

IN THESE TIMES

Impasse in black and white

The impasse in black political movements, noted by most black leaders, parallels the general impasse in American politics. It is not defined by confusion over goals but by an unwillingness among both blacks and whites to confront their growing realization that the achievement of their goals requires a struggle to bring the U.S. to a new stage of its history—from its capitalist past to a socialist future.

The goals are clear enough: racial equality, social equality (as against class and sexist oppression), full employment, quality education, housing and health care for all, a vibrant democracy. These goals are shared by both blacks and whites.

The impasse has been made palpable precisely by the victories—but not the success—of the civil rights movement, as well as other reform movements of women and labor. Those movements have pressed against the outer limits of the corporate order. The conservative backlash much in evidence now is but the recoil from those limits. The impasse is the result of the inhibition to press beyond them.

The current debate among black leaders over whether class or race, unfulfilled civil rights or economic structure, is the key roadblock to progress, is really a debate over the nature of the impasse, and what to do about it.

No one questions whether racism in the U.S. is at an end. It isn't. The problem is where to go from here. Even those,

like Kenneth B. Clark, who hold that racism is still central in barring black progress and American democracy in general, recognize the economic dimensions of the situation. And those, like William J. Wilson and Rep. John Conyers, who stress the need to go beyond civil rights to the struggle for economic justice are not suggesting relinquishment of the civil rights battle. Both sides recognize that the two struggles are inextricably intertwined.

The question is whether progress can be sustained on both fronts without transforming the capitalist social order.

The more conservative black leaders, pointing to the real gains made by perhaps 20 percent of the black population since the civil rights breakthroughs of the 1960s, urge more of the same. As some NAACP leaders put it, the task is to consolidate the coalition of Big Government, Big Business and Big Minority.

Other black leaders note that this strategy has relegated a huge number of blacks to worsening material and spiritual conditions—to growing unemployment, poor housing, inadequate education and health care and family instability. And the gains have tended to divorce the better off blacks from concern for the plight of the majority.

This argument is indisputable, even by conservatives. But it is also indisputable that black leftists cannot produce a program to meet the needs of the black majority that stays within the limits of the

private economy or that has a chance of adoption within the present political order.

This brings us to the responsibility of the white left. It has not created a political alternative to the corporate order with which the black majority can align in an effective political coalition. In the absence of a socialist movement among Americans in general, the only realism for black political leaders is to seek allies to the right or left of the corporate center in the pursuit of reform.

As Rep. Conyers painfully puts it (interview, pp. 12-13), it makes no sense for him to advocate democratic socialism—there simply are no effective political allies now lying in that direction. He must persist with reform. But reform can no longer yield substantial gains in civil rights or in economic justice for the black majority. Thus the impasse.

