

Along the Color Line

by Dr. Manning Marable



Dr. Manning Marable is professor of sociology and political science at Purdue University. "Along the Color Line" appears in over 140 newspapers internationally.

Racial Conflict in Europe

Part III of a Three Part Series

Last month's election in the United Kingdom represented two historical turning points. The first, which has up to this point dominated all political discourse in the international media, was Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's unprecedented victory over her rivals in both the British Labour Party and the Liberal-Social Democratic Alliance. Thatcher's Conservative Party won by a smaller margin than four years ago, but nevertheless dominated the seats in southern and eastern England, the country's most populous and economically-prosperous regions. No Prime Minister in this country has previously won three consecutive elections, and the triumph of Thatcher is being interpreted as a victory for the Reagan-like policies of economic austerity and social reaction.

But from here in London, Thatcher's so-called triumph is far less than impressive. Although she controls Parliament, her Conservative Party won only 44 percent of the electorate. The voters cast ballots against the Labour Party for its failure to advance a coherent social and economic policy alternative to Thatcherism.

The second, and by all odds more substantial victory was the election of four Black and Asian members of Parliament—Bernie Grant, Keith Vaz, Paul Boateng, and Diane Abbott—all elected as left-wing activists within the British Labour Party. Given that there are still no Black judges in any British court, and only one Black mayor in the whole country, this electoral triumph marks the culmination of thirty years' antiracist struggle.

The full meaning of the election of four nonwhites into the British Parliament cannot be comprehended outside of an analysis of the recent currents of Black political and social protest throughout the country. As West Indians and Asians began to emigrate into the United Kingdom during the 1950s, the first form of protest was advanced in the area of journalism. Claudia Jones, a brilliant Black radical who had been forcibly deported from the U.S. during the McCarthy era, led the way by establishing the progressive monthly, the West Indian Gazette. Other militant publications followed, and are still in wide circulation, including the Marxist-oriented Race Today and Black Voice.

Protests were manifested in popular culture, as the sons and daughters of West Indian immigrants began

to be influenced by reggae music and the spiritual-political movement of the Rastafari. Although frequently distorted as a religious cult, Rasta contains a dynamic mix of anti-colonial, anti-racist ideologies which reinforce the capacity of people of African descent to resist cultural genocide in the context of Western societies. In the U.K., Rastas established a branch of the "Ethiopian World Federation" in London, and became active in local anti-racist campaigns. The British police responded to this cultural threat with unprincipled brutality. Rastas' homes were raided without warrants; their characteristic "dreadlocks" hair was forcibly cut off; the media dubbed them "criminals". Rastas and non-Rasta Blacks were increasingly subjected to police harassment and imprisonment. By 1980, Blacks comprised barely 3 percent of the U.S.'s total population but account for one out of six prisoners. Some Rasta leaders are even cynically diagnosed as "schizophrenic" by white psychiatrists and are forcibly placed into mental hospitals.

In the 1980s, the Black struggle has assumed an overtly electoral form, as the 2.5 million nonwhites are seeking to influence the political system in their behalf. Two general and conflicting perspectives are being expressed on this strategy for Black empowerment. One minority tendency of Asian and West Indian activists, including the journals Race Today and the Black Voice, has rejected Black participation inside the Labour Party, and opposes the use of voting as a means to address basic grievances. These militants fear that the small nonwhite middle class may be coopted into the liberal political establishment, thus severing any links between prominent Black spokespersons and their poor and working class constituents.

The majority of Black activists strongly disagree, and advocate the creation of so-called "Black Sections" inside the Labour Party which would serve as permanent caucuses and pressure groups. So far, the white moderate Socialists have adamantly rejected these demands for Black Sections, despite the fact that there are currently "Jewish", "Women's" and even "Lawyer's Sections"! Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock calls Black Sections "reverse racism", ignoring his own silence on vigilantism and rampant police brutality against nonwhites. As newly elected Member of Parliament Paul Boateng states: "Blacks have a critical role to play... We are not concerned with tokenism."

HEALTH WATCH

BY Steven Bailey, N.D.



