

IN THESE TIMES

Editorial

Afro-Americans and Full Employment

"The problem of the twentieth century," wrote W.E.B. DuBois at its outset, "is the problem of the color line." Like all good prophecies—and as DuBois later in his life affirmed—the truth of this one intersects with others. One of those is that the problem of the color line is also the problem of the property line—the problem of class and social systems. This is true in southern Africa and it is just as true in the U.S.

The great struggles of the 1960s established the full range of formal civil rights, from voting to public accommodations. Yet American society still denies non-whites equality of opportunity in income and employment, education and housing, health care and recreation—in short, in power and wealth.

Racial prejudice and racist practices play their inveterate role in perpetuating this inequality, but if they were to disappear tomorrow the inequality would not. The distinctions of class, the poverty of propertylessness, the power of capital that profits on cheap labor, unemployment, and inflated prices, would still be there. The very success of the civil rights movement has made it clear as never before that the property line is the key to the color line.

Leaders meeting.

The meeting of 15 black leaders in New York on August 29 testifies to the centrality of property to the condition of Afro-Americans and other minorities in the U.S. For it was the "economic" question—the question of jobs and all it implies—that brought such a broad range of black leaders together to forge a common program, for the first time since the 1960s.

As Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., president of the National Urban League and the meeting's host, declared, they all agreed that the solution to the dire situation of blacks must begin with a national full employment policy. "There was universal agreement on jobs . . . [as] the overriding issue of the 70s." Full employment, they recognize, is only the beginning. In calling for "a counterattack on the callous neglect of blacks, the poor and American cities," the leaders designated as their "consensus issues of critical concern" not only full employment, but also the allied matters of "rebuilding our cities, welfare reform, affirmative action, economic development and the rejuvenation of moral and social purpose in this nation."

The crystallization of this broad social program, for the relief and further progress of the black and other non-white people, brings the black leaders and all Americans face to face with the incapacities of the capitalist system of property and class domination. That system has never produced sustained full employment or balanced economic development. Nor have its political leaders, its business executives, or intellectual guardians proposed any program remotely promising it. Their end is to preserve capitalism ("Our Way of Life") whatever the necessary consequences, including chronic poverty, unemployment, ghettos and urban decay. The black leaders' end is presumably, the progress and welfare of their people through balanced economic development and full employment. Their end can not be achieved within capitalism.

The record.

The record of the 1960s and 1970s offers conclusive evidence in support of this formulation.

The 1960s gives us a test case of the most favorable conditions, within the



Vernon Jordan putting on his coat

for In These Times, Jan. 1977

capitalist framework, for black progress. It was a period of comprehensive civil rights legislation, of the longest uninterrupted economic expansion in modern American history, and of gains for Afro-Americans unprecedented in their long suffering experience. Yet by 1969-1970, the black unemployment rate was still two to three times that of whites, black teen-age unemployment stood at the official figure of 29 percent, black median family income was only 61 percent that of whites, blacks remained grossly overrepresented in the low-skill, low-paying jobs and underrepresented in the high-paying jobs, and their education, housing and health care remained far inferior to that of whites.

Such gains as were made came with the economic pump-priming of war, special government programs funded by an expansionary economy, and intense and bloody struggles.

Since 1969, even these modest gains have been reversed. In many significant areas blacks are worse off today than in 1964. Black median family income has dropped back from 61 to 58 percent of white, black unemployment is officially put at 14.5 percent, and realistically it is over 20 percent, black teen-age unemployment is officially put at over 40 percent (in New York City at 86 percent), black education and housing are deteriorating, and the situation is recognized by even the most "respectable" authorities as alarming. Blacks and other minorities are experiencing a catastrophic depression while the rest of the country is experiencing a "mild recovery."

The 1960s expansion ended in the 1970s "stagflation" of chronic high unemployment, rising prices, lower workers' real income, and cutbacks in essential government programs and social services. Modern up-to-date corporate capitalism is no more capable of sustained balanced economic development or continuous improvement in the living conditions of the working class than was the old-style laissez-faire capitalism. And it is just such sustained development and improvement that is indispensable to the well-being and progress of Afro-Americans.