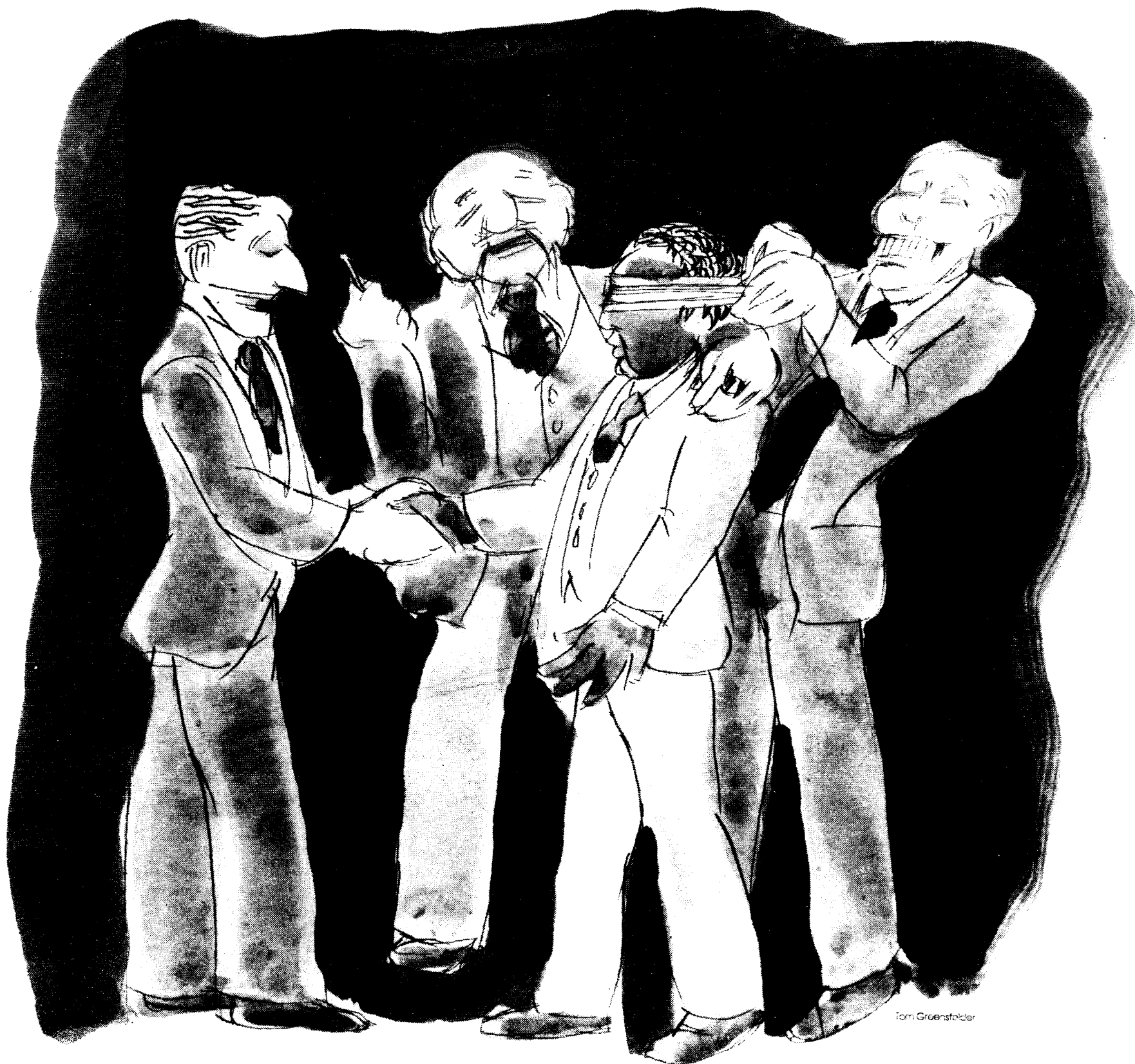
As Robert S. Browne, president of the Black Economic Research Center argues (*New York Times*, Oct. 2, 1977), without a full employment economy the black majority can make little further progress or protect themselves against deteriorating conditions. That will require "a significant evolution away from the free enterprise ethic," including an unprecedented "degree of economic planning," and "government enterprise in areas traditionally felt to be the preserve of private enterprise." For, "left to itself the economy is not going to solve the problem of black unemployment, nor will...income

maintenance and welfare reform."

The impasse in black is therefore also part and parcel of the impasse in white. White leftists know that the needs of Americans in general—from jobs to education to housing and health—cannot be met within the limits of the "private enterprise" order. They know that corporate power and genuine democracy are incompatible. Yet they have not committed themselves to challenging the "free enterprise" ethic frontally or to beginning the task of building a popular, explicitly socialist movement in the mainstream of American politics.

Given the left's evasion of its responsibility, the black movements must cast about for alternatives among corporate liberals and corporate conservatives, establishment Democrats and Republicans. These promise no real alternatives for the black majority, but are the only realistic politics available. The black left, in the process, is deprived of leverage against black conservatives, as well as against the white corporate establishment. The majority of Americans, moreover, find themselves without a political movement with credible solutions to modern problems and many of them are falling prey to racist and right-wing demagoguery, or to cynicism destructive of democratic impulses.

Breaking the black impasse requires breaking the white impasse. In the last analysis, it is an impasse of American democracy. ■



Tom Greenfelder

Letters

Too pro-Israel

I ENJOY READING THE MANY well-written articles in your newspaper, but I feel that you are somewhat hesitant in condemning Israeli settler-colonizing in Palestine and revealing the racist character of Zionism. Otherwise, keep up the good work.

—John W. Gilbert
Pittsford, N.Y.

Too anti-Israel

WHILE SOME OF THE EDITORIAL comments pertaining to the Middle East appear to be "even-handed," the anti-Israel bias in your news items and featured articles is most regrettable. Please consider the following:

- 1) Israel itself is a country of refugees.
- 2) The birth of Israel was facilitated by the UN at the urging of the delegate of the USSR. The U.S. and Great Britain continued to oppose the creation of Israel even though approximately 250,000 people were still in displaced persons camps with no state willing to admit them.
- 3) The response of the surrounding Arab rulers, most of whom had supported Hitler, was to launch a full-scale war before the new state could be formed. It was this war that brought about the flight of the bulk of the Palestinians.

