

1984 election agenda: Addressing the pain, hurt

by Joseph E. Lowery

The combined effects of high unemployment, federal policies that constitute a vicious assault on rights so dearly won, and embarrassing capitulation by Democratic opposition have created a crisis of frightening dimensions for Afro-Americans.

While media interest has centered on a possible black presidential candidacy, we have been concentrating on developing a "peoples platform" that must be addressed

by all candidates who seek black votes.

This agenda — not a black agenda, but an agenda for America — will demand bold measures to deal with an economy that is strangling nearly 35 million Americans whose earnings are so low they are trapped in dungeons of poverty. It will seek the involvement of all instruments of government and responsible elements of the private sector to initiate programs for change.

The agenda recognizes that the nation's economic health is not solely a black issue. It has happened to blacks and Hispanics first, but it is a precursor of what will happen to millions of white Americans as our economy shifts to respond to high technology, foreign competition and automation.

We must consider systemic changes, targeting re-training and initiatives to create new jobs. The so-called job bills recently enacted with Democratic cooperation will not cause the problems of structural unemployment to tremble, let alone diminish. The "recovery" some argue is in progress will not touch the chronically unemployed.

Long before we look at any presidential candidate seriously, we must look at how these issues are addressed. Personalities will be measured against issues.

If it can be clear that the platform is the priority issue, then we come to the issue of a black presidential candidate. I feel that this is a viable option, and I do so with full awareness of the risks involved. Unless the announced candidates seriously embrace the "peoples platform," many of us are willing to take the risks.

If the next Congress is no different from the Democratic House that

has played "me-too-ism" with the administration, then many of us are willing to take the risks.

If the announced candidates don't commit themselves in very certain terms to bold measures to address the issues in the "peoples platform," we are willing to take the risks.

Black Americans are sick and tired of being used by Democrats to gain public office and then ignored or given token response to our concerns. Black Americans are sick and tired of being taken for granted "because they have nowhere else to go."

And, as the late Mississippi warrior Fannie Lou Hamer put it: "We are sick and tired of being sick and tired."

We want to know what measures will be taken to develop an urban policy that will save our cities from further decay, will expand mass-transit systems and assure that block grants reach the most-needy areas.

We want to hear about the launching of peace and arms-reduction initiatives that will half the rise in deficits that wreak havoc with economic stability. We want to hear about moral leadership that calls all nations to reduction of arms and to international attacks on poverty, hunger and disease.

Now let me confess that I approach the prospect of risking the defeat of the "liberal" candidate with considerable caution and agonizing. So I am praying that the announced candidates will hear our cry and embrace our platform.

If we obtain meaningful response, (and tokenism is meaningless), I will urge the support of the candidate with the best chance of winning and implementing the platform. The black vote, from all indications, will be pivotal in 1984 as it was in 1976 and 1960.

Mr. Reagan will probably use all the considerable powers of his office to show signs of improvement in the economy, and even in reducing the arms race before the election. Black voters may very well hold the balance of power to determine election or defeat. In exchange for that power, we must opt for an embracing of the platform.

We applaud the eventual coming together of national Democratic leadership around Harold Washington's successful mayoral campaign in Chicago. It's a good sign. We applaud the "missionary" journey of brother Bert Lance and his Southern band, provided that concern is translated into support for voter-registration efforts in Georgia and the elimination of any

vestiges of racial discrimination against voting rights.

The nation needs leadership that is bold and sensitive. Democrats have a unique opportunity to build a political force consisting of those who are committed to justice, peace, full employment and women's rights.

If the party fails to seize the movement, and if there proves to be little substantive difference in one party that shuns, and the other that shoves — one that ignores and the other that takes for granted — then as many of us see it, we must look for radical options.

A black presidential candidate is one of the options. But, with all the excitement surrounding this issue, we will not lose sight of the importance of congressional and local elections.

Black candidates can stimulate political activism and assure national discussion of critical issues. The pain and hurt in the black and Hispanic communities must be addressed.

Dr. Joseph Lowery, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, is also chairman of the National Black Leadership Forum and the Ad Hoc Committee on the 1984 Elections.



PCC Optical Technology student Joe Loftgren at work in the optics lab at the Cascade Campus. He attends an international optical convention in Milan this month.

Optic student attends International Fair

Joe Loftgren will have the opportunity to learn first-hand how Europeans make eyeglass frames, lenses and contact lenses during his visit to Milan, Italy this week.

A Forest Grove resident and a first year optical technology student at Portland Community College's Cascade Campus, Loftgren is attending the annual International Fair for Optometry, Opticians and Ophthalmology in Milan May 6-19.

Because his father is an aeronautical engineer with the U.S. Department of the Navy, Loftgren has lived most of his life in Italy. He originally intended to become an optometrist and enrolled in the program at Pacific University. Illness forced him to drop out of school after the first semester. When he resumed studies, it was in PCC's Optical Technology program.

"PCC was recommended to me

by an optician at Pacific," says Loftgren. "I feel this is the right profession for me and I like the price at PCC."

When he completes the program, Loftgren intends to set up his own dispensary business in Italy. "That's why this conference is so important to me," he says. "I need to meet the people who cartel to the business, see the new products and equipment and make the contacts. European manufacturing styles differ from the United States. At the conference I can find out first-hand what they are."

Of particular interest, Loftgren will attend a contact lens seminar put on by the Bureau Federale of Dispensing Opticians. When he returns to college in September he'll give slide and lecture presentations to first and second year optical students at Cascade.

Congress considers plant closure legislation

The House Labor-Management Subcommittee, chaired by Rep. William L. Clay (D-Mo.) conducted hearings on a federal plant closure bill last week.

The bill would require companies to give workers, unions, communities and the federal government advance notice of intent to close or transfer operations. It authorizes the Secretary of Labor to explore measures to avoid a shutdown. If the closure occurs, the employer would be liable for income maintenance payments for up to a year, backed by the government. Workers would be entitled to transfer rights and training; communities could receive grants to compensate for the losses.

Nearly every country in Europe restricts mass layoffs and plant closure. In most European countries employers must give notice of layoff — from 3 months to workers with less than five years seniority to 9 months for those with more than 15

years. In Sweden, an employer must show reasonable cause for layoff and government resources are available. Belgium and France have industrial development funds that provide low-interest loans to companies locating where plant closures have occurred. Threat of plant closure as a weapon in collective bargaining is nearly unknown outside the U.S.

AFL-CIO Industrial Union Department President Howard D. Samuel called plant closures "a national crisis," pointing out that it is no longer a phenomenon of older industrial cities. "More than half of all closings in the last decade occurred in the South and the West," he said. Jack Scheinkman, Secretary-Treasurer of the Clothing and Textile Workers said a study of 171 closures of plants by major corporations revealed a median age of 15 years with one-third no more than 6 years.



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