

EDITORIAL/OPINION



Africans flex muscles

by N. Fungai Kumbula

Where is racism?

"There are some damn racists people in this country that don't give a damn about the Constitution."

When Dr. James Nabrit, President Emeritus of Howard University and co-counsel in the Brown v Board of Education case, said those words last week, he could very well have been talking about the Portland school district.

After twenty-five years, 25 per cent of Portland's Black school children still attend segregated schools, yet school board member Jonathan Newman labeled as separatist the Black United Front demands that the Albina schools be integrated through cross-busing, that two integrated middle schools be established in the Black community, and that Black students bussed out to other schools make up at least 40 per cent of those schools.

How can demanding schools that are 60 per cent white and 40 per cent Black be called separatist? How can demanding the transfer of white students to Black schools be called separatist? How can integrated middle schools be called separatist?

Since before the 1954 Brown decision, Portland Blacks have been calling for integrated schools. In 1962 the NAACP demanded integration and was refused -- the separatist "Model Schools" were created instead. In 1970 the NAACP opposed Blanchard's "Schools for the Seventies" plan on the basis that the remaining K-5 schools would continue to be segregated.

The Model Cities Planning Committee recommended pairing Black schools with white schools to attain desegregation, but was refused and the segregated schools remained.

When Black parents opposed the injustice of the Newman Plan, which would have barred selected Black students from Jefferson High School without providing them a regular high school assignment, they were accused of opposing desegregation.

When earlier this year the Community Coalition for School Integration, a group made up of as many whites as Blacks, called for desegregation through school pairing, the district refused. Again the segregated schools were retained.

In short, the school district has confined Black children to inadequate and segregated schools where their achievement still tests at the lowest level of the district. Yet every group, whether liberal white or activist Black, that calls for desegregation is maligned by district spokesmen.

The racism is in the School Board and in the administration, not in the Black community. The Black United Front is asking for the same equity for Black children that this community has sought for more than twenty-five years.

Why not Cawthorne?

Next Monday night the Portland School Board will elect a new member to the Board. Herb Cawthorne has received the endorsements of the Oregonian, Willamette Week, the Observer, and at least a suggestion that he be considered from the Oregon Journal.

Cawthorne received these endorsements, and the strong support of three Board members, because he is without doubt the most qualified candidate -- Black or white. In fact he is the most qualified candidate the Board has seen in a long time. His knowledge, involvement and concern with education and his integrity, intelligence, communication skills and personal qualities can be matched by no member of the current Board.

Why not name Cawthorne to the Board? Power. Why would those who now hold power want an articulate Black man on their Board -- a man who already has vehemently disagreed with the most explosive issues they will face. Why would they want a constant reminder that they are breaking the law -- that they are discriminating against and abusing Black children? Why would they want someone who can belie their proudest achievement -- a "successful voluntary desegregation program."

The new Board member will hold the balance of power, and if a person is selected who will seize that power, the old regime will come tumbling down. And once Jonathan Newman, and to a lesser extent, Frank McNamara no longer dictate policy, how long will Dr. Blanchard be around?

The editorial endorsement of Cawthorne by the Oregonian demonstrates a clear change in attitude toward the Superintendent. It demonstrates that downtown business interests are not completely satisfied. The school district has lost a series of levies and faces a potential teacher strike as well as the boycott. The two Board members who faced strong opposition in the recent election were defeated. There is a strong element of disenchantment with the school district in many areas of the city and many levels of society.

Cawthorne would be the obvious bridge between an embattled Board and an angry Black community. He, as no other, could guide the district to an equitable and legal desegregation program. He also could be a strong factor in bringing credibility to the Board in many other areas.

But the stakes are too high. The district is apparently willing to face a school boycott, a teacher strike, and a federal suit -- perhaps all at once -- rather than risk losing their power. And the man with the most to lose is Dr. Blanchard.

So it's politics before principles -- as usual.

The OAU concluded its conference in Liberia, Monrovia a week ago and it is generally agreed, this was the most productive conference in the African body's 16 year history. There was the heated exchange between Tanzania's Julius Nyerere and Sudan's Gaafar Nimeiri over Tanzania's role in the overthrow of Idi Amin. The Sudan, backed by Nigeria, was charging Tanzania with violation of the OAU charter which forbids members from violating the territorial integrity of other member nations. Tanzania, backed by the new Ugandan government, countered by chastizing OAU inactivity when Amin had originally invaded Tanzania, this initiating the war that culminated in his ouster.