When working people make gains in wages, income, and social services, as in the 1960s, capital gets sick. It restores it-

self to health, as in the 1970s, with budget-balancing, investment cutbacks, unemployment, and inflation—that is, with misery and sickness for the working class.

Carter's response to the black leaders' challenge is in character. His good intentions may be granted, but he is still the chief executive of corporate America. First he rebuked them for suggesting that he should keep his campaign promises. Then he met with the Congressional black caucus and repeated his campaign promise to them to make jobs his top priority. But he continues to tailor his employment and economic development planning to the dictates of the corporate investment system. That means a commitment to the old formula of stimulating the private (corporate) sector with public funds and tax breaks. Such a program cannot be expected to yield better or more lasting results than similar programs in the 1960s. It means leaving the initiative with the white corporate ruling class, and it means that Carter's promise now is no more to be relied upon than his promises during the campaign.

Can't do it alone.

But if the well-being of the black people, and their achievement of equality, requires erasing the capitalist property line, the black leaders, even those who privately understand this, are not saying so in public. They cannot be blamed. Some of them represent black bourgeois interests and wish to preserve capitalism. Others, perhaps the majority, remember what happened to Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and other black leaders in the 1960s when they began to articulate a working class oriented challenge to the capitalist status quo.

They know, also, that a program of social investment with working people and their representatives in control of the economy, would challenge capitalist power and require a powerful political coalition of whites and blacks consciously moving together in that direction. We may presume that many black leaders are watching and waiting for such a popular movement among whites to become discernible. In the meantime, however, they will bargain as best they can with the corporate power structure,

including the President, for whatever gains they can get.

The white working class has also been hit hard, if less devastatingly, by "stagflation." The labor movement is now calling for full employment planning and its leaders know it needs allies among blacks, other minorities, women and the poor. (See *ITT*, Editorial, Aug. 31.) George Meany himself lost little time in identifying the AFL-CIO, in his Labor Day message, with the black leaders' criticism of Carter and with their full employment and urban development demands.

More significantly, younger labor leaders like Murray Finley of the Clothing and Textile Workers, Douglas Fraser of the UAW, William Winpisinger of the Machinists, and Jerry Wurf of the public employees, have associated themselves with the Democratic Agenda of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee calling for social planning for full employment. A labor-black coalition is in the making, and it can rally to itself the support of movements among other minorities, women, youth, and progressive intellectuals, technicians and professionals.

But while such a coalition is still only on the horizon, black leaders and rank-and-file will continue with good reason to play it cautiously. They have been sold out and pawned off in the past, and before they put themselves out on an anti-capitalist limb they will want solid assurance that their prospective allies will prove constant in the battle for an equalitarian society.

The best service socialists can now render to their black compatriots is to join in the building of a full employment movement among the American working people, consciously oriented to replacing the capitalist with a socialist investment and property system. That would give the black movements the viable allies on the left that they so compellingly need.

In the final analysis, there can be no sustained progress and well-being for the white people of America without the sustained progress and well-being of the black people, and there can be no solution to the problem of the color line without the solution to the problem of the property line.

Letters

Otherwise-wise, thanks

Editor:

First, I would like to pay my long overdue respects to you for publishing a superb paper—content-wise, interest-wise, and literary-style-wise. I now read *ITT* cover-to-cover and find I depend on it for knowing "what is happening and an attempt at understanding why it is happening."

What finally prompted me to write this letter was the realization that this is the only newspaper in which I have ever read the sports articles! Your sports articles have finally given "sports" some meaning to me in relation to the rest of the activities coming down around me.

Thank you again for providing such high quality information on all subjects.

—Debra Asher
Oakland, Calif.

People vs. Politics

Editor:

Perhaps Ron Kovic's book "is not a useful book in terms of learning how political consciousness is shaped or changed," as Ms. Linden points out, but it does remind us of human tragedy.

People, after all, make up society. In my opinion people come before politics.

—C.S. Poirier
Dekalb, Ill.

Fewer, but better

Editor:

Michael Stone's remarks on the subject of abortion betray his antisecularism as well as his sexism, and his callousness to the plight of women maimed or killed by dangerous back-alley abortions, his hatred and contempt for women.

