on-Black crime.

There are too many Blacks in the cities who become added welfare statistics; they become dependent on the inadequate social programs that shore up the cycle of poverty. Thus the Black rural crisis cannot be separated from the Black urban crisis. Black land loss is a recreation of the slavery system for all Black people: we become again a helpless, powerless, and landless people.

Many Black absentee heirs who are able to make a living fail to recognize the significance of Black land ownership for their own political and economic well-being. They do not keep up on tax payments, or they give in to speculators' offers. Speculators know the value of the land and have perfected the art of double-talking working-class heirs into selling their property. The Black working class must become equally conscious and realize that the speculators' money is temporary, but the political and economic base gained by the speculators through land ownership endures.

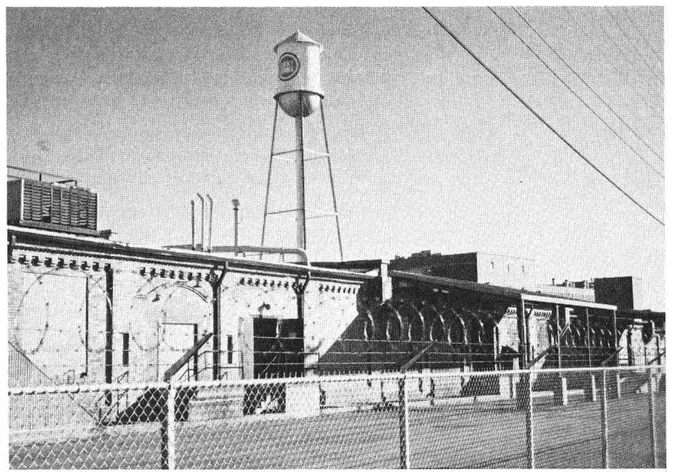
According to the *Sixth Edition of the Profile of North Carolina Counties* published in 1981, within the 21 counties which comprise northeastern North Carolina, there are 5,783,500 acres of arable land. In 1954 there were 2,570 full-time Black farmers working 116,888 acres. However in 1979 there were only 529 full-time Black farmers working 26,876 acres, a drop of 79%. The remaining acreage is broken down as follows: white farmers till 1,283,812 acres; 3,572,200 acres is used to grow timber and is owned by outside owners; 233,909 acres is owned by the federal government and used mostly for military bases or parks; the other 810,600 acres is used for urban purposes. To further erode the land base, the number of "superfarms" is increasing, spreading loss of local control over land and having a major impact on governmental policies which directly affect land use.

William Johnson, President of the Urban League of Rochester, has called for urban Blacks to take a stand on Black land loss:

> While many of us have escaped the daily despair, we cannot escape the enormous implications of this problem. The fate of rural and urban America are inextricably bound...These farmers need our financial support, but they need something more. They need our moral and political support, to reform the political and economic policies which are driving them into extinction.

Black farmers and the Black working class are fighting a common adversary--corporate America. Blacks are united in history by our ancestors' oppression, and we must unite in this crisis on all fronts. Under the plantation system, large landowners required forced labor, and so our ancestors suffered under slavery. With the slow dismantling of the plantation system, some Blacks became small farmers. Now agribusiness demands direct control of the land. While taking Black land, agribusiness simultaneously creates for itself an exploitable Black working class for their non-union processing plants and textile mills.

The industries brought into the northeast region of North Carolina seek to perpetuate the cycle of poverty. Such sweat shops as sewing factories, processing plants and others who seek to avoid unionization locate in



Jerry Savage

Just as small farmers face elimination, the jobs of workers in the agricultural processing factories are threatened by the introduction of new technologies and high capitalization.

northeastern North Carolina. These low-paying, low-skill jobs are the ones that feel the nation's economic lurches or recessions immediately. The workers are constantly subject to layoffs and no increases in pay. A study prepared by Frank Adams and Donna Dyer in 1981 shows that in only 2 of the 21 counties in this region did average weekly wages approach the state-wide average of $222.56 in 1979. Seven of the counties reported wages that averaged less than two-thirds of the state's 1979 average. In the same year, North Carolina became the nation's eighth most industrialized state, yet ranked 50th in the nation for average weekly wages for industry.

Of course these low wages carry over into the Black working class' daily lives as they struggle to make ends meet. The agribusiness monopolies have successfully raised consumer prices by 30% over the past six years, while the prices they pay to farmers for their produce has declined during that same period, actually falling below the farmers' cost of production.

According to the Texas Department of Agriculture's Farmers Assistance Program, agribusiness is "making obscene profits off a federal farm policy that is driving family farmers out of business, undermining the benefits the consumer receives from the competitive structure of agriculture, adding to our national trade deficit, and threatening to increase interest rates by 2 or 3 percent." Meanwhile, taxpayers and consumers paid 26 billion dollars last year in subsidies to the agribusiness monopolies.

Black Farmworkers Powerful Potential

Currently agriculture creates and maintains twenty-three million jobs. These twenty-three million workers represent the potential of a powerful group if united to fight the exploitation of all the "have-nots" in the agriculture industry: the small farmer, the working class in agriculturally-related industry, and the migrant workers and day laborers.

Blacks make up a significant proportion of these groups, and must be in the vanguard of this coalition. We must oppose racist policies and practices of the FmHA and private lending institutions. We must oppose federal policy that upholds agribusiness against the small farmer. And we must oppose agribusiness monopolies which offer landless people only one choice: an underpaid job, usually with the added benefit of unhealthy working conditions.

For example, as Black farmers face imminent elimination in northeastern North Carolina, Perdue Farms, Inc., has sunk a large proportion of its billion-dollar poultry industry there. In a recent presentation to the North Carolina Agribusiness Council, Frank Perdue stated that "North Carolina is where our company will grow in the future." Perdue Farms is infamous for its low wages, unsafe working conditions, and intimidation of workers who apply for workers' compensation for job-related injuries.

Furthermore, just as small farmers face elimination, the future for the working class is equally insecure. The same technological revolution and high capitalization in agriculture which today overpowers small farmers will eventually come to the processing factories and textile mills. Large scale mechanization will allow agribusiness to further consolidate and automate their production process. A united front is necessary to prevent the loss of jobs in the agriculture industry.

Blacks must be unified in the struggle. A "landless people is a helpless people." We must make short-term financial sacrifices in resisting speculators' temptations and in maintaining tax payments on the land. We must contribute financially to our family members, friends, communities and other organizations who are struggling to help Blacks save that balance of land which still remains in our possession. Blacks must call upon their churches and church leadership to take a progressive and active position in this struggle for Black independence. Most important, we must actively apply and maintain political pressure on all levels, in order to revolutionize the historic and current discriminatory structures that perpetuate oppression against Black people. As Ghana's first national president, Kwame Nkrumah, declared, "Seek ye first the political kingdom and all things shall be added unto you." ■

Maxine Mills-Donnan

Black Theology and the Southern Church

Reverends John Mendez, Ray Sommerville, and James Williams

FM: It's clear the Black church has always provided a central survival role for the Afro-American nation, particularly in the South. But over the past twenty-five years or so, the massive dislocation of the Black community through desegregation, migration to the North, and migration back must have put some tremendous strains on the Black church. Can you talk a little about how you see these changes affecting the church? Your own roles as ministers?

Rev. Mendez: It's true that the role of the Black church has changed, but I think there are still the same basic trends that have always been there, trends that have run through Black religious thinking in America all the way from slavery through Reconstruction and the various freedom movements. Basically there has been a trend of religious thinking which sought to accommodate itself to the conditions of slavery and oppression and there has been a liberation trend represented by people like Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, Gabriel Prosser and others up to Martin Luther King and Malcolm X.

You know in any kind of social movement you have ebb and flow. This is true here. In the sixties the Black liberation movement affected many different areas of our culture including religion; there was a lot of struggle and calls and cries for liberation.

In the seventies we attempted to accommodate and we expected a lot. There was this hope and dream that we had arrived. And many Blacks *did* break through, as far as becoming upper middle class. So you had a lot of folks who in the sixties cried "Burn, baby burn" here in the seventies and eighties talking about "Stop them folks from crying out." They have made a certain kind of arrival. But the fact is that for the masses of folk reality has not changed a heck of a whole lot. And we are in many ways worse off now than we were back then.

Before he died, Dr. King talked about a poor people's campaign

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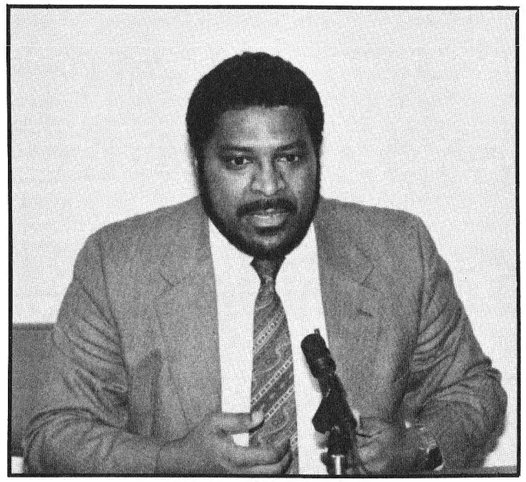
Rev. John Mendez is pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, NC. Rev. Mendez attended Shaw University, Morehouse School of Religion and Southeastern Baptist Seminary. He has been an organizer and business agent for AFSCME Local 77 in Durham, NC and a member of the African Liberation Support Committee, the Racial Justice Working Group of the National Council of Churches, the Black Theology Project, and the Progressive National Baptist Convention.

Rev. Ray Sommerville is pastor of Young Missionary Temple (CME) in Raleigh, NC. He is a graduate of Duke Divinity School and is affiliated with the National Rainbow Coalition and North Carolinians Against Apartheid.

Rev. James Williams is pastor at House of the Lord Church in Raleigh, NC. Rev. Williams is Vice President of the African Peoples Christian Organization. He was a founding member of the Raleigh Black United Front, host of the radio show, "What's Going On?" and columnist for the Mahogany Journal.