4) Regardless of strong feelings of nationalism and religious exclusivism, it is the presence of a modern democratic state in their midst that is most disturbing to the Arab leadership. An organized working class, socialist ideas, a higher standard of living, liberated women, etc., is anathema to the kings and sheikhs and their outmoded social structures.

6) The perception of the PLO as some kind of radical and revolutionary force in the socialist sense is sheer nonsense. It is maintained by the dictators as a mercenary army.

6) The most influential of the Arab states, Saudi Arabia, which finances the PLO, has entered a new stage of economic development. It has become, royalty and all, the world's leader in the export of finance-capital. (Lenin's definition of imperialism). Its partnership with the multi-national oil companies is well-known.

The major issue then is still the right of Israel to exist. There are 20 Arab states and many of them are oil rich. Why not one tiny Israel? How heroic does one have to be to join with the entire world against Israel?

—Alvin Kogut
Far Rockaway, N.Y.

Dumpin' Donuts

THE NEWS THAT WINCHELL'S Donut House will not build in Ocean Beach has brought great relief to mem-

bers of PAW (People Against Winchell's). The donut chain was determined to proceed without compromise but their overconfidence proved they did not understand O.B. (See *ITT*, May 31.)

Ocean Beach (a small neighborhood in San Diego) has a history of militant resistance to redevelopment of its low and moderate income housing, which culminated in the establishment of the democratically elected O.B. Planning Board in 1976. As adviser to the California Coastal Commission the Board has been able to protect the small town atmosphere and scale of O.B. Though the board itself cannot stop development, the Coastal Commission has upheld most of its recommendations. To our surprise, last fall the Regional Coastal Commission approved Winchell's, and the State Coastal Commission refused to hear the case on appeal.

PAW formed, distributed bumper stickers and leaflets, and picketed the proposed site. Our letters and phone calls to corporate headquarters in La Miranda went unanswered.

It was only after last winter's fire bombings of two local Winchell's that the company acknowledged us, but even then, they had no interest in negotiating. PAW continued picketing and gathered the signatures necessary to put the Winchell's question to the voters of O.B. in the form of a non-binding referendum on our June 20 O.B. ballot. Then, just three weeks before our local election, Winchell's announced that they were backing out. The reason they gave was that no contractor would take on the project for a reasonable sum.

To Denny's/Winchell's, O.B. is just a figure on a balance sheet. In the end, it was the company's own inflexibility that destroyed the project. Their disrespect and arrogance toward the community hardened opposition to them. Our victory has shown that a community can fight back against the corporate intruder.

—Tom Yamaguchi
—Laura Lent
People Against Winchell's
San Diego, Calif.

Johnstone appreciated

HOORAY FOR DIANA JOHNSTONE. She has ardent fans. Her analysis of terrorism in Italy, general politics in France and Italy, and now the rape case in France (*ITT*, June 14) is much appreciated. I'm glad she's writing for you.

—Wini Breines
Cambridge, Mass.

Anti-government revolt

YOUR EDITORIAL, "IN THE wake of Jarvis-Gann" (June 14), omits an essential element of the Jarvis-Gann equation, namely the criticism of the government itself at all levels. Government is bloated with 17 million employees. Much of it is unacceptably inefficient concerning which almost every adult American has personal experience or has friends who tell him or her instances of gross waste. Pension ripoffs, excessive holiday and sick leave arrange-

ments, and half day work for full day pay are common in the government at all levels. Much of the government attitude towards citizens is domineering instead of respectful.

This widespread view of the American people of government arteriosclerosis should not be ignored by *IN THESE TIMES* but, on the contrary, should be continually investigated. This is not to paint the entire government with a single brush stroke but to expose unacceptable inefficiency and bureaucracy. The use of Ombudsmen, Sunset Laws, revision of the Civil Service rules and public financing of all elections would help remedy governmental inefficiency.

For a socialist newspaper, this problem is particularly important because socialism would inevitably increase the size and function of government at all levels. Thus, the government serving the people rather than dominating the people, is an issue not only for today but for the future.

—Lee Marsh
Berkeley, Calif.

Steady through times and tides

THANKS SO MUCH FOR THE wonderful article about Hobart McKean (*ITT*, June 14). I've been reading his letters and essays for quite a while and only recently found out my father is a friend of one of Hobart's sons. So seeing the article was like a dose of old home week.

