

EDITORIAL/OPINION

The new feudalism

by Manning Marable

The level of American political discourse plummeted to new lows with President Reagan's recent proposal to reshuffle Federal and state responsibilities for domestic socio-economic programs. Reagan's New Federalism is viewed by most Blacks as a retreat into the nineteenth century, a conservative program to balance the burgeoning Federal budget on the backs of welfare mothers, school children and the elderly. The logic behind these initiatives is exceedingly familiar to Blacks—States' Rights, laissez faire, and an almost feudal conceptualization of the role of government in the social and economic life of human beings. An assessment of the proposals conceived by Reagan reminds one of a comment made by Goethe: there is nothing more frightening than ignorance in action.

On paper, Reagan's "financially equal swap" appears to be a simplistic extension of his general philosophy of States Rights and a truncated Federal authority. States would save \$19.1 billion from the Federal government's Medicaid takeover, and would receive an additional \$28 billion from a Federal trust fund similar to one that finances the Interstate Highway system. The new fund would be financed from additional Federal excise taxes on tobacco, alcohol and gasoline sales. The states would receive control of 43 programs, ranging from Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC), food stamps, public housing, education, community development and other social service programs. Between 1987 and 1991, the fund would be gradually eliminated, and states would be forced to choose between higher local taxes or would have to slash programs completely.

For many Civil Rights leaders and liberals, the scheme had the air of unreality. Some pointed out that the Federal Highway Trust Fund has run large deficits since 1980. Drew Lewis, Reagan's Transportation Secretary, had already urged the Administration to raise gasoline taxes from 4 to 9 cents a gallon. Any additional taxes to finance social programs would be a burden to working class and poor consumers. Reagan's idea for transferring these programs to the states had originally come from two governors, Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, a Republican, and Democrat Bruce Babbitt of Arizona. But only one day after the President's speech, Babbitt carefully distanced himself from the inevitable political fallout, claiming that he would have to oppose the plan in its present form. In Babbitt's view, Reagan would have to placate the justifiable fears of Blacks and Hispanics, especially in the light of Reagan's record on the Voting

Rights Act and his disastrous position on tax exemptions for all-white private educational institutions.

The greatest concern of all is that once the state governments assume responsibility for welfare, CETA, food stamps, etc., that even the tattered "safety net" provided for the poor will disappear. Since Proposition Thirteen, a wave of tax reduction referenda have passed many states. Most state governments did not increase welfare payments at all last year, and five states actually cut benefits. In order to maintain needed social programs, liberal lobbyists and Civil Rights organizations would be forced to conduct a series of guerrilla-like campaigns in unfriendly state legislatures. In all probability, states that maintained certain social programs at humane levels might receive massive in-migrations of poor and low-income people from the more fiscally austere states. For Blacks, this could result in a pathetic new migration of literally millions of persons, desperately seeking the means to survive. Even for political moderates who have endorsed other Reagan initiatives, the specter of major cities and rural areas with large concentrations of minorities turning into vast poorhouses is simply unacceptable in the 1980s. "What is the logic in Federalizing one poverty program but turning back the others?" editorialized the *New York Times*. "Do poor people get equally sick in different places but unequally hungry?"

It is possible to believe that Reagan's advisers are convinced that white voters and politicians have successfully identified welfare, food stamps and other social programs with Black and Latino recipients to such an extent that the white majority will be willing to go along with the New Federalism. But even this "closet racist" strategy fails when one examines exactly which racial constituencies would lose if these programs were reduced or eliminated. One illustration will suffice—food stamps. The 1977 Food Stamp Act was designed to "permit low-income households to obtain a more nutritious diet." According to the Bureau of the Census research of March, 1980, about 5.9 million households received food stamps in 1979. The median annual income of these families was a meager \$5,300. 77 per cent had total money incomes below \$10,000 a year. The average face value of food stamps received in 1979 was \$810 per household. Who receives food stamps? 63 per cent of all household recipients were white, 3.7 million families. Only 2.1 million of 35 per cent were Black; 600,000 were Latino, totaling 10 per cent. One million households were 65 years or older. Two-thirds of the households had children 18 years old and under.