The interview was conducted for FM *by two staff members of the Justice Speaks Radio Program. The ministers have asked to have a second session, perhaps expanding the group.*



Reverend John Mendez

and the object of that campaign was to assault the oppressive nature of capitalism. He understood that the good life was not just around the corner. Those of us who tried to keep the goals and objectives of our struggle in focus knew that we would have to continue to fight some more because those issues never got resolved. So I would say that the mission of the church has not changed. The agenda of both Dr. King and Malcolm is still waiting to be fulfilled.

Meanwhile, the middle class and upper middle class people who moved out to the suburbs and separated themselves from the reality of Black folk in the community are now experiencing a rude awakening and realizing that regardless of what accomplishments they made over the past years they are on shaky ground. Because white folks--not just white folk but particularly the ruling class of this country--have decided that they don't need a whole lot of us folk. They are taking advantage of the world market to produce everything they want. So we can see with Reagan letting these corporations and banks loose, they are just swallowing up everything. We see more and more middle class people pushed into the marginalized parts of our society. And as Marx once said, in the end we will have two great camps: the very rich and the poor. We can see that happening.

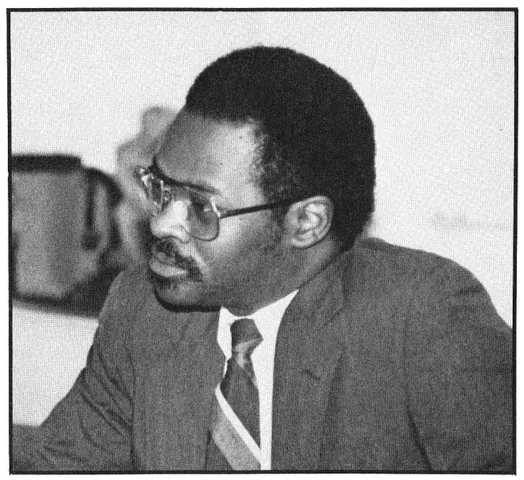
So, I would say that the agenda has remained the same. The objectives are still there. It is just that we have gone through a period of illusions because certain folks have broken through and wanted to see that as an end in itself when in fact it was anything but that.

FM: O.K. The agenda may not have changed, but on Sunday and Wednesday nights does the Black church really still address those issues? I mean, the Black church was what fed folks, helped folks "get it together." "Wade in the Water" came out of that. "Roll Jordan Roll" came out of that.

On the way here I was listening to Martin's speeches to SCLC in late 1967 when he began to say to folks: "You've been slouching. It's alright. Just admit you've been slouching and let's move ahead." He talked about the ministry to the valley; he talked about the poor people's campaign. The man broke it down, broke it down.

Granted there may be a resurgence of that to some degree--Jesse and the Rainbow are clear continuations--but the kinds of things that you all are talking about seem to be spoken about by a very small minority of Black ministers, much less *acted* on in the day-to-day of congregational life. Even projects that don't necessarily challenge the status quo--like the National Black Baptists' housing development plan--aren't they the exception not the rule? [Several years ago, the Black Baptists began to address economic development; housing, including low income apartments, was a focus--ed.]

Reverend Ray Sommerville



Reverend James Williams

Rev. Sommerville: Let me respond to that. I do agree with that assessment and I would be the first to admit that the Black church, particularly the Black church leadership, has lost its role as the vanguard of the struggle in recent years. We can attribute that partly to what Brother Mendez was saying about the two streams--one of survivalism and the other a radical thrust for liberation. We are still seeing an emphasis on survivalism and mutual Black support. But we are also seeing that turn into a situation where a lot of the churches are focusing on their own individual needs like building projects, where ministers are focusing (particularly in Methodist churches) on getting elected Bishop, and Baptist preachers are looking for bigger and better churches.

There has been some effort, on the national ecumenical scene, to bring Black churches together to form organizations that address the critical needs of our people at the grassroots. One that comes to mind is the National Congress of Black Churchmen, which is an effort to rally Black churches and to mobilize their resources so that we can address the real needs of our people. [The National Congress of Black Churchmen functioned in the 1960s and was the forerunner of the Black Theology Project.--ed.] I do see an insurgency, particularly with the Rainbow Coalition. But I was dismayed that even at the Rainbow Convention there was not a forum for Black religion or Black churches. I think Black ministers were under-represented at the Conference. We were not in the forefront. Jesse is in the forefront, but as a group coming together and coalescing we were not present. The convention missed out on the contributions it could have gotten from real grassroots ministers who are involved in the trenches.

Rev. Williams: If we look at the Black church, even during slavery, but particularly during the Civil Rights Movement and the evolution of the Black Power Movement, we can see that the church has always been challenged by the movement. As the people move, so moves the church. The Black Manifesto was the church's response to the challenge of the Black Power Movement. [The 1968 Manifesto was written by James Forman on behalf of the Black Economic Development Conference, asking white churches for reparations to be used to develop Black institutions-ed.] In the same way, the Rainbow Coalition and what happened in '84 in Jesse's campaign was not really Jesse or the Rainbow; it was the people. It was a movement I don't think any of us really expected to move.

So one can see that the church has to be held accountable by the people. It either has to shut up or put up. And hopefully as the need intensifies for our people to address issues or face our demise, the church will respond.

Rev. Mendez: Even though there has been a relaxing in the role of the Black church and Black leadership during this period, still very little happens in the Black community without the Black church. Anybody that wants to get elected somehow or other has to make his or her way to the Black church. The Black church on Wednesday night prayer meetings may not be as large as they used to be, but they get larger depending on the situation. On Sunday morning we have a pretty good congregation and there are certain times when we have more folk there because something has happened that affects the community, and the church is the only institution that Black folk own and control in the Black community. Black folk can raise money, and they raise it through the church. For example, my budget is $274,000.00. But the mutual aid societies that were established years ago have now become transformed into church-sponsored building projects, so most of our money is tied up directly in the church. One challenge is to use our budgets more collectively.

The Darryl Hunt case [a black youth from Winston Salem accused of raping and killing a white news reporter--ed.] is a good example of how, even in a conser-

Jim French/Charleston Chronicle

Very little happens in the Black community without the church. Here a minister participates in a memorial service for Tom Key, a Black murder victim, in front of the South Carolina Highway Patrol office.

vative city like Winston-Salem, we were able to get mass support through the churches. We were able to raise over $30,000.00 in appeal money. We held rallies at my church which were pretty well supported. We've had some marches. Some of the older ministers who have a sense of commitment to the community (although a lot of them aren't sure what to do or have been caught up in the system somewhat) had to support the movement, primarily because their members were involved. So when I came in, conditions were ripe to help organize the community. And maybe this is where many of us in the church have to find our role--the gadfly Socrates used to talk about--somebody who comes in and begins to stir up a situation. All it takes is somebody with some motive and some vision to do that.

This is why I contend that the agenda hasn't changed, the situation has not really changed. Dr. King and Malcolm died with that agenda unfulfilled and no matter how many bandaids we put on the situation we still will have to deal with that. If we can break through those illusions then we can reveal the reality of the picture as it is: the socio-economic system itself which very few of us are talking about.

One of the new things that is happening (and I'm really glad that you have brought us together today) is that I look at brothers here who have these new ideas and have a perspective on Black liberation theology which years ago brothers didn't have. They had a perspective on struggle but it wasn't developed into any kind of theology. James Cone is addressing that now. The Pentecostal brother in Connecticut, Cornell West, is doing a lot of writing on that. So in our theology we see some new evolution toward addressing these much broader questions. But understand, this is serious because anybody who addresses these questions is put in direct conflict with the very heart and nature of what this nation is about. We have seen folk get killed. Also this will cause a lot of division among Black folk themselves.

Rev. Williams: Yes, the agenda is still there and to use improper vernacular: "You ain't seen nothing yet." Those traditions force people to respond. The church is still alive. Plus this time we'll be coming back with people like these brothers--Cornell West, James Cone--

which we didn't have before. Our thinking is formulated.

FM: Can you talk a little more about Black liberation theology, how you came to it, and also, how you see its relation to Liberation Theology as articulated by Latin American religious leaders?

Rev. Williams: Growing up in the church, I'd always felt something was missing in the way the gospel related to me. My interest in liberation theology stemmed from a void I had felt for many years in relation to my culture and my faith. I was attracted to Black theology because it encompassed liberation but put a strong emphasis on Black culture. This was where I began. As I grew over the years I came to broaden my ideas about liberation, to strive for liberation not only for African-Americans, but for all people.

Rev. Sommerville: I was baptized in Southern Black liberation theology during its hey-day, when Jim Cone, Wilmore and the others were beginning to do some serious writing. One particular day I happened to venture into a bookstore and pick up Guttierez's book on liberation theology; it really opened my eyes on liberation theology, especially what was going on in the Third World communities. The first thing I was attracted to was Latin American liberation theology's emphasis on class analysis. That's something that Black liberation theology had not gotten to yet. Only in recent years has there been an emphasis on that part of our oppression. Another aspect of liberation theology that is almost taboo in certain Black quarters is its relationship with Marxist analysis as a tool for examining the roots of our oppression and also as a means of coming up with some viable strategies. And so, in that sense I benefited from my exposure to Latin American theology.

Rev. Mendez: I was a student here at Shaw when James Cone and the "Black Churchmen" group were on the college campuses. We didn't know what to call it then, but we were participating in the development of some kind of Black Theology. It was a developing trend across the country in response to the Black power movement which presented a tremendous challenge to the Black church at the time. I'm talking around 1967, '68, '69.

Liberation theology took a look at traditional theology, and said: "Religion does have a place in politics." "Look, we can struggle for our freedom and justice and equality, that must become the end goal, that is redemption, that is salvation." "Not just the spiritual part of humankind, but also the material reality has to be liberated." It sought to bring those two things together.

