

Between accommodation and liberation

by Trevor W. Purcell

Two campaigns occurring among Blacks these days should give every responsible member of the Black community hope, but also cause for concern: one is Jesse Jackson's campaign for president—undeclared though it is—and the other is the fair-share campaign by Operation PUSH and the NAACP to secure agreements from major corporations to give more jobs and contracts to Blacks at all levels. The benefits to the Black community (and indeed to the country as a whole) from both efforts are indisputable.

Jesse Jackson fever

Jackson's possible candidacy—though not the first by a Black—demonstrates that both psychological and material limits imposed on Black progress for over four centuries in this country can be overcome with sanguine political struggle. He may not win the Democratic nomination but there are important contingency goals which, if achieved, will make his candidacy worthwhile: Black voters will participate more fully as a bloc, and the Democratic candidate will be forced to pay attention to the collective demands of Blacks. In effect, the groundwork is being laid for a serious reckoning with Black political power in the future.

Fair share effort

The fair-share effort will bear badly needed economic fruits immediately, although the long-term rewards will depend on the general political direction of the Black community. Nevertheless, the NAACP has negotiated over \$100 million in fair share agreements and PUSH, which initiated the effort, has also made significant strides. Aligned with the fair-share effort is the boycott weapon which has been effectively employed by both organizations. With an estimated \$146.1 billion a year spending power among Blacks, corporations can no longer

afford to ignore the Black hand with the green note.

But lest we allow ourselves to be swept away by the excitement of the moment and the apparent glitter of the future, we should pause and reflect on some of the less obvious but potentially troublesome aspects of these two efforts. There is no intention on my part to throw the proverbial wrench into the works; Blacks are in a historical rut and we have a moral obligation to extricate ourselves. The crucial question is by what method we shall achieve our goal. We cannot assume the end justifies the means and therefore any means will do. In historical processes the means have a sneaky way of becoming part of the end. We must therefore define our ends clearly and unambiguously so that we may select the most appropriate and dignified means.

Common struggle

Jackson's candidacy and the fair-share campaign have several things in common, but there is one particular aspect I want to highlight: They both indicate, among other things, a willingness to struggle for Black liberation within the confines and according to the dictates of the present socio-political system. Indications are that Blacks who enter the mainstream political arena soon discover that possibilities for meaningful change are limited by the constraints within the system, become co-opted by the social and political demands inherent in trying to remain in office, or become shackled by a touch of both. An incident involving Marion Barry, a former 1960s civil rights activist and current mayor of Washington, D.C., is illustrative. In a recent Public Broadcasting System documentary a young Black journalist pointed out that when poor and desolate residents of Southeast D.C. complained that they get little or no attention from the mayor, Barry's response was, "They don't vote."

The pressure to conform to the

system weighs heavily on politicians, Black or white. But the priorities of the Black politician must be different from those of the uncritical white. To put it figuratively, the Black politician is a descendant of the slave while the white politician is a descendant of the master. The slave cannot liberate himself or herself by conforming to the values of the master. Granted, we are no longer slaves but we are still oppressed—along with other poor sectors of the population. Black politicians must therefore be more conscious of the plight of the oppressed. It is only by liberating the oppressed that they can liberate themselves. They must not only fulfill the just functions of their office, they must also struggle to reform a society which has consistently failed to live up to its own humanitarian ideals.

Long term goals

The goals of Blacks as well as of the society at large, simply stated, should be peace and freedom. These goals must be achieved through a just distribution of economic rewards regardless of race, color or religion, along with respect for other cultures and societies, and for the environment. We should ponder the question of whether or not these goals can be achieved by struggling only within the confines of the present political structure. In doing so we must never lose sight of the unfortunate fact that this is the same society that is responsible for our enslavement, that rationalized our domination in terms of natural inferiority, and that is responsible for our worsening economic position even after the bitter civil rights struggles of the 1960s. We must be aware that this country covertly but strongly supports the oppression of South African Blacks under apartheid, that it continues to support the overthrow of left-wing or liberal regimes dedicated to the alleviation of oppression in Latin America and the

Caribbean and imprudently props up right-wing regimes that violate human rights.

These and other glaring atrocities are not simply the result of freak individual or institutional deeds. They have their roots in the very way the society is structured as well as in its injudicious desire to maintain, at all costs, its position of dominance over the rest of the world. A simple change of leadership will not change the nature of this society.