Both major parties agree that the New Federalism is actually a diversionary tactic to shift the political terrain to the right during a period of high unemployment and economic stagnation. For Republicans, particularly leaders in the Senate, it does not obscure their major worry, and the central concern of Wall Street—staggering Federal deficits. Most GOP politicians who are not supply-siders recognize that Reagan's massive deficits could create panic in financial markets, causing a new round of high inflation, and even another more severe recession sometime in 1983 or early 1984. "If we embrace the kinds of deficits now projected," admitted Republican Senator William Armstrong of Colorado, "the financial markets will go nuts." Another Republican senator informed the *Wall Street Journal* that he was unwilling to embrace Reagan's new proposals, because cuts in social programs could never justify the tremendous expenditure in military hardware. "What we didn't figure in all this was that defense spending would add up to financing a war."

For Democrats, the New Federalism could create the first real possibility of recovery from the political Waterloo of 1980—but it could also widen the split between conservatives and liberals within party ranks, alienating Blacks and Latinos. Every Democrat would have attacked Reagan if he had listened to his advisers and had introduced tax increases in the midst of a recession. But since Reagan didn't ask for new taxes, they will undoubtedly attack the Administration from both the left and the right. Fiscal conservatives like Oklahoma's Representative James Jones and other Boll Weevils will charge that they now represent economic responsibility, and that the Republicans are now the "Big Spenders." Liberals like California Governor Jerry Brown charge that the transfer of programs is a "diversionary tactic, diversionary from the central issue of our time, which is the sick economy and the 9.5 million people who are out of work." The irony is that the Democrats have not yet developed an effective programmatic alternative to the Right. The New Federalism will serve as a lightning rod for all kinds of criticism, but the fact remains that the Democrats do not have any real solutions to the fiscal crisis of the state, nor have developed any consensus to recapture the political initiative.

Opportunism makes bad politics. The New Feudalism will create a temporal unity among the principal targets of Reagan's States' Rights agenda—Blacks, labor, and the poor. But that is a sorry substitute for the hard political work that remains to be done before the forces of Reaganism are defeated.

Matthew Prophet: Will they let him do the job?

Dr. Matthew Prophet comes to the Portland School District with solid support in the community. He had the unanimous vote of the citizen and staff committees that participated in the selection process.

Although the School Board was somewhat reluctant and would have preferred one of the white candidates, six of the seven finally decided to select him. Only Charlotte Beeman voted for another candidate.

The question now is whether the community and the School Board will allow Dr. Prophet to succeed.

The Board has every reason to wish the new superintendent success. The Board is seen by much of the public as weak and disorganized, divided and indecisive. No one has emerged as a leader. Herb Cawthorne and Steve Buel are the minority; Dean Gisvold and Charlotte Beeman are followers; Joe Rieke is in a class by himself; and Bill Scott and Frank McNamara compete for the lead. McNamara has not shown the strength to lead and his constant wrangling at Scott weakens Scott's position.

The Board should be well aware that they need a Superintendent who can project an image of intelligence, commitment, strength and competence. Anything less will leave them in a state of chaos.

The only segment of the community that did not strongly support Dr. Prophet was the Chamber of Commerce, which made a last-ditch effort to stop his selection. Whether this group

of downtown businessmen—those who have the power and make the decisions—will tolerate a strong Black man in a position of power and influence is debatable. We have not seen it yet.

Perhaps the more serious question is whether the district's administrative staff will support Prophet or whether they will attempt to sabotage him by withholding information and through "passive resistance." This is rumored to be one of the problems that hampered Dr. Jim Fenwick's early days as interim-superintendent. Perhaps Dr. Fenwick should have cut with a deeper sword and gotten rid of some of the dead wood and those who were more loyal to past administrations. His kindness and willingness to give everyone a new opportunity might have cost him not only greater success but even the job.