What is interesting is that at the same time people like Gustavo Guttierez were also beginning to look at the Latin American situation in terms of its religious tradition. Historically they had accommodated themselves to the oppression that came through the colonial powers and the Catholic church. They began to see that the basis of their oppression was not that Indians or Latin Americans were lazy, sorry people, but rather the export of capitalism to their country and the rise of dictators supported and controlled by countries like the United States. They realized they had to organize and develop a faith that would give them the strength and substance and motivation to fight against that situation, even if it meant going up against the church, which many of them did. And they studied the examples, as I understand it, within the United States, particularly the liberation struggles as promoted and perpetuated by Dr. King and Malcolm.

Rev. Mendez: A couple things I'd like to add: There *has* been some tension in the dialogue between Black liberation theology and Latin American liberation theology. As Brother Sommerville pointed out, Latin American liberation theology puts heavy emphasis on the class question; in Black liberation theology, the emphasis lies heavily upon the race question. So you have Black liberation theologians criticizing the Latin theologians, saying that they do not put enough weight on racism. And the Latin Americans are saying to Black theologians: you're not putting enough weight on the class question. Which says something, in my own thinking, about a need for a synthesis of the two. The fact that we're poor speaks to the class issue and the fact that we're Black and poor in America speaks to the race issue. I might as well add the third one--the question of sexism--because Black women suffer triple oppression in terms of class, sexism, and racism. But there *is* some tension there.

Also it's worth mentioning the dialogue has broadened beyond just Latin American and Black American liberation theology. It's taking place as well with African theology and Asian theology.

FM: Could you say a little bit about the Theology Project?

Rev. Mendez: The Black Theology Project, of which I am a part, is an organization that was established back in

the late 1960s, early 1970s, coming out of the Congress of Black Churchmen. James Cone had just begun to write, and we saw there was a need to get into dialogue with other theologies of liberation around the world so that it would not just remain a nationalistic movement. The project is committed to the task of continuing to develop the Black religious tradition and provide a theoretical basis for our movement that is relevant to the Black church. We have a convocation once a year in January.

Rev. Sommerville: But is it really filtering down to the local churches? The papers you've written would be very pertinent for every Black church. But is Black liberation theology in principal and practice filtering down to local churches? In my denomination I could unequivocably say "no way!" (Laughter) We had our national convocation in which the best and brightest minds of our churches taught sessions on just about every subject--sexuality, the AIDS crisis, teaching in the church--but in terms of addressing the needs of our people with liberation theology nothing at all was mentioned. The subject was not even broached.

"Not just the spiritual part of humankind, but also the material reality has to be liberated."

Rev. Mendez: That is still a problem. How do we make what the scholars are talking about relevant to local church action? The Latin Americans are much further developed than we are. In Latin America, they broke away (I'm talking about the priests who made a decision that they would become the church of the poor). They started organizing base communities. I saw that when I was in Nicaragua a few years ago and also in Honduras. Those base communities were excellent vehicles for bringing about change. It worked in Nicaragua. In a lot of other places they are under constant attack.

One of the problems is that we are trying to practice liberation theology through our older, formal institutions. They became, on the one hand, vehicles of struggle but on the other hand, lets face it, a way of integrating us into the culture, into the society. The laws that govern these institutions operate the same for anybody regardless of race, so we have to be careful if we don't want to find ourselves becoming carbon copies of white folk who have created the history of these institutions. We will become just as oppressive as they are. I hope the Black Theology Project can provide the kind of vehicle that offers alternatives as we struggle within this particular system. It is small now but it is growing. The more we can get young theologians and preachers and ministers involved in it eventually it will filter down.

Rev. Williams: We tend to be reactive. It just may be something like the contingency plan, if you've ever read Samuel Yette's book, *The Choice*, that may spark the movement of people which will then force the church to respond. Then we will respond with the tools we have developed through such things as the Black Theology Project. We must remember the context in which all this happened in Latin America; it happened through a struggle. We have been put to sleep with the lure of assimilation. It is sad to say that it may take something like the contingency plan or some mass oppression to wake us up. [Samuel Yette's book, first published in the late 1960s, described a plan to relocate and incarcerate Black people in the event of Black rebellion. The site of the camps was to be the same ones used to incarcerate Japanese-Americans during World War II-ed.]

FM: I know all of you--like most Black Americans--have roots in the South. But you've also all lived in the urban North. Could you talk some about the differences between the South and the North as it affects the church? Also the differences between the urban and the rural church. I know there are still rural ministers who travel the circuit like they did 150 years ago--holding services in a place once a month and so on.

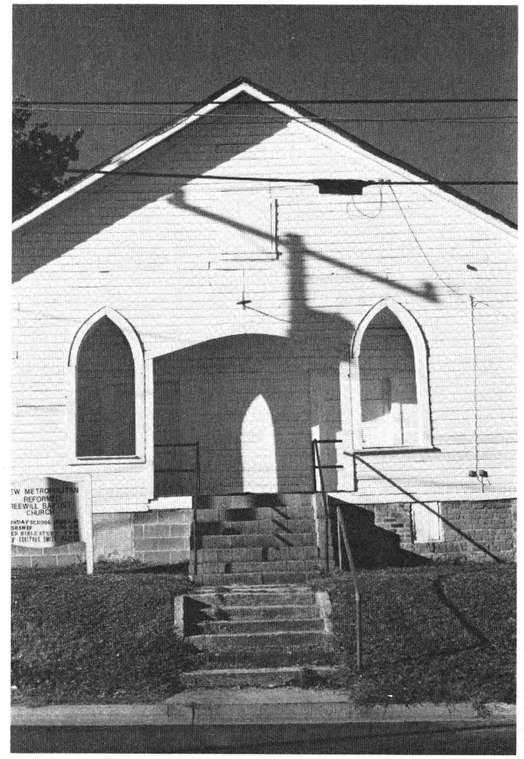
Rev. Mendez: I've had first-hand experience in both. I grew up in New York. I never pastored in New York but I did pastor in a rural church not far from here in the Wendell/Zebulon area and then pastored in an urban situation. I served with Dr. Charles W. Ward of the First Baptist Church for at least five or six years while I was a student at Shaw [University Theological Seminary]. And yes, there is a big difference. Although, as I say to young preachers, the rural church is a good place to start, because if you understand the rural church, learn to deal with it, you find the same folk when you get to the city.

Many of those rural churches are what you call "family churches." They may be run or dominated by three or four different families whose histories go way back. They can tell you who "Master so-and-so" was, where these children came from...everybody knows everything about everybody. You have basically a farm community. Where I pastored, there used to be a lot of big tobacco farmers. So, for three or four months during tobacco time you didn't see them; they were out there in the fields. Your budget went down, attendance went down. So you have all of those kind of forces working.

In a lot of those churches there is a heavy emphasis on education, and school teachers are some of the most important folk in the community. There is always somebody in the congregation who is heavy into the NAACP or involved in other things. For instance, in the church where I pastored there was a lady by the name of Ruth Morgan who was fighting to get the NAACP organized back in the thirties and forties, and she was harassed and went to jail during those years. People didn't even want to sign a card to become a member of the NAACP. She fought through all of that. She was responsible for getting Blacks elected. She was a very elderly lady when I arrived but the story is still told about her. There was another lady who was inspired by her example who took up the leadership of the NAACP and continued to fight.

Many of the struggles we had when Ben Chavis was going through here took place in rural areas. We were able to utilize the churches and the people supported us very well in a lot of those areas. Dr. King found a lot of support, you recall, from a lot of those people. So I would say that the rural situation is still fertile ground. The potential for struggle is still there but you have a lot to cut through. Rural folk tend to follow other people. They are slow but they can be stirred up. What the Black rural church needs is consistent, solid leadership over a period of time. Most pastors or preachers have their eyes on bigger goals, see the rural church as a stepping stone. You figure five or six years there, and you're going to move on. Even when I was pastoring in Wendell I knew I was going to move on.

Rev. Somerville: I grew up and went to school in Alabama, so I got a lot of exposure to rural counties, especially Greene County, Alabama which is a predominantly Black county. I just want to affirm the point that the rural mentality is a lot different from the urban mentality and I don't mean that in a pejorative sense. It is just that they do things differently. The pastor may not be in charge. The members may be in charge. They have their own ways of doing things. But as people are moving to the cities, they are bringing some of those same beliefs and practices with them. In my church, and in churches where I have pastored in Raleigh and Durham, you have that rural mentality still operating in the church.



Jerry Savage

Black churches developed in reaction to segregated white-dominated churches. Rev. Richard Allen called on Blacks to leave and organize their own churches.

While I was growing up, Black folks in Greene County were on the move. It was primarily a grass roots effort. And I agree that the opportunity is still there to mobilize through the rural churches as well as urban churches. I did a survey in my denomination last year asking the lay people if their pastor was addressing the political and social issues of their area. Overwhelmingly the members reported yes. Even though the pastor was out of town, absentee, he was still addressing the issues in the community. They saw that as a very positive thing.

Rev. Williams: My orientation is the same as the others.

I grew up in New York and went to school there. In doing political work here in the South, when we go to rural areas it would not be Mt. Zion this-or-that church we are pastoring, it would be **The Church**. The minister usually responds to the church, especially in the rural South. The people respond to the leadership that comes out of the community. The leadership comes from the people. This is different from the North where the pastor takes a more predominant leadership role.

FM: One last question--on the religious right. What has been its impact on Southern society?

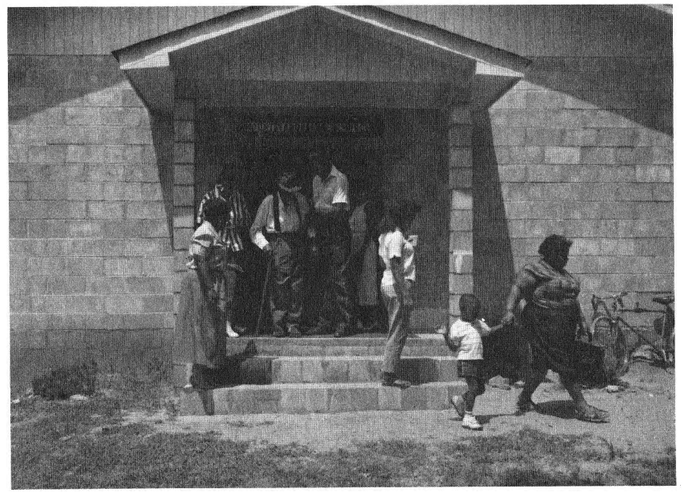
Rev. Mendez: As you know, fundamentalism as a theology originally developed as a response to evolutionary science and as a reaction against the whole liberal movement that developed in the latter part of the 19th century and early part of the 20th century. Politically the fundamentalist movement has always been a conservative trend. But even though the fundamentalists were political, the fundamentalist movement for years held the philosophy that religion and politics just don't mix.