Part II: Legislative Evaluation

I wrote an earlier article commenting on the specific actions of House and Senate committees on Human Resources and Labor. This week's article will be my attempt to give a rating to all 92 members of the past legislature. My evaluation will focus on the areas of health, labor, handicapped issues, environment and other social and personal concerns. While it is difficult to produce an entirely objective scale for evaluation, I have incorporated my own records as well as conversations with lobbyists for public interest groups.

Starting with a high of Plus Two to a low of Minus One, my ratings are as follows:

THE SENATE:

Plus Two:

Senator Bradbury: especially strong in workers' issues and alternative choice. Senator Cease: strongest in women's issues.

Senator Cohen: strong in women's, environment, and social areas.

Senator Larry Hill: strong in handicapped and labor issues.

Senator Kerans: women's, labor and social issues.

Senator McCoy: strong in nearly all areas.

Senator Roberts: with Senator McCoy, one of the strongest over-all Senators in all social areas.

Plus 1: (This is a good rating but reflects that these Senators didn't actively push social issues.)

Senators: Dukes, Frye, Hamby, Jim Hill, Kitzhaber, Otto, Ryles, Trow and Wyers.

Neutral: (Nothing to be proud of, but did not lead major obstructionist legislation.)

Senators: Breneman, Brockman, Hanon (strong on handicapped issues), Houck, Jernstedt, Kennemer (strong in health care issues), Kintigh, Meeker, Monroe, Simmons, Thorne and Timms; also Senator Ryles' replacement, Senator Bloom.

Minus 1:

Senators: Olson (while a good record in handicapped issues, this could not pull the Senator out of his negative work in women's, environment, personal choice and alternative health care); Yih (Albany has its own breed of Democrat. Senator Yih seems to think that all problems can be solved by "getting a job" and votes against most social issues.)

THE HOUSE:

Plus 2:

Representatives: Bauman (all areas), Carter, Cease, Dix, Eachus, Gold, McTeague, Peterson, Springer

Plus 1:

Representatives: Barilla, Bunn (strong on solar, environment and women's issues, weak in alternative health care), Burton, Dwyer, Fawbush, Ford, Hammerstad and Hooley, Hanlon, Hosticka, Hugo, Mason, McCarty, Sowa, VanVliet and Katz

Neutral:

Representatives: Agrons, Brogotti, Butsch, Campbell, French, Gilman, Gilmour, Hanneman, Hayden, Johnson (good handicapped, terrible labor), Jolin, Jones, Jones, Kopetski, Markham, Miller, Minnis (good handicapped and alternative health care, poor most other areas of social legislation), Norris, Parkenson, Phillips, Pickard, Roberts, Saylor, Schroeder, Shiprack (very poor labor), Sides, Trahern, Van Leeuwen (excellent handicapped), Whitty and Young.

Minus 1:

Representatives: Anderson, Bellamy, Calouri, Katulski (almost created a Negative 2 category), Schoon.

While some of my profession's best friends are rated as neutral, this reflects an evaluation based on a much broader range of votes. Legislators may have strong points in areas outside of labor and social concerns which would not be indicated in the above rating.

Oregon

STATE SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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by William E. Davis
Chancellor of the Oregon
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Higher-Education Investment Reaps Dividends

You don't have to read Forbes magazine to know that some investments really pay off.

Two years ago, the Oregon Legislature was wrestling with where it could invest lottery revenues for the biggest economic dividends.

As lawmakers debated putting \$30.5 million into higher education, we made a pledge. If they voted that money, we told them, we would match it.

But we were wrong. We did not match those lottery dollars just once.

No, instead we have matched them more than three times.

Since the session adjourned in June, 1985, the Oregon State System of Higher Education has received \$99.27 million in federal and private gifts and grants.

This is in addition to about \$120 million that State System schools receive annually for research.

These lottery dollars are building an advanced-sciences complex at the University of Oregon, a new college of engineering facility at Oregon State University, a building for the business school and International Trade Institute at Portland State University, and a high-tech classroom-lab building at Oregon Institute of Technology.

No question about it: These projects are good for Oregon's construction industry, which puts the money back into the economy where it turns over several times.

These projects will continue to attract top-flight faculty to teach and to perform research.

These projects will be instrumental in drawing still more top students.

These projects should serve as a magnet for industry seeking sites near campuses that are not only undertaking cutting-edge research but also graduating top students.

No one claims that all of that \$99.27 million resulted from Oregon lawmakers' bold decision to invest in higher education; but we do know a significant portion did result from their action.