Another problem will be the principals—many of their incompetent to do the job, unwilling to progress, unaware of current needs. Will men who tell racist jokes at their staff meetings respond positively to a Black superintendent?

We recommend to Dr. Prophet that he watch his back carefully and not hesitate to eliminate any whose undivided loyalty he has reason to question.

Dr. Prophet is on his own. Although he has the support of most of the Board—at least in the beginning—he cannot expect that Board to deal with the staff problems that they have tolerated for years.

Dr. Prophet is walking into the Lion's Den. But he can prevail if he pulls his sword first.

Putting death before life

The American people are being squeezed between Reagan's budget cuts—especially in the areas of social programs, job training, and economic development—and the shortfall in state and local tax funds that hurt the same programs.

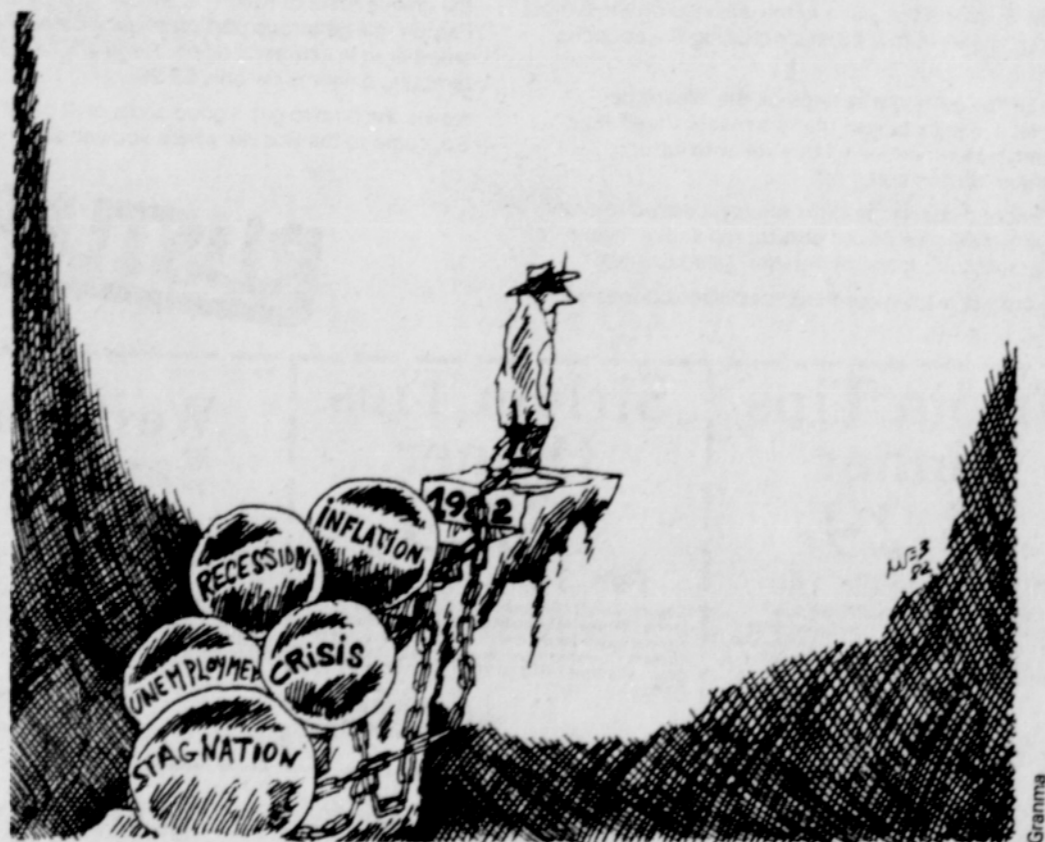
While Reagan talks about making social programs—much needed help for the elderly, the unemployed and unemployable, and children—the responsibility of the states, the high rate of unemployment is affecting the collection of state taxes to fund those programs.