As a number of writers have pointed out, the day after Goldwater lost the election white conservatives went underground and started organizing. The Falwells, the Vigueries, the Helms, the Pat Robertsons, the Bakkers, they laid their foundation, they found themselves a leader to bring to power in the person of Ronald Reagan. And when that machine emerged you saw the church and politics and everything else that was conservative mixed in together. What it really turned out to be (what it was from its beginning) was a counter-progressive and counter-revolutionary force.

This is something that Dr. King used to warn us about time and again when he talked about the backlash. He wasn't just talking about somebody throwing a bottle through your window because you took a stand one day; he was talking of the undoing of the gains of the sixties. Every revolution, every movement has its counter force and that is what this turned out to be.

If you look at the New Right and fundamentalism, they support every reactionary, conservative dictatorship throughout the world. Look at who gives support to the Nicaraguan contras. Who supports Botha in South Africa. Who supports the reactionary government in South Korea. Who supported Thieu in Viet Nam. Who worked for the overthrow of Castro. These folk are solid about their objectives. If they are against red, they are against Black. If they are against Black, they are against red. They see red and Black and that's all.

Many Black people have been getting excited lately because white folk just learned how to beat the tambourine, how to cut a few steps in their churches. But Black folk should never lose focus of the fact that these people work against our interests and against the interests of other progressive people throughout the world. Remember, these are the same white folk who during the week are trying to cheat you out of your job, get you fired. They don't intend for you to become dominant in their church. Remember the reason we have a Black church in the first place is because white folk did not let us integrate with them in the white church. We were slaves sitting up in the balcony. We could not pray with them. Richard Allen said: "We will leave and organize our own church." That has not changed.



The opportunity is still there to mobilize through the rural churches. In Keysville, Georgia, many community meetings were held at the local church.

Historically the Black church has always supported progressive movements. Going back to Frederick Douglass' day when he protested against the Spanish American War, the Black church supported his efforts. In Viet Nam the Black church took a stand. The Black church has supported progressive struggles in South Africa and Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea Bissau, Zimbabwe, etc.

There is a campaign being organized now by the White House and the CIA, in which disinformation is intentionally being spread particularly about what is happening in South Africa and Central America. This campaign has zeroed in on the Black community and the Black church. The Moonies (Moon himself was closely connected to the CIA) have been offering Black ministers prepaid trips to conferences in Korea and Japan. And what is the subject matter of these conferences? Anti-communism, anti-Marxism. In essence what it boils down to is anti-Black Liberation Theology. It is an attempt to do a thorough brainwashing job on the Black church, to undermine the new protest thought that has developed in the Black church, particularly among those of us who have been part of the struggle for the last couple of decades. The new bloods that are developing are being threatened by this disinformation campaign in particular.

So the attempt is counter-revolutionary--to brainwash the Black church. They don't want another Martin Luther King, Jr. ever to arise again. And what is the way to immobilize the Black community other than to go at its leadership? So that the few of us who try to keep the issues up front, who try to deal with the truth are always in danger of becoming isolated, ostracized.

To give you an example, Savimbi is the counterrevolutionary leader in South Africa who is fighting against the legitimate government of Angola. He is supported by white South Africa and has gotten over $50 million dollars from the United States government to perpetuate that war. Right now he is in this country traveling around to Black churches, running his line. I saw a Black preacher in Alabama on the news the other day who is taking up that particular cause.

And what is the issue? Communism. And yet communism is not responsible for the racism and apartheid in South Africa. Communism is not responsible for Black boys and Black girls not being able to get hot lunches in America. Communism is not responsible for the millions of Blacks and whites who are unemployed in this country. Or for a Black getting shot down in the back because he stole a bottle of wine. You could go on. But America knows that all you have to do is mention the word communism and white folk turn into a frenzy and will oppose anything. Black folk are not moving toward communism. Black folk want justice, they want truth, they want righteousness, they want liberation--total liberation. The issue is not communism. They are hiding behind the communist hysteria to keep folk focused on that, to undermine and undo all the progress we have made.

Rev. Williams: There's a strong movement in the Black church away from traditional Black religion and becoming more and more like the Humbards, the Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagan. Young professional Black people are being drawn into this movement. They support Jesse Helms, they support Reagan.

So what is it that attracts our people to these movements? As the brother said, they see white folks picking up tambourines, white folk able to cut a step. And for so long one of our mentalities has been that if white folks sanctioned this stuff, it's got to be right. So they think that if they are sitting next to a white person and that white person is shouting and if they worship together, that is good.

We really have no problem with some of the theological arguments of the fundamentalists. Everybody loves family and Black folk are always appreciating life. We've never disregarded our young. But you've got to get beyond that. The question is how do you take people beyond that to see what is really happening? Those of us who are progressive, who have eyes that can see, have to get the message across. Because these brothers and sisters have eyes but can see not and ears that can hear not, they are being drawn into a camp whose broad agenda will bring no good to any of us.

Rev. Mendez: To piggy back on what Brother Williams said, the family issue as well as the issues of abortion, prayer in the schools, were the smoke screen issues, but their real agenda has been hiding behind that. What Falwell and all those others don't tell you is that they may be pro-life before a baby is born (they will fight like hell to save a fetus) and then kill the baby after it is born

through denying a Black mother enough food and milk and heat to provide for her children. The same thing with prayer in the school. They talk about how the country degenerated after they took prayer out of the school. For Black folk the degeneration and depression was nothing new. We live in a constant state of depression.

I think you also hit on something very important when you talked about the middle class Blacks who are attracted to these white fundamentalist churches and organizations. They went to Harvard. They went to Yale. They went to Duke. And all of a sudden they find out what is right in the world, but what they consider right in the world is anti-themselves. Malcolm said the worst thing that this country has done to us is not the fact that it enslaved us but that it taught us how to hate ourselves. So many of us still subconsciously as well as consciously believe that "if you're white, you're right, if you're brown stick around, if you're Black get back."

Let me give you an example. A Black man and a white woman go to one of these churches, and all the time they're there the ministers and the congregation do everything they can to undermine that marriage or relationship because biblically they believe that Black and white are innately separable. Blacks are inferior and whites are superior. Therefore they should not be wedded together. I was talking with a couple out in Oklahoma last week and the guy was saying "I should get rid of my wife, I should separate because the Bible teaches that." So insane things go on in these institutions.

Rev. Williams: The sad part is that one of their directions is to finance larger Black churches.

Reverend Mendez: Yes, and most of our middle class Blacks suffer from the same problem that white middle class folk suffer from--jumboism. The bigger a thing is, that means it's got to be right and has to be greater. They don't have a commitment to the magnificent minority, so to speak. When I was down in Nicaragua and whenever I go to Africa, it is the small things that really inspire me. You can become one with nature again. Whereas our jumbo mentality is about destroying nature to put up concrete buildings and concrete ground.

We've gotten away from what corresponds with the nature of who we are as people. King, before he died, came to that realization. He said maybe as Black folk we should come together first; we should deal with ourselves first before talking about integration. Integration means taking from the white man everything he has to give us, not realizing that we have something to give him through 300 years of struggle that is more valuable than what he has to give us. It isn't him having to save us. So I think that was the contribution that the Black Theology Project and other Black organizations have made. If we can turn that table around it ought not to be Black folk running after white folk; white folk ought to be running after Black folk for their own salvation.

FM: I think this discussion certainly will be beneficial to the readers of Forward Motion, but I would like to ask if it has been of any benefit to the three of you?

Rev. Mendez: Oh absolutely. It is just refreshing to talk common language with brothers who are moving in the same direction.

Rev. Sommerville: I don't get this very often.

Rev. Williams: Yes, you draw strength from one another, and I can say I've drawn tremendous strength from you. It's something we need to keep in mind from the Latin American experience: they draw strength from one another. ■

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Black Women Workers and the South

We Are Our Own Liberators!

Since 1986, the Black Workers For Justice Women's Commission has sought to lead BWFJ work among Black women workers, educate and mobilize the organization around the specific needs of Black women workers and provide a mechanism for Black women workers to become involved. The Commission targetted work inside a small textile plant where the vast majority of workers are Black women and has done support work for other women workers.

Currently the Commission is conducting a Women's Speak-Out Campaign, enabling women to "speak out," struggle for solutions, and buiid mutual support as workers in the workplace, community and home. One of the key issues that has emerged is the level of abuse of women and children going on inside Black households.

The following article is the result of various discussions and conversations within the commission. In writing it, we hoped to spark discussion within the Black liberation movement and trade union movement as well as provide another voice of Black working women. If you ask many Black working women, the African-American national liberation movement has a lot to prove. If we are to win ultimate political power, our Black liberation revolution will have to convince the millions of Black women that it is truly committed to transforming and developing every aspect of their lives--at work, with their families and in the community. And it is Black women who will have to set the example, in fact lead the struggle as an integral and significant part of the Black working class in these arenas. The liberation movement also has to convince and educate Black women that only through the national liberation struggle can women win and ensure their full economic, social, and political rights at the workplace, in the home and the community.

It has become customary, when referring to women's participation in Black people's struggles for power and justice, to cite the great heroines--Harriet Tubman, Fannie Lou Hammer, Queen Mother Moore, Assata Shakur-as proof that women have been pillars of these struggles. Yet the very act of romanticizing these few women has often allowed men and many women to ignore the thousands of less well-known Black women who continue to be vital and active contributors to the Black nation.