I've admired Hobart McKean for years. It takes such strength to keep living one's politics when the times and tides have turned against them. I know I'm heartened to know of this person and his strength, and to become better aware of the political history of eastern Montana. May we all be living our politics as Hobart does when we're 80.

—Marie A. Root
Miles City, Mont.

Ask a worker

I WANT TO OBJECT TO YOUR photo section (*ITT*, June 14), "Images of Labor."

Implicitly, you repeat the fiction that the only people who work for a living are horny-handed miners, machinists, construction workers.

So, teachers, bank clerks, store salespeople are not "workers"? Why don't you ask a couple of them? Yet these are probably your major constituency.

Your prejudice may have made some sense 40 years ago. But this is, to end on a radical note, 1978.

—Samuel Schiffer
Los Angeles

More than lip-service wanted

I LIKE *ITT* BUT I AM QUITE DISAPPOINTED at the lack of feminist reporting. It seems that feminism is being paid lip service, but feminist-socialist analysis (an integrating approach) is absent. For instance the last issue had no hint of feminism except a plug by Gloria Steinem (who is hardly a socialist-feminist activist). If space is a problem we could do without the sports (male) coverage.

—Alice Adeo
Davis, Calif.

A pressing proposal

THE ESTABLISHMENT PRESS does a horrible job of reporting the news. Not only is its reporting generally distorted, but on most critical matters it's non-existent. Each week, one can find in a paper such as *Le Monde*, hardly an organ of leftist propaganda, stories of major consequence concerning Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe, and even the U.S., which receive little or no coverage here.

The poor performance of the media in disseminating information should be

an immediate concern of the left. It will be difficult for a socialist movement to advance very quickly if the media that inform the overwhelming majority of the American people continue to ignore a vast quantity of news that would lend credibility to a leftist critique of society.

Publications such as *IN THESE TIMES* have an essential role to play which will increase in importance as a socialist movement grows. But we must not ignore those who obtain their news from the establishment media.

The left should be able to unite on this issue with community groups, labor groups, and some small businesses. Through petitions, and subscriptions and advertising boycotts, we can pressure the most vulnerable sections of the media, probably independent local newspapers, into meeting our demands for expanded coverage.

Cooperation with community groups should provide extremely valuable experience, which can be built upon to form a solid base for the left. The association of the left with the increased dissemination of information, should help to remove the image of totalitarianism that hangs over the left. This issue provides a unique opportunity which we cannot ignore.

—Dean Baker
Seattle, Wash.

Insensitivity to white ethnics

IN AN OTHERWISE USEFUL ARTICLE written, ironically, on Mayor Ed Koch's shabby treatment of the New York City Human Rights Commission (*ITT*, June 14), Nora Lapin shows an insensitivity to white ethnics often characteristic of liberal-left circles. After describing Koch's maneuvering in the hiring and firing of Commissioner Nieto Ortiz, Lapin comments:

"Acting Chairman Frank Mangino is an Italian-American from Queens, whom an elected official with close ties to the Commission described as a 'two-bit politician who can't speak a simple sentence, let alone enforce anti-discrimination law.'"

In choosing to highlight Mangino's ethnicity, while utilizing, and perhaps hiding behind, the above anonymous "expert" characterization, the author feeds directly into prevalent anti-Italian stereotypes, and therefore is guilty at least of insensitivity to the feelings of Italian-Americans. Because Mangino is an Italian-American, he is a stupid clubhouse politician (read mobster?) incapable of sensitivity to civil rights. Or so the structure of the statement encourages our biases, effortlessly, to extract.

The article's tactic here, whether intended by Lapin or not, is to add fire to the criticism of City Hall by tapping common anti-Italian prejudice. In so doing, an important statement is cheapened: If Mangino is incompetent, why not simply say so?

To those to whom my remarks sound severe, remember we are not dealing with literal precision, but with personal reaction that cannot disregard past abuse. Those of us who admit to our prejudices have learned to be wary of using group stereotypes to depict individuals—even when the stereotype seems an apt description. We do this to help break down prejudice, and show respect to those upon whose self-image society regularly tramples. But when it comes to white ethnics, many of us on the left stop short. Somehow, there the remarks remain funny.

The left's continued insensitivity to white ethnics remains morally troublesome, and fast is becoming a luxury we can ill afford. As a person on the left, I value Lapin's analysis. Yet, I deeply resent the slur, both as an Italian-American and as a person on the left.

—Tom DeLuca
Cambridge, Mass.

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.



"Gosh, General—72 isn't old for a war horse."