Awesome responsibility

We as Blacks must ask ourselves whether our salvation lies in simply getting a piece of the American pie or in recognizing that the recipe is not so good in the first place since one of its essential ingredients is the oppression of one group for the benefit of another. This country has built its highly flaunted "liberty" on the blood of Native Americans and the sweat of Africans.

Such considerations suggest that the responsibility in the hands of a Black leader—Jackson or any other—would be awesome. Would he/she be allowed to put together a government which balances the demands of big business with the growing desires of the worker to have a greater share in decision making at the workplace? Would he/she be permitted to create an economic atmosphere wherein a job is a human right? Would the hawks in the society countenance the discontinuation of American militarism abroad by a Black president, or would such discontinuation be viewed as a threat to the "liberty" of the mainstream? Would a Black president be allowed to restore to Native Americans the land and dignity taken from them with such brutality? Finally, would a Black president be effective in convincing

Americans to consume less if we are not to deplete the earth's natural resources and thereby hasten the termination of life on this planet?

\$146.1 billion is far more than the Gross National Product of most Third World countries. It is up to us to decide whether we want to use such leverage simply to gain a piece of an already infected pie or whether we might channel our efforts toward developing our own pie. We may not want to reject American society; we are part of it. But we should recognize its inherent shortcomings and not depend on it for

our salvation unless we are prepared to effect deep changes. We should not seek a piece of America simply because our oppressor controls it. By doing so we allow him to define the terms of our self-worth and the conditions of our liberation. It might do us well to remember that during the colonial period there were a few Blacks who, when they got the opportunity, owned other Blacks as slaves. They thought they had arrived. We must choose between accommodation and liberation.



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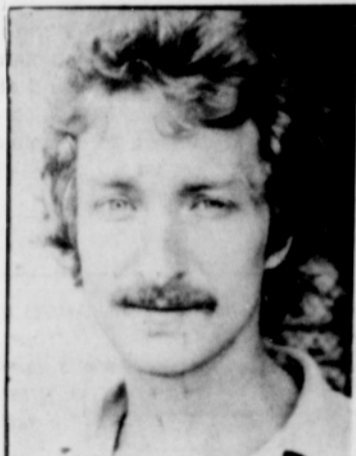
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Street Beat

by Lanita Duke and Richard Brown

The success of the Washington State Lottery was on the minds of the **Street Beat** team as they asked, "Would you favor or oppose having a State Lottery in Oregon as a means of raising revenue?"



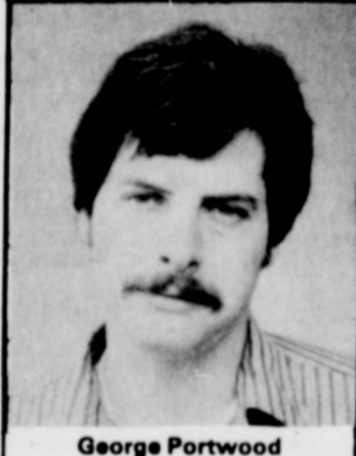
Dan Bauer
Driver

Favor! I live in Washington and it gives the people a chance to win some money or get some of their money back.



Floretta Davidson
Housewife

I favor a lottery in Oregon. I want people to be able to make some money. You have got to spend money to make money.



George Portwood
Maintenance

I would oppose having one in Oregon. I feel the majority of people who buy tickets can't afford them. There is a big "if" either way. I wouldn't want to see a lottery in Oregon.



DeAnn Kamish
Billing Clerk

Favor—for the fun of it. And people who can't afford to play shouldn't even buy the tickets.



Linda Tucker
Housewife

Favor! I think it is a good idea. People are going to gamble anyway so you might as well have the money going for a good cause.



Jackie Files
Student

I would love to have a lottery in Oregon. It gives you a chance of having something new. I think Washington has benefited so why not Oregon?

The Oregon Transportation Commission
wants your opinion
about
highway improvements and repairs planned for this area.

Attend a public meeting on the Six-Year Highway Improvement Program

Location: Multnomah County
Time: 7:30 p.m.
Date: Tuesday, October 11
Address: Multnomah County Sheriff's Bldg.
Auditorium
12240 N.E. Glisan
Portland, OR
Phone: 653-3090

- Hear a report on the condition of the state highway system.
- Learn what improvement projects are scheduled for your area.
- Tell transportation officials what projects you think are most important.

A copy of the Preliminary Six-Year Highway Improvement Program is available from the Department of Transportation,
104 Transportation Building, Salem, Oregon 97310.

For Information Phone...