Anonymous Black Women Leaders

Because it is common knowledge that the Black church is a pivotal institution in the Black community, the Black minister is always formally recognized as a key Black leader. It is much more rarely recognized that the organizational spine of the Black church has been, and still is, made up of Black women. The "mother" of the church (usually the eldest female member) has historically held great influence and respect, albeit informal, in most every congregation.

The church is not the only place where women's activism has shone through, nor is it the only organization Black women workers have helped to build and maintain. The history of Black YWCAs, sororities, and middle class women's organizations like the National Council of Negro Women--focusing upon "uplift," mutual aid and self-help--has already been told. But the documentation of Black women workers' activism has not.

In the 1940s, the war industries were shaken by the March on Washington Movement to desegregate the war-mobilized factories, and Black women played a major role. "We ought to throw fifty thousand Negroes around the White House, bring them from all over the country in jalopies, in trains and any way they can get there...until we get some action [on the integration of defense industries-ed.] from the White House." [Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love...*] These were the words of a woman delegate to a 1940 civil rights convention held in Chicago that instigated the March on Washington Movement. In 1942, Black potential workers and Black rank-and-file workers, with support from unions,

Activism of Black women workers has a long, though not always well-known history. Here workers march in support of striking furniture unionists.

the NAACP, the Negro Youth Council for Victory and Democracy, Double Victory Clubs, and the Urban League staged protests and mass meetings to publicize the refusal by the Detroit auto industry to hire Black people, especially Black women. This would eventually lead to the hiring of ten thousand Black women in Detroit, at least one thousand of whom had received job training.

In the South, where most industrial plants still refused to hire Black women in operative positions, "the air was filled with rumors of mysterious 'Eleanor Clubs' (named for the notorious busybody of a First Lady)--groups of Black women who colluded to withhold their labor from the job market in order to demand unprecedented wage concessions." [*Labor of Love*] Black women "kitchen mechanics" forced improvement in wages and working conditions in domestic service jobs and factory jobs where they were open to Black women.

During this period the unions had mixed reactions to the pressure from Black women and men. Some still refused outright to allow Black membership; in others the response was uneven. The United Auto Workers formed its own Women's Bureau at the national level to monitor cases of discrimination in seniority, wages and promotion. Yet at the shop floor level, many stewards still discouraged Black women from joining the union, even when approached by groups of sisters requesting membership. Several Black women came into prominence by their work as union organizers in this period.

Organized actions by Black working women go back as far as Reconstruction. In Jackson, Mississippi women field hands staged a slow-down and then refused to work until the white landowner met their wage demands. The planter, fearing total crop loss, caved in. Phillip Foner calls this the "first known collective action of free Black working women in American history as well as the first labor organization of Black workers in Mississippi." In the summer of 1881, the Washer Women's Association of Atlanta, three thousand strong, struck over wages. The influence of the strike became widespread and began to effect cooks, houseservants and nursemaids. To crush the strike and break the organization, Atlanta's "city fathers" came in the back door; landlords raised strikers' rents exhorbitantly while the city council debated whether to infict a $25 business license on all laundresses. Black leaders were arrested and fired. Around 1900, Black women participated in successful strikes by the National Tobacco Workers Union; the key to enlisting Black women's activism was union respect for the Black community and a recognition of Black women's importance in that community.

Jumping to 1969, in Charleston, South Carolina, female hospital workers waged an 103 day strike and credited their victory to a "winning combination" of 1199 union power plus SCLC soul power, reflecting a potential link between the civil rights and labor movements. In 1980, one thousand mostly Black women furniture workers struck for ten weeks. Since then, continuing labor dissent has emerged among the mostly Black women poultry workers (Perdue and Holly Farms) and at small textile plants. (For more on this history see *Labor of Love* and on the tobacco industry struggles, see Delores Janiewski, *Subversive Sisterhood...*)

Outside the workplace, the NAACP drew respect from women of the working and middle class. Large numbers of cafeteria workers, social workers, welders, and school teachers joined its ranks as some of its most stalwart forces. When Ms. Rosa Parks, a seamstress, sat down in the front of the bus, she already knew that she was not acting alone. The Montgomery, Alabama Improvement Association, composed of women and men, in which Ms. Parks was a member, had planned ahead to challenge that city's segregated bus system.

Black women also showed great courage in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, although there never was a woman chair of SNCC because of open opposition to women holding such a leadership position. Black women spoke out against male supremacist practices in the organization by circulating a position paper.

Obstructions to Black Women's Leadership

While Black women have been consistently active, they tend to be most active at the local level of organizations. Leadership by working class Black women is much less well-represented at regional, national or international levels.

Key reasons for this tendency both in the Black Liberation Movement and the labor movement are problems of dependable childcare and family pressures. Black women workers usually must "make the house straight" before they can leave even for an overnight trip. "Making sure the house is straight" means, at the least, ensuring that someone is watching the kids, providing meals and clean clothes. Even if her male partner is present, many times this still does not alleviate a woman of her responsibilities. If anything goes wrong during her absence, she is likely to be blamed for being negligent.

A related and very important factor in the drop off of women's participation and leadership at any level is the question of time as a resource. Many women have begun to point out that women workers have very little time to think; men are able to develop politically (theoretically or otherwise) because they have time to think and reflect. And men have this time because women handle and organize all the day-to-day domestic labor, freeing up men for concentrated reflection, study, and therefore political development.

In middle class society, women address this problem through the hiring of "help" and promotion of "self-actualization," etc. divorced from any political/economic analysis or struggle. But Black women workers are the "help" and cannot define themselves in isolation from the national, class and gender dynamics of oppression and exploitation in the South or the United States as a whole.

It should be a foregone conclusion that the African-American National Liberation Movement must chart a new course regarding women--a course new for us but time-honored and battle-tested by national liberation revolutions around the world. If we are to win ultimate political power, our movement will have to convince the millions of Black women that it is truly committed to transforming and developing every aspect of their lives: at work, with their families, and in the community. ■

Some Suggested Readings

Davies, Miranda, ed. *Third World, Second Sex; Women's Struggles and National Liberation*. London: Zed Press, 1983. This compilation of articles and interviews by women of the Third World gives first-hand glimpses of how women are attempting to address political and ideological questions through practical struggle around the fundamental needs of women in their respective countries.

Jones, Jacqueline. *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow; Black Women and the Family From Slavery to the Present*. New York: Vintage Books, 1986. This is one of the first comprehensive chronicles and analyses of the life, work, and conditions facing African-American women, whether in the Black Belt or otherwise. It looks at what work African American women have performed and the impact of that work economically, socially and politically within the family, community and Black Nation as a whole. It shows conclusively that African American women are essential workers and not appendages (wives, daughters, sisters, mothers.) Additionally, the impact of Black women in the workforce and economy is reviewed. While we don't agree entirely with the context in which the author defines the answers to Black women's problems, Jones brings a balanced view on male/female dynamics in the context of our oppression as a people, and contributes to debunking the myth of the "Black matriarchy."

Marx, Karl, Frederick Engels, V.I. Lenin, Joseph Stalin. *The Women Question: Selections from the Writings*. New York: International, 1975. This book of excerpts is a must for anyone wishing to understand the development of socialist ideology and its analysis and projections concerning women's oppression.

Urdang, Stephanie. *Fighting Two Colonialisms: Women in Guinea Bissau*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979. In narrative form, Stephanie Urdang works to overcome US white middle class sensibilities to describe the struggle of women in Guinea Bissau to fundamentally transform their society during their national liberation struggle. Included are interviews as well as her personal observations.

Resources on Black Women in U.S. and Southern Economies:

Janiewski, Dolores. *Subversive Sisterhood: Black Women and Union in the Southern Tobacco Industry*. Center for Research on Women, Memphis State University, Memphis TN 38152.

Wallace, Phyllis A. *Black Women in the Labor Force*. Cambridge, Mass: M.I.T. Press, 1982.

Southeast Women's Employment Coalition. *Women in the Southern Economy. Who Are We?* Lexington, KY, 1984.

"Working Women; A Handbook of Resources, Rights, and Remedies," *Southern Exposure*. IX:4, Winter 1981.

Participants in the first Speak-Out Campaign organized by the Women's Commission of Black Workers for Justice.

The Challenge

Christina Davis

In the morning when I rise each day
I raise my eyes to the skies
And say, there's some struggle in this life
just to live it...
Yes, in the morning when I rise each day
And I raise my eyes to the skies
I say, it's the struggle in this life
That keeps us going...going...going

There are sisters, women, mothers who are under attack
By a system that is trying to bring slavery back
There are workers who are trying to stop the lies
In a fight for compensation that's no compromise
In our struggles to unite and fight for the cause
We are threatened with division thru tactics and laws
There's a challenge that's been issued that we now must take
If the world will be maintained for the children's sake
So listen sisters, women, mothers there can be no doubt
That for united struggle is what we all must be about

Christina Davis is an activist and community educator. She uses songs like "The Challenge" as a way of teaching and organizing, much like the earlier singers of the Civil Rights, peace and women's movements. She was on the staff of the Institute for Southern Studies in Durham. She is now on the staff of North Carolinians Against Racist and Religious Violence.

David Vita

The Klan Marches in North Carolina

by Akil Jagas

The existence of violent Ku Klux Klansmen in North Carolina was brought into full focus on November 3, 1979. In front of television cameras, Klansmen carried out what could easily be called the state-sanctioned murder of five anti-Klansmen holding a "Death to the Klan" rally. Not one Klansman served any time in state or federal prison in connection with the murders.

Since that despicable event, the KKK and its Nazi off-shoots have remained politically and militarily active in North Carolina. Klansmen and Nazis have organized camps for military training such as the one operated by one-time Klansman now Nazi, Glen Miller. Miller and other racists/fascists have run for political office on the state level, using their campaigns to spread their politics of violent racism and anti-semitism. State-wide marches and rallies are also part of the political work of some Klan groups. In the summer of 1987, the Christian Knights of the KKK (CKKK) brought their "recruitment drive" to the urban cities of Greensboro, Durham and Chapel Hill.