The State of Oregon, with one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation, is caught in a vicious circle. Inability to collect taxes from unemployed people means the job placement and job training programs so badly needed will suffer. And the cycle continues. Cuts in education, health and other areas will depress the job market and the tax revenues of the future.

While the states are sinking into deep financial problems with nowhere to turn for assistance, Reagan has proposed an obscene increase in military spending. Not only has he asked for more missiles, planes, tanks, etc., but he has authorized and will fund the development and stockpiling of nerve gas.

The nerve gas is supposedly for use against Soviet troops in case of an attack on Europe. This is also the excuse for the helicopters and fighter jets—but these weapons are not defending anyone from a Soviet attack, rather they are killing innocent people in El Salvador. The U.S. has already used napalm and biological warfare against the people of Vietnam, El Salvador and Cuba, and will again.

Will we continue to willingly buy the utensils of death, bringing suffering and pain to the peoples of the world, while our own people suffer from hunger and neglect?



School Board delays Tubman decision

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if Boise is closed and its Kindergarten through fifth-grade students are put in surrounding schools, the Black percentage of those schools will increase. Also, many students that will have to be moved from Beach and King to make room for Boise youngsters will be white because of their geographic location.

The Board faces a dilemma. The restoration of grades to Albina schools; the new policy of allowing Albina students to attend school in their neighborhoods; and the decrease of white pre-school students coming into the area schools has pushed the minority per cent upward. Establishing the middle school at either Boise or Eliot would increase that percentage—a situation that appalls McNamara, Dean Gisvold, Charlotte Beeman and Joe Rieke. To locate it outside the community not only breaks a commitment but opens the district to a discrimination charge.

If Tubman is assigned to Eliot, 450 primary students would be

moved. Most are already bused to Eliot and could be placed, as a group, in another building.

If Tubman is located at Boise, 333 lower grade students at Boise would have to be reassigned. Also, to make room for those students in adjacent schools, the following transfers would occur: 100 students from Humboldt to King, 60 students from King to Sabin, 60 students from King to Woodlawn, 30 students from Beech to Chief Joseph. Approximately 663 primary students would have to be reassigned and the Eliot building would need to be expanded to some 600 students.

Use of the Monroe building would have no effect on the neighborhood schools and would not displace students.

Joe Rieke favored delay of the decision until after the tax levy vote in May. He opposes putting the school at Eliot.

McNamara favors the Monroe building and feels Eliot would not provide quality facilities. "Any choice is going to give considerable difficulty in the community. We will

take a lot of heat because of any decision."

Scott is opposed to delay and sees nothing that will change enough to counterbalance the cost to students, staff and administration of delay.

Beeman favors Monroe. In a sharp exchange with Cawthorne she said she had always opposed Eliot because it cannot provide excellence to "the population we want to serve." Cawthorne accused her of being on the verge of "making the same type spectator approach as with the school closings."

Rieke said it was the Eliot decision that placed him in the impossible situation of favoring desegregation but not being able to vote in favor of the plan. "It is not consistent with what we need—an excellent facility for an excellent school."

Cawthorne reminded him that in December of 1979 Dr. Robert Blanchard had proposed middle schools at Eliot, Hayhurst and Chapman—and had documented that a middle school could be successful at Eliot.

The Board voted to eliminate some of the options: to eliminate Jefferson (Rieke No); to eliminate Washington/Monroe (Rieke, No); to eliminate Adams (Rieke and McNamara, No); Cascade College. The Board failed to eliminate Monroe (McNamara, Rieke, Gisvold, Beeman, No), Boise (Scott, Gisvold, Rieke and Beeman, No). (Buel was absent for this voting.)

Buel called for a vote on siting it in the Black community to see where the lines are drawn and let the Black community know where the Board members stand: Scott, Beeman, McNamara, Gisvold, and Rieke voted No.

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