True socialists correctly perceive the antichoice movement as reactionary and sexist to the core and they recognize the right of every woman to free safe legal abortion on demand. In answer to Tom Lehman's remarks that most workingclass women he knows oppose abortion: socialist revolution is brought about by educating the masses, not by pandering to their backwardness. Antiabortion laws degrade and oppress women and are based on myths generated in a capitalist society. Opposition to abortion rights stems not from concern for human life but from superstition, mysticism, obscurantism and misogyny all of which are directly contrary to socialism. Karl Marx warned of fake socialism in the Communist Manifesto. Many secularists and feminists today, who could otherwise probably be won over to socialism, are opposed to it because they mistake the fake socialism of the Tom Lehman and Michael Stones as the real thing. One thing is clear: Michael Stone and Tom Lehman are not really socialists. To this very day we socialists are hindered in our efforts to achieve socialist revolution by those who claim to be socialists but who in fact are not.

—Karen Moskowitz

A sleight error

Editor:

Your editorial on the Panama Canal treaty (*ITT*, Aug. 24) while hard-hitting and accurate, was nevertheless incomplete. The statement, "The pending agreement with Panama is designed to preserve the substance of American imperial power while giving up the annexationist form," warrants further attention,

as does the discussion of the debate between the Reagan-types and the "liberals" over the treaty's merits.

The Panama Canal issue fits almost stereotypically the pattern called for by advocates of the Yankee/Trader vs. Cowboy/Prussian dichotomy of American power. The Carter administration, heavily laden with the non-ideological internationally-oriented tenets of the Trilateral Commission, negotiated a treaty that accomplishes three major goals: (1) assuages displeasure towards the U.S. by many Panamanians and other Latin Americans, (2) endears Carter to American and world liberals, and (3) yields ownership of the Canal without significantly altering the power relationship.

While many applaud this sleight-of-hand, those of the Committee for the Present Danger school, who are generally more ideologically anti-communist and more nationalistic than the Trilateral blokes, oppose the treaty as a hand-out and sign of weakness.

Trilateralism heralds the institutionalization of 1984 Double-speak.

Saul A. Rigberg
Amherst, Mass.

Lynch responds to critics

Editor:

I would like to respond briefly to the two letters regarding my column on the growth of the right (*ITT*, Sept. 7). First, Ken Ratner. His letter raises some excellent questions. However, I'd like to urge him to try to explore them seriously in 1,200 words or less. Because of the space restrictions, I was not writing an in-depth piece on the nature of the right or a strategy for countering it. Rather, I was trying to indicate a problem that requires more analysis and thought that it has so far received within the left. I don't think that my tone was alarmist, nor did I imply that we are on the verge of fascism—or anything close. Also, I did note that many who participate in movements influenced by the right are not themselves ideological right-wingers. In previous columns I have tried to suggest how issues like anti-abortion or anti-crime can attract people who have basically decent political instincts to movements that are used by the right.

On Claire Ferguson. I can only say that if all the people who have such profound understanding of "why the American left is in such disarray" would become active in trying to build socialist organization along the lines that they think would be more productive, either the world would become a much better place or at least they would begin to take up less space pontificating in letters to the editor.

—Roberta Lynch
Chicago

Help stop the neutron bomb

Editor:

Readers of *ITT* who have been appalled by the news of the neutron bomb should know there is a chance to stop it. Rep. Ted Weiss (D-N.Y.) has offered an amendment to HR 6566, the ERDA National Security Authorization Bill, deleting all funds for this horrific and destabilizing weapon. Quick letters to members of Congress are called for, since the House will vote on the Weiss Amendment during the week of September 19. Until there is a way to abolish all the atrocious weapons, we have to fight them one at a time.

—Todd Glin
San Francisco, Calif.

One Struggle, Many Parts

Editor:

Hans Koning (*ITT*, Aug. 24) would have us diminish our concern for Soviet dissidents because there is hypocrisy among liberal critics of the U.S.S.R. and because questions of hunger and unemployment must precede questions of free speech and expression. I don't agree.

The fight for the good society has many parts. The Sloop Clearwater,

sailing the Hudson River, gay people marching, farmworkers organizing are all part of that struggle. When walls come tumbling down the sound travels and gives hope to others. Echoes bounce off Kremlin walls as well as tenements in Harlem. Long may they bounce.