The events surrounding these three marches took place between April and June, 1987. The locations were different, but the scenarios were almost identical: a Klan leader goes to the police department or other municipal or county office and fills out a march permit. The local municipality mulls over the issuance of the permit and eventually decides that there "is no legal basis" to prevent the Klan from marching.

In the process, liberals, reformists and the masses hear about what is going on. One wing of the liberals discourages the masses from engaging in *any* type of protest, while the other wing encourages *their* type of protest, either a rally or march or a silent vigil prior to, or on the same day as, the Klan march.

In Greensboro and in Durham, those opposed to the Klan march lobby their respective city/county councils to stop the march from occurring. In both cities similarly worded resolutions opposing the Klan

Akil Jagas is a writer and activist with experience in the Afro-American liberation and working class movements, residing in North Carolina.

Birmingham News

Recent Klan activity has both a political and a military side. In a 1980 march in Birmingham, KKK "soldiers" wearing combat fatigues lead the way.

are passed by the councils. In Greensboro, a petition containing at least 5,000 signatures is presented to the city council to indicate mass opposition to the march.

When the Klan arrives in town to march, they are protected by the State Bureau of Investigation, along with a large contingent of local and regional police forces. In Durham (and probably in Greensboro, too) the Klan is armed. In Durham their weapons are confiscated until the end of the march. Forty to 125 Klanspeople (depending on the city) attend the marches, including Klan children.

At each march some come out to vocally oppose the Klan; in Chapel Hill, at least 2,000 did so. Others come "out of curiosity," and others attend to show open support for and interest in racism and oppression. Arrests of a few anti-Klan protesters occur at each march.

Stand Up to the Klan

Events like this let you see where people stand on the real issue of Black freedom. On the city councils, liberals who were more vocally opposed to the KKK stood out from liberals and conservatives who issued wishy-washy statements about how they hated that the Klan was coming to march, but "if they must, let them do so in peace." Ministers and public personalities who were opposed to *any* type of protest against the Klan stood in contrast to those who wanted to lure people *away* from the site of the march (like Greensboro's "Music in the Park" and Durham's "Free Day at the Pool," which were held at the same time as the Klan marches). Those who wanted protest *along the Klan parade route* were a rarity, except in Chapel Hill.

To make matters even more interesting, Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young appeared in Greensboro at a speaking event a few days before the Klan march. He said that many of the Klan's "gripes" (!) grew out of the "poverty and rural existence" of their members. Young added that if the Klan demands were legitimate, he too might march with them.

The anti-Klan struggle is one of the most visible forms of an American movement against racist ideology and activity today. Where people stand and act on this issue is an indication of where they really stand on the struggle to emancipate working people and the Afro-American people from wage slavery and national oppression. (This point does not minimize the importance of the women's emancipation struggles or the struggles of the Puerto Rican, Latino, Native American, Hawaiian or Eskimo people, or the struggle of any national minority, immigrant or refugee group for equality. But where the Klan gained its prominence as an anti-Black organization, opposition to it is closely related to the struggle of Afro-Americans for both legal rights and complete emancipation from US imperialist oppression.)

Those organizations and individuals who consciously oppose the active mobilization of the working people and the masses against the KKK--*when the Klan marches under the protection of the state*--should not and cannot be considered allies of the movements for Black and workers' emancipation; their stand against the KKK is also questionable.

Most of the active anti-racist groups in the state did *not* organize or attempt to oppose the Klan in an active way when they marched *under the protection of the state* in late spring/early summer 1987--the same state that these same activists and their organizations run to for prosecution of the Klan and the Nazis. The majority of the anti-racist "activists" opposed active, on-site protests against the Klan--which is exactly what the government wanted.

It was reportedly a student anti-apartheid group in Chapel Hill that had the political courage and foresight to call for protest along the Klan parade route even though reformists had urged people to "go home, go to the beach, go to watch the Lakers and Celtics play--just don't go to the march." (Some efforts were made in Greensboro to organize protest along the Klan parade route, but they were unsuccessful.)

Those who were opposed to active protesting are guided by a liberal and reformist strategy. Following this strategy always leads to engaging in political work that is opposed to Black liberation and working class struggle politics.

As the struggle develops, the real question will soon become whether activists and organizations are opposed to the Klan and Nazis on the basis of support for Black liberation and working class struggle, and whether activists and organizations will help to build up these movements as a viable method of opposing and defeating the Klan. Much work needs to be done to introduce and build *this* type of anti-Klan political agenda, especially amongst those who are genuinely drawn into anti-racist activity.

The events surrounding the three Klan marches indicate that the government continues to protect the KKK and its "right" to organize Anglo-Americans for white supremacist activity, and that there continues to be at least a small number of whites interested in hearing the Klan's message. Second, there is a lot of work to be done to place the anti-racist/anti-fascist movement on the proper course. And third, *these events show that there is interest throughout the state in opposing the Klan and Nazis.*

Let us build upon this interest and learn from these lessons in order to develop a viable anti-racist movement that is led by the politics of working class struggle and Afro-American self-determination. ■

Alabama New South Coalition Resolution

Support International Paper Workers

WHEREAS on March 21, 1987 the management of International Paper Company in Mobile locked-out over 1200 of its employees;

WHEREAS this lock-out has caused severe economic hardship, grief and pain to the 1200 employees, their families and the south Alabama community;

WHEREAS decent wages, decent working conditions and good health care are important to these union members, to members of the Alabama New South Coalition and to the people of Alabama;

WHEREAS record profits of $2305 million in 1986 have resulted from past union concessions and the hard work of the locked-out employees;

WHEREAS the management and shareholders of International paper Company have achieved great benefits from the workers' dedication to the company, and such benefits have not trickled down to these workers;

WHEREAS International Paper Company's labor costs are $1100 less per employee than the national average;

WHEREAS International Paper Company's administrative costs are 21% higher than the industry average;

WHEREAS International Paper Company's executive payroll is 43% higher than the industry as a whole;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED, the membership of the Alabama New South Coalition urges the management of the International Paper Company to end the lock-out; furthermore, that the members of the Alabama New South Coalition support the United Paperworkers International Union and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers in their fight to save jobs and to maintain their current wages.

Please contact Joseph Mitchell, President, Mobile Chapter of the Alabama New South Coalition, 513 Myrtlewood Blvd., Mobile AL 36610; 205-457-8578. The Alabama New South Coalition is a multi-racial, non-partisan, multi-issued independent organization.

Black Labor: An Overview

by Saladin Muhammad

One of the main historical shortcomings of the trade union movement has been its lack of understanding of the conditions of national oppression faced by the working class of the oppressed nations. This question is essential to understanding the development of trade unions in the U.S. from the mid-1800s to the present.

Since the U.S. had been a British colony, the developing working class, particularly in the Northern states, began to follow the direction of their British counterparts by organizing trade unions. Inside the United States, the oppression of Black people as a nation in the South was visibly apparent to the developing trade union movement. The abolition of the system of chattel slavery in the Black Belt South was a central issue to be addressed by the labor movement in the 19th century.

Because of their failure to actively address and challenge the bosses and government around this issue, Black and white workers became very much divided, thus forestalling the development of a unified working class trade union movement. While there was much lip service offered by the trade union movement, there was never a strike conducted by trade unions demanding an end to slavery and the granting of full democratic rights for Black people. In fact, many trade unions spoke out against slavery only because slaves were used as skilled workers, thereby threatening the jobs of white workers. On the other hand, many trade unionists believed that the freeing of slaves would open the door for competition between white and Black workers in the wage labor market.

By the time of the Civil War, the Black slaves who were the working class foundation of the Southern economy took their destiny into their own hands. Instead of waiting for trade unions to lead their struggle against economic exploitation and political repression, they themselves conducted what amounted to a general strike by leaving their jobs on the plantations and taking up arms, first in the form of small slave revolts, and later as soldiers fighting on the side of the North against the South in the Civil War. What most historians fail to say when discussing the Northern victory in the Civil War is that the loss of Black slave labor on the Southern plantations prevented the South from supplying its Confederate army with the necessary food, clothes, ammunition and other supplies to carry out the war. The key to the victory of the North in the Civil War was the initiative of the Black laboring class in the Black Belt South, and not just the military might and superiority of the Northern army.

Even after winning some basic democratic rights following the Civil War, Black wage workers were still the most exploited in the South. In 1867 a wave of strikes, particularly among Black longshoremen, occurred in the South. Most of these strikes were for higher wages, and one in Savannah, Georgia succeeded in securing the abolishment of the $10 poll tax on all dockworkers. By 1869, the growth of Black labor organizations had been so rapid that they began to consolidate into statewide labor bodies and pressure for protective legislation. Within four years after the Civil War, conventions of Black workers were held in Indiana, Pennsylvania, New York, Kentucky, Maryland, and Washington D.C. with delegates representing virtually every trade in which Black workers were employed. In December 1869, 203 delegates met in D.C. to consolidate Black workers from several states to act in cooperation with locals of the National Labor Union that primarily organized white workers in the North.

These Black labor organizations called for cooperation with the white working class. They wanted organizational unity, but the National Labor union was unwilling to bring the Black working class into its union as equals. Black workers therefore developed their own local unions and affiliated with the National Labor Union. These Black local trade unions formed into the Colored National Labor Union. Their principal activities for the next three years centered around demands for higher wages, equal employment opportunities, educational facilities, cooperatives, homesteads and for equal rights under the law.

In August 1870, at the 4th annual convention of the National Labor Union held in Cincinnati, Ohio, the cooperation between the Colored National Labor Union and the National Labor Union ended when the delegates of the National Labor Union refused to allow a Colored National Labor Union speaker the same rights to address the convention as the speaker from the National Labor Union. To Black delegates, this symbolized the unwillingness of white workers to treat Black workers on an equal basis and their failure to recognize the special problems of Black workers, particularly their need for leadership in the national trade union movement.

Even after the split, the Colored National Labor Union in several communities stimulated Black and white workers to form local unions which then won strikes. The vast majority of the workers in the Colored National Labor Union were former slaves. They lived in the Black Belt South as agricultural workers under conditions that were growing rapidly more intolerable. When these workers tried to change their conditions, they were attacked by the Klan and similar racist terror organizations.