The same OAU session saw the creation of an Africa-wide civil rights watchdog. Though this body was not endowed with any specific powers to deal with civil rights violators, its setting up is a major step in the right direction. It is a well known fact that, even though the OAU unreservedly condemned apartheid, colonialism and other forms of oppression in the minority ruled countries of southern Africa, it had brazenly turned a blind eye to gross violations of human rights in Black ruled Africa. The OAU never said anything about mass arrests and executions in Rwanda and Burundi a few years back, nothing about Zaire, the Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Malawi, and the list goes on.

This particular session of the OAU went so far as to lambast Jean Bedel Bokassa, self styled emperor of the Central African Republic (Central African Empire) for the recent massacre of 100 schoolchildren ranging in ages from seven to sixteen. The children had been protesting Bokassa's ruling requiring them to wear school uniforms and they had protested because they could not afford the uniforms.

Bokassa sent in his troops to quell the protests and they arrested about 200 of the protesters. Some of the protesters had thrown stones at Bokassa's car. Those who were arrested were taken to jail where they were crammed into cells so tightly that about 100 of them died either from suffocation or were trampled to death. Others were said to have been beaten to death by the soldiers on Bokassa's orders.

The OAU also condemned the regime of Macias Nguema, another Ida Amin, dictator of the West African country of Equatorial Guinea. His was reportedly one of the bloodiest regimes anywhere in the world, so bad, in fact, that as much as 40 per cent of its entire population was forced into exile.

This past Friday, I received the good news that the same Macias Nguema had been overthrown in a bloodless coup.

Nigeria clashed with Ghana over the latter's spate of executions of former government officials. Nigeria went so far as to cut off all oil supplies to Ghana until and unless those executions were halted.

With the intra-African disputes concluded, the OAU then focused its attention on the one area where there is nary a voice of discord: minority rule in southern Africa. The dominant topic this year, of course, was Rhodesia. The OAU rightly condemned the Muzorewa regime, set up at the end of May, as a sham -- a front for continued white domination -- and threw its weight behind the Patriotic Front. The PF, carrying on the armed struggle, was declared the sole representative of the people of Zimbabwe.

The OAU closed with a warning to the world at large that "any country recognizes the Muzorewa regime, that would be construed as enemy action against all Africa". Nigera singled out Britain in particular because the Thatcher government had been hinting at recognition of Rhodesia and a resumption of trade. Nigeria also warned the U.S. where conservatives have been pressuring President Carter to lift trade sanctions and recognize the Muzorewa regime. These warnings were greased with oil. Nigera supplies 17 per cent of the U.S.'s oil needs and is second only to Saudi Arabia.

Fired up by these developments at the OAU, the Africans carried this tough, no nonsense attitude to Lusaka, Zambia, to the annual Commonwealth prime ministers' conference. The Commonwealth conference brings together British and 38 of her former colonies. As with the OAU, the dominant topic of the agenda was Rhodesia. To emphasize the seriousness of her threat, Nigeria nationalized British Petroleum assets in Nigeria. The British government owns 51 per cent of BP and Nigeria said her actions were precipitated by BP's role in continuing to supply oil to South Africa.

Apparently the British, who now drill oil out of their North Sea oilfields, had been supplying oil to South Africa (filling the gap left by Iran) and using Nigerian oil to make up for the shortfall this created in Britain. When Nigeria announced this nationalization, the British were FURIOUS! This was the boldest action taken against the British in a long, long time.

As the conference progressed, African countries, led by Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia stepped up the pressure on Thatcher (the British premier) to abandon her idea of

recognizing the Muzorewa regime. All along, Britain had been arguing that Muzorewa was elected by the people of Zimbabwe in "free and fair elections" and that, as such, his government merited recognition and acceptance into the international community.

This past Monday, Britain completely reversed her position. She now concedes that the constitution on which the Muzorewa government is based is grossly unfair, discriminatory and illegal. It is unfair in that it holds out so many privileges (control of the army, police, judiciary, civil service) for the minority whites. She is now calling for "significant changes in the constitution" and a whole new round of elections -- elections that would be held under international supervision. This new approach should strengthen Carter's hand considerably.