—Irwin H. Rosenthal
Ellenville, N.Y.

It's still the same old story

Editor:

David Moberg's account of the NAM convention (*ITT*, Aug. 24) states that NAM "... organized a national conference of women who share their 'socialist feminist' view of women's liberation..." This is untrue on several counts.

1) NAM did *not* organize the Socialist/Feminist Conference in Yellow Springs, Ohio in July of 1975. It was organized by nine S/F groups from across the country. I, as one representative of the Lexington S/F Union, was a member of the Planning Committee for the conference. There were NAM women among the Planning Committee members but only one of the nine planning groups (the C.P. Gilman Chapter) represented NAM.

2) The conference never wanted to be for women who shared NAM politics. The conference was organized under principles of unity developed by the Planning Committee.

3) It was not a women's liberation conference although socialist/feminism (why the quotes around "socialist feminist"?), of course, encompasses women's liberation.

Now, I am curious about all the other "facts" in Moberg's article. What price truth and what price principles?

I was one of those very early members of NAM. One of the reasons I resigned my membership was a recurring pattern of puffed up claims that had very little substance. That was my perception at that time and from this article I conclude it's the same old NAM.

I am not a separatist, but, thanks, Holly Near, for speaking to lesbian separatist politics at the NAM convention. What the hell else could you have done?

—Mary Dunn
Sadleville, Ky.

Grow, or stay on the spot

Editor:

David Moberg's report of the NAM convention (*ITT*, Aug. 24) presents NAM as a stumbling, bumbling group, and not a serious political organization. Perhaps that is correct, but it's not a critique that tells readers what is worthy and what is lacking in NAM.

NAM was created by a residue of people from SDS, who did not consider their former activity just "radical chic." Though I belong to an older generation, I was at the beginning of NAM. I still think that the effort deserves support and that it may help to fill the socialist vacuum in the U.S.

From the first, NAM set out to find ways to present the need for socialism to the people of the U.S. It rejected, to quote Moberg, the "authoritarian image of bureaucratic socialism" developed in other countries.

Unfortunately, in rejecting the rigid, bureaucratic brand of socialism, NAM also rejected the need to generalize from existing conditions and to project a vision and goal of socialism.

After five years, NAM is still a shell without national policy. An outsider looking in has great difficulty deciding what it is. One has to be inside to ap-

Editor's note: Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you want to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

preciate the extent of political growth.

NAM originally reviled electoral politics, as Moberg mentions. Now, some chapters are involved in electoral politics, while others view such activities with horror. NAM still has no national policy on the kind of socialism suitable to the U.S. Some NAM members use rhetoric that chimes with the sectarian or traditional groups. NAM is on both sides of this issue. NAM has established itself in a number of cities as speaking for the left. It is so recognized by the media, but NAM shuns the role of speaking for socialism. It is developing a sort of "Communitism," deplorable as "Syndicalism," as a general theory.

—Leon Blum
Plantation, Fla.

A socialist perspective

Editor:

A friend passed on a copy of the paper to point out an article by Herbert Kohl. I enjoyed it and the other pieces in the paper. Since then I have bought it weekly and now find myself looking forward to every issue. The paper again reminded me of my need to view the world's happenings through a socialist perspective. I appreciate the openness of the paper. Often I have been turned away from some socialist papers because of the dogmatism. Keep up your efforts!

—Joe Famiglietti
Seattle, Wash.

Correction

Our apologies to Philip Michael Walker, whose photo of the Nazi rally in Milwaukee on page 4 of last week's issue, was not credited.

DIALOG

Socialism cannot be separated from the major issues of the day, or from the existing arenas of popular struggle, says Max Gordon

The Kinoy-ITT dialogue suggests the value of a paper that affords the badly-needed opportunity for open debate on the issues involved in the development of a viable socialist movement.

But both the Kinoy and ITT positions are open to criticism. Both base their outlooks not on an assessment of material realities, including the level of working class social consciousness, but on subjective desire. Both appear to rely on exhortation, or agitation, as the primary means of influencing consciousness, thereby failing to make the organic connection between the development of a third party or a socialist movement and mass struggle on the issues. Thus, both overlook the essence of all Marxian socialist organi-

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