A developing political alliance against the Black Reconstruction governments meant that these governments had no real power to challenge the federal government. Unfortunately, the CNLU did not organize a national campaign against the North-South capitalist alliance in defense of rights of Southern Black workers to organize unions and oppose the Klan; nor did it call for strikes in the North against industries who were secretly engaging an alliance with former slave owners in the South. Instead it aligned itself with the Republican party. The Republican Party at that time was considered the party that freed the slaves, but it also was the party of the industrial bosses and the owners. The Colored National Labor Union, which was at one time a fighting union, stopped fighting.

Meanwhile, a new organization, the Knights of Labor, formed secretly in the late 1860s and became a trade union organizing body in 1878. It consisted of both Black and white workers. Fifteen organizers were assigned the task of building trade unions in the South. Black workers--longshoremen, miners, ironworkers, steelworkers, and farmers--joined to form locals. After the ban on women's membership was removed in 1881, Black women joined assemblies with men or formed their own locals, mostly of domestic workers, laundresses, chambermaids, housekeepers and some agricultural workers.

In 1886, Black workers made up more than half of all the unionized workers in the Southern states. They were an essential component in building a trade union movement. In fact, Black workers joined trade unions when other workers didn't.

The Knights of Labor was open to Black workers from its beginning, but two tendencies began to emerge. One was reflected in widespread union strikes, labor demonstrations, picnics, assembly halls and the election of Blacks to office in mainly white locals. The other tendency was the reluctance of the leadership to deal with the white supremacy of some of the white workers toward Black workers. They were reluctant to talk about it at a union meeting--to say, "let's struggle around it, let's examine it." While the Knights of Labor made an important contribution to organizing labor in the South, its failure to make a struggle against racism and national oppression the essential focus of its organizing meant

During the Civil War, Black slaves conducted what amounted to a general strike by leaving their jobs on the plantations, thereby depriving the Confederate Army of the food and other supplies necessary to carry on the war.

that there was not a strong force to purge racism from within the white ranks of the Knights of Labor. The Knights of Labor eventually disappeared around 1895. Toward the end, a resolution was proposed saying, in effect, that the solution to the Black "problem" was to raise funds to send all Black people back to Africa.

In 1881, the American Federation of Labor formed. It organized craft unions, and just like the Knights of Labor, it professed to be anti-racist. But the AFL also organized separate locals. Black workers were organized in those locals for dead-end jobs. It was only because of the organization, power and leadership of the Black working class through their locals that the AFL unions eventually began to address the special questions confronting the Black working class.

During World War I, many Black workers left the South to come to the North. Many were run off their land and driven out by the Klan. They began to work in those industries in need of labor because of the large number of white workers entering the armed services. Blacks then flooded the jobs which became vacant and they organized in unions.

At the end of World War I, however, white workers returned from the armed services to their jobs in those industries. The Black labor force, which had left the Black Belt South and come to the Northern cities to be part of what they thought to be a stable workforce in the "non-racist" North, became massively unemployed. Those who were not unemployed were bumped down to the lowest paying, most dangerous and unskilled positions. The AFL did not fight or address this question and would not make the fight against national oppression and racism a central part of their program.

During the '30s, there were at least two major organizing efforts in the South which were tied to the national question. The position of Black workers in the oppressed nation gave direction to the trade union movement and the working class.

The Southern Sharecroppers Union began in 1931 in Tallapoosa County, Alabama, and by 1933, it had 3000 members and had spread to other counties. The Southern Tenant Farmers Union started in July, 1934 in Poinsett Country, Arkansas. It conducted a series of strikes, the most dramatic of which took place in January, 1939 when 1300 evicted sharecroppers camped on the main highways of Missouri. the union won wage increases and hundreds of thousands of dollars of government benefits, exposed the brutal aspects of the plantation system, caused government investigations at the state and national levels into the cotton industry, and, not the least, caused a halt of lynchings in many areas where they were organized.

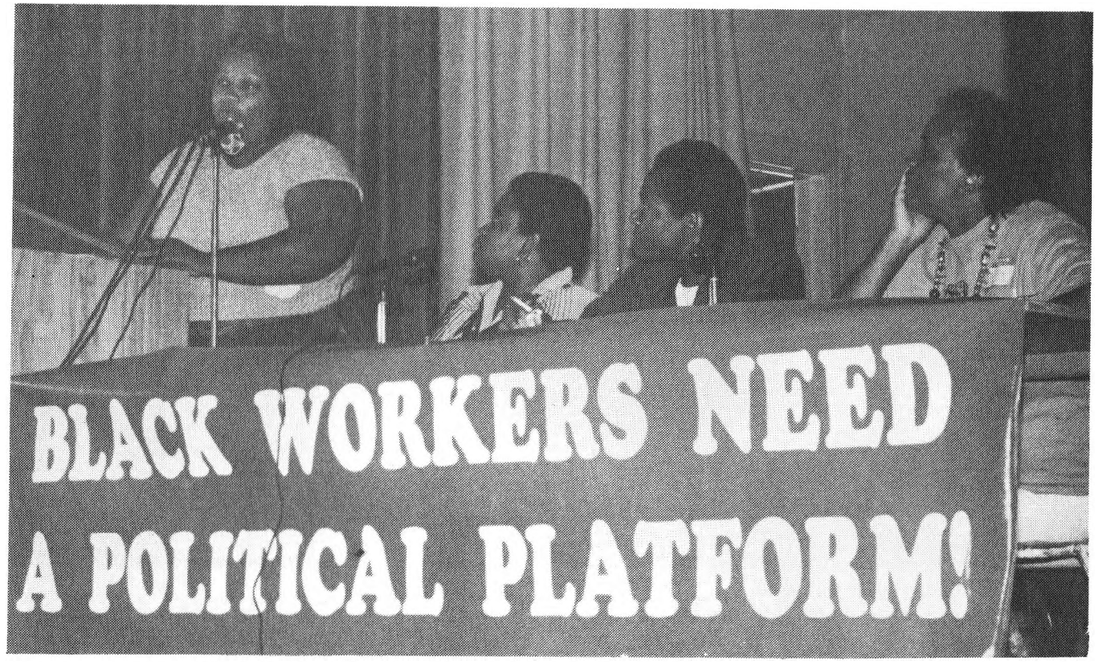
Another struggle of the 30s centered on the Scottsboro Boys in Alabama. When nine Black youths were put on trial to be legally lynched by the "justice" system for a crime they had not committed. Black workers throughout the country, and many of their white allies in the working class, came together to call for the freedom of the Scottsboro Boys. Labor solidarity between Black and white workers was built around the struggle.

In 1941, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters leader, A. Philip Randolph, and others called for a March on Washington, D.C. to demand that Black workers be allowed to work in the defense industry. The threat of a national march made Roosevelt sign an executive order to lift the legal ban on Black workers in the defense industry. Again, it took either the threat or the actual organized challenge of the Black working class itself in order to put this question on the floor. Once that question was put forward, then the trade unions had no choice but to either openly and clearly stand with the bosses, or to give lukewarm support, at best, to the movement of the Black working class.

Ten years later in 1955, it was the Montgomery bus boycott in Alabama that opened up the challenge of the Black working class against the system of forced segregation in the South. Not only did the Black working class refuse to ride the buses, but its actions had the effect of a drawn out, partial general strike on the area's businesses. Many Black workers didn't go to work. This affected the Southern industries of Alabama; many companies and small businesses went out of business.

Throughout the 60s, particularly the late 60s, the Black working class had a profound effect on heavy industry. In auto, Black workers built a revolutionary Black trade union movement in Detroit known as the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. Forming the core were young, fiery brothers and sisters, whose mothers and fathers worked beside them inside of the factories. To ensure that the leadership of Black workers in those unions had some organized base, these organizers also demanded the existence of Black caucuses inside those unions.

These Black trade unionists saw themselves not just as everyday trade unionists; they saw themselves as an organized working class sector of the Black freedom struggle. They developed for Black people a body of ideas based on viewing the working class movement as



In North Carolina, Black Workers for Justice is organizing to develop a voice in and direction for the 1988 presidential campaign.

the major leader of progress and social change in the society. Black people started talking about power--Black power. It was the beginning of an understanding of the power that came from the position of the Black working class in the production process. People began to see how their struggle and their challenge in the production process could affect the direction of the whole economy within the U.S. and throughout the world. These Black working class freedom fighters--Black revolutionaries--were against the war in Vietnam. They opposed the suffering of the people inside South Africa; they opposed racism in the schools.

Drawing on these ideas as well as the long traditions of Black labor organizing, we should work today for the trade unions to view themselves not just as labor organizations, but organizations of the struggle for working class power and Black liberation. Such a view must recognize the centrality of unionizing the Black Belt South and Black political power as the key question facing workers in the oppressed Afro-American nation of the Black Belt South and in advancing the struggle against national oppression and U.S. imperialism exploiting all workers. ■

Saladin Mohammad is a member of Black Workers for Justice and a national co-ordinator of the Black Workers Political Platform Campaign. This article is adapted from a presentation at a BWJ workers school class, April 1985.

Jazz and the South *by Walter J. Norflett*

For decades jazz has been excluded from the mainstream music industry. Though born in the South and of the struggles and celebrations of African-Americans, jazz has in recent decades become the music of white college students of middle class (mostly northern urban and suburban) families. Or rather, that is the way jazz is primarily projected by those promoting, recording and supporting the music. It is amazing to me how a music that came from the threads that make the fabric of a people's history can become all but alien to that people in a historical blink of the eye.

Equally amazing is how the music that is virtually the root of all other American music can be related to the status of "alternative art form" in our society. To add the final insult to this injury, the very musicians who make this music believe that the African-American community and the Southern community have abandoned "the music." Only in recent years have I been been convinced that this really is not the case.

Europe, Asia and a few small clubs in northern US cities were for years the places to find the finest of this "classical American music" and those who make it. Expatriate became the statement of citizenship for many of our best musicians. As a result of the experiences African-American musicians had in Europe, many European musicians learned to play this great American music. These European musicians are generally better accepted and better paid in America than those they learned from and still study. European artist Jon Garbarak is very popular in America while many so-called jazz fans still don't know who mative-born Don Byas was.