This is a major victory for the Africans. If everything works out the way it is planned, a new constitution drafted, new elections held in which all interested candidates would participate, which would also be internationally supervised to eliminate the possibility of threats, intimidation and coercion of voters, then whoever wins will rightfully claim the Zimbabwe leadership. This would substantially reduce the possibility of a post election civil war because whoever loses under such circumstances will find it very hard to marshal support inside or outside Zimbabwe. The front line states could no longer harbor guerrillas after elections of this sort had been held and, without outside bases, any serious challenge to the Zimbabwe government would be pretty high impossible.

Curiously, it appears that Smith and Muzorewa will agree to this new set of conditions. They probably see it as the only way in which to end the war which is now costing a staggering \$1.5 million a day, driving a thousand whites out of the country every month, has bogged down farming, almost crippled industry and brought the country to the brink of bankruptcy, not to mention the 16,000 Zimbabweans who have died so far, and the banditry and lawlessness that have now become endemic throughout the country.

In all of these good tidings, the most important factor has been African solidarity. For the first time, Africans have not only worked together, they have also exercised their collective muscle and, in the process, have served notice to the whole world: "Look out, the Sleeping Giant is awaking." As Africa realizes that the world needs Africa more than Africa needs the world, this could usher in the most dramatic shift in world power we have yet witnessed.

Door to prison reform is closing

(Continued from page 1 col. 6) movement, now hopelessly split between those fighting for prisoners' rights and those in active support of what they considered to be revolutionary violence on the part of some prisoners, never recovered.

The revolutionaries on the outside failed to recognize the reality hidden from the revolutionaries inside, that revolution was not imminent in the United States of the 1970s. The high tide of political struggle which characterized the sixties was giving way to the ebb of the seventies by the time of Angela Davis' acquittal. The new reality was a bitter disappointment to the revolutionary prisoners released in the early 1970s, and it was

unacceptable, and unaccepted, by some of those in the support movements outside.

Violence born of despair was one reaction to the decidedly non-revolutionary situation. Groups such as the Tribal Thumb and the Symbionese Liberation Army unsuccessfully attempted to substitute a strategy of anarchism and terrorism for the mass demonstrations of the 60s. The failure of these strategies to accomplish revolutionary change or win a mass following, prompted more frustration and fratricidal violence, such as the 1976 murder of Popeye Jackson, a Black former convict active in reform movements who, like Fay Stender, was accused of "selling

out."

The prison movement won some important legal victories on behalf of prisoners. In California, prisoners are no longer deemed "legally dead" and may be deprived of "only such rights as is necessary for the reasonable security of the institution" in which they are confined. Prisoners won the right to possess any and all written materials, other than publications which describe how weapons can be produced. U.S. Supreme Court decisions have guaranteed prison inmates access to legal materials and to fellow inmates with legal knowledge. Suits brought by the American Civil Liberties Union have resulted in judgments

declaring the entire state prison systems of Alabama, Rhode Island, and Tennessee unconstitutional because the conditions prevailing in them constitute cruel and unusual punishment. Limited due process rights have been guaranteed to prisoners facing disciplinary proceedings for the violation of prison rules.

Judicial largesse, however, has become increasingly infrequent in the recent years of fiscal conservatism, and in the absence of a mass political movement in support of prisoners' rights. Rehnquist's "one man, one cell" decision follows other Supreme Court cases denying prisoners the right to take part in the activities of a charitable labor union and severely limiting the rights of prisoners to challenge their convictions through filing writs of habeas

corpus. The Court's new limitation on the traditional remedy of habeas corpus means that state prisoners will be denied access to federal courts to test the validity of their confinement against unconstitutional standards.

America's economic problems do not augur well for the 300,000 men and women now confined in this nation's federal and state prisons. With government economy so popular among politicians, including many judges, prisoners' rights appear an unnecessary luxury to bestow upon a constituency without votes or political leverage. But the economic benefits derived from present policies may be short-lived. History teaches that the pressure which builds up behind the walls of a San Quentin, Attica, or Leavenworth will be released -- somehow.

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