From Buddy Bolden and Louis Armstrong through Thelonious Monk and John Coltrane to Wynton Marsalis and Olu Dara, many innovators in the jazz world have hailed from the South. Seldom have they been able to stay at home to develop their music or even play their music in public settings. Because of the overt racism, the social conservatism of the South (no public mixing of the races, limited mixed drink sales, etc.), the image of New

York as the cultural capital of the world, and other reasons, artists are all but forced to leave their Southern homes. The reality of the racism they faced in New York is often over-shadowed by the still-held impressions of the blatantly racist encounters in the South.

The club owners and recording and big distribution bosses build their wealth on the cheap--sometimes free--work of African-Americans, then feed the hungry audiences less creative white players as the real jazz musicians. We ought to ask ourselves if these jazz businessmen are any less racist than the good old boys back home.

Jazz Lives!

Through the work of musician-teachers such as Ellis Marsalis and Alvin Batiste in Louisiana and some others, some young musicians are meeting the challenges of development as jazz artists and doing so quite well. But in order to make a living at their profession they must still find their way to the urban north or California (to take advantage of the few jobs available in the movie industry).

Still, the picture is not all dismal for us in the South. Richmond, Raleigh-Durham, Charlotte, Charleston, Atlanta, Savannah, Miami, New Orleans, Louisville, Nashville, Memphis, (you get the picture) are by virtue of being the largest cities in the region, the showplaces of the arts. These too are the centers of jazz activity. Because it is geographically the gateway to the South, Washington, D.C. is the starting place for many of the jazz tours that come to the Southern states nowadays. Many of the presenters view Atlanta as the center of activity south of the Mason-Dixon line. So, naturally, many try to identify groups that are playing both cities in order to take advantage of reduced travel costs and availability of performers. This strategy has worked, contributing significantly to the presence of jazz in our region.

The growth in the number of jazz festivals in the South is significant. George Wein and other jazz entrepreneurs have seized the opportunity to bring some of the touring festivals into Southern cities. Unfortunately, many of the performers in these "Jazz Festivals" are not jazz musicians, nor is the music they play "real jazz." When I speak of real jazz, I'm not drawing lines between swing, bebop, new music and so-called fusion but I am addressing the presentation of rock and rhythm 'n' blues in jazz festivals. Nor am I speaking against these other musics. My preference would be refer to it all as "Great Black Music," as does the Art Ensemble of Chicago, but the various names and categories now in wide-scale use must be dealt with before they are dispensed with. The kind of misrepresentation that sometimes goes on at jazz festivals does more to hurt the development of the jazz audience than to help it.

The problem develops when there are three days of a jazz festival in Hampton, Virginia and among all the artists appearing there may be three or four real jazz groups. The others are primarily rhythm 'n' blues artists. This usually happens in areas where you are assured heavily African-American audiences. It appears that once again someone is assuming that the African-American community is not interested in, nor does it appreciate, its own music.

Some jazz festivals do present with integrity: the Umbria Festival, brought to Durham, N.C., by saxophonist Paul Jeffrey, Atlanta Free Jazz and the New Orleans Jazz Heritage Festival are examples of events that have consistently brought real jazz to our region. As in most of the country, colleges and universities, art societies and arts councils are the major presenters of the arts in the South. This holds true for jazz also. In addition to these usual presenters of the music, there is much support from jazz radio in the region. From many of the university campuses, both student and professionally-operated, non-commercial radio stations boast some jazz programming in their schedules.

Even more exciting than the campus stations are the community-based non-commercial stations that are playing "the music." From Washington, D.C.'s Pacifica station WPFW, Warrenton/Rocky Mount, N.C.'s WSVP, Atlanta's WRFG to stations from Hemingway, S.C. to Jackson, Mississippi, there is jazz on community radio in the Southeast. Though it is by no means as well supported as European classical music on public radio, jazz is present and growing. The growing number of stations on predominantly African-American campuses that are changing from top forty radio to jazz radio is especially refreshing. Fayetteville State University in North Carolina has a 100,000 watt jazz station. While Shaw University in Raleigh is just establishing its jazz format, Clark College in Atlanta has had a long commitment to jazz programming on its station, WCLK. Things are improving. ■

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Remembering Harold Washington

Thousands of Black Chicagoans stood along the streets in a bitter wind to watch Harold Washington's hearse proceed through the South Side to his grave. A million grown-ups and kids stood in blocks-long lines to file past his body laid out in City Hall. We mourned the passing of a man who stood for a city government which promised fairness and openness, and beyond that--a sense of excitement and of struggle.

There was, of course, the Washington personality: the exuberance and warmth he radiated; the concentration and respect he bestowed on anyone he spoke with; the taste for combat; the outrageous praise he showered on his allies and the spectacular scorn he rained on his enemies; the joy he took in his job and in his relationship with the people of his city.

But beyond his qualities as a fascinating human being, Harold Washington's five years as Mayor of Chicago enabled us to explore the limits of reform government in America's cities, with all the hope and frustration that implies.

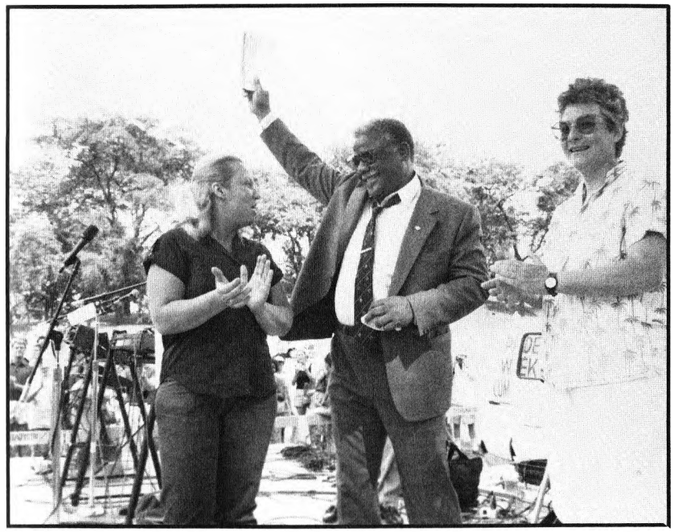
He believed in the people's movements, and especially in his base in the Black national movement. Positions he took could usually be explained by his commitment to the political movements and to his closeness to his base. This was true of his refusal to compromise with the City Council's racists in order to "get things done" when he first took office. It was true of his decision to appoint a Black police superintendent rather than placate white critics. It was true when he answered angry parents critical of his handling of the recent school strike by calling on them to build a parents' movement to force reform in the schools.

He had a broad and conscious world-view. Washington grew from precinct captain to state legislator to Congressman to Mayor, and in the process developed an international perspective, one which could win supporters even after his death. A small-business person said she had never liked Washington until an El Salvadoran refugee and her daughter, injured by shrapnel, came to her church to speak about the war in Central America shortly after his death. The woman from El Salvador said that were it not for Harold's stand on that war and his stance against INS meddling in city affairs, her child and others would have been left to die in El Salvador. Nationally, Washington developed a comprehensive agenda for the cities, issuing a critique of Reaganism and federal cutbacks which drastically cut Chicago's ability to care for its hungry, sick, and homeless.

Finally, Harold Washington was a consistent democrat. That is why he was able to win over, for example, a large constituency of white gay and lesbian voters. He had supported state and federal gay rights legislation when there was no political percentage in it for him in his districts. His speech reflected his experience as a 65-year-old South Sider (he talked about equal rights for all regardless of their "persuasion"). But his support was unequivocal, and he stood before a crowd of thousands of lesbian and gay pride marchers, greeted them with delight, and ad libbed remarks stronger than the speech on gay rights and AIDS written for him by a lesbian staffer.

The frustrations many of us felt with Washington the politician sprang from the constraints on a city government hemmed in by hostile federal and state governments and by a pervasive machine mentality supporting a pervasive racism within the city itself. Class contradictions within his base in the Black community meant that Washington had to accommodate its least progressive sectors with appointments to various city boards and commissions. Then his belief in non-interference with appointees led, as it did in this fall's school strike, to real problems and bad policy. Washington worked hard to bring progressive Latinos into the City Council, but his succession was undone by an alliance between white racists and the Black hacks and thugs Washington's political operatives had not focused on defeating sooner.

Even within these constraints, Harold Washington was as consistently progressive a politician as we are likely to see elected to major political office in this country at this time. Harold could not have been the leader he was without the movements which brought him to power. But movements need leaders who can crystallize and go beyond their demands. Harold did this, and beyond that put the whole city on a first name basis with him. He made a space in his administration for Left organizers like me. He gave us a way to go into communities which have been excluded from government, to work for at the grass roots for a progressive agenda. Because there was no question but that he would endorse the March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, I had credibility as his representative to lesbians and gays to struggle over issues of racism and coalition-building in the gay community. The new administration has already walled off the room on the Left that Harold made possible.



Mayor Harold Washington thanks sign language interpreter Susie Hermann-Patt following his speech to 10,000 marchers at Chicago's June, 1987 Gay and Lesbian Rally. The author is at his right.

But I miss the Mayor for more than just the political work he made it possible for me to do. I miss having him throw his arm around my shoulder and say what a lucky day it was that we met again. I miss his telling me what a good speech I had written, when it was his improvisations that really hit home. I miss knowing that for all the aggravations of hacking through the bureaucracy surrounding his fifth floor offices, once I got in the door I would find respect and support for the concerns I carried to him. He represented a moment in Chicago's history where electoral politics were the place for carrying on the struggles for democratic rights, for economic justice, for racial equality. That moment has most likely passed, leaving many of us feeling like the little boy who told a television interviewer "I'm sad, I feel bad, I'm mad."

Peggy Baker

Peggy Baker was Co-chair of Lesbians and Gays for Washington and currently Co-ordinator of Gay and Lesbian Issues for the City of Chicago.