These are examples of those outside dollars:

• \$31.1 million in federal funds for the UO science-center complex, Eugene's largest construction project;

• \$16.5 million in federal funds for hospital renovation and an eye center at Oregon Health Sciences University;

• \$8.6 million in federal dollars for OSU ocean engineering;

• \$2-million-plus in computer equipment donated by Control Data, Hewlett-Packard, Tektronix, Apollo, Intel and Fujitsu.

• \$79,500 in federal funds to use telecommunications technology to help industry researchers share new knowledge with Oregon higher-education faculty; no other state has done this.

• \$329,400 over three years from the Fred Meyer Charitable Trust to the Advanced Science and Technology Institute, created to make OSU and UO research more accessible to corporations.

• \$687,000 from the Tektronix Foundation for electrical-engineering faculty and research at Portland State University.

In addition, contributions from generous individuals and corporations financed the recently completed \$3.2-million Earle A. Chiles Business Center at the U of O and the \$425,000 Schneider Museum of Art at Southern Oregon State College.

There are those who claim putting lottery dollars into higher-education buildings in Eugene, Corvallis, Portland and Klamath Falls was not economic development.

I know of no better response than to point to a tripling of the people's investment in Oregon public higher education.

Unless it is that these new higher-education facilities and the faculty who work in them, will continue to attract hundreds of millions of research dollars for generations to come.

When Oregonians think of economic development, I believe this is what they have in mind.

William E. Davis is chancellor of the Oregon State System of Higher Education.

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

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The Robertson Story Part II

"No one should have to live like this." That's what Mrs. Robertson kept saying. It explains why she and her family kept fighting the racist element on her block in the Flatlands section of Brooklyn, New York. It also explains why that block has begun to change. The Robertsons' story is the story of a family that wouldn't give up. Even when the bureaucracy wouldn't work. Even when the Robertsons felt like they were living through World War III.

We told you in a previous commentary about some of the racist violence to which the Robertsons were subjected. We told only part of that story. We mentioned, for example, that one of the Robertsons' sons—Dario, who was 13 at the time—was the victim of police brutality. He was running to an after-school program when he was halted at gunpoint by white police officers. When his teachers tried to intervene, the officers cursed them. The false charges against the young man were soon dropped.

What we didn't mention then, however, was that the Robertsons filed a complaint with New York City's Civilian Complaint Review Board against the police. They did so even though one officer openly told Mrs. Robertson that their complaint would only "cause trouble".

What became of their complaint? Nothing. Oh, the Robertsons received a letter, all right. The letter said the complaint had been referred to a commanding officer who would investigate the case. The commander was to then submit his findings to the review board and the family would be contacted. In other words, a police officer would investigate his fellow officers on a police brutality charge and then present a supposedly unbiased finding. If you believe that, I've got a bridge I'd like to sell you. But, that doesn't really matter because no one ever contacted the Robertsons again. That was back in 1981. Maybe the Review Board is still investigating.

Then, when the family moved into their present home, 7 years ago, they became the target of constant

racist violence. They were the first African American family on the block.

And the violence continues. Recently the school bus used to transport racial and ethnic students to a previously all-white junior high was attacked. Four vanloads of young white men ambushed the bus and began smashing it with bricks and bats. Ruti, the Robertsons' 13-year-old son, was on that bus. A few weeks later, a racial blow-up at a nearby school—which Ruti will attend in September—made the headlines.

But even in the midst of this racist environment, the buds of change are beginning to bloom. Two months ago Mrs. Robertson, with her 2-year-old in her arms, began going house to house. Many of the older, more racist neighbors had moved away. In addition, some racial and ethnic families had begun to move in. Mrs. Robertson began to organize. She told her neighbors that they needed a new block association—one that would work for everyone. One that would really improve the block. She also reminded them that the old block association was not active. At the first meeting of this new association over 100 people showed up. The group was equally mixed: black and brown and white. They discussed how to make their block better. They volunteered to be block captains. And then they elected Mrs. Robertson president of the new block association—unanimously.

Nothing will ever stop the Robertsons from remaining vigilant. They know the battle is not yet won. As Mrs. Robertson says, "There can be no compromise on the wrongs that were done to my family." But the Robertsons and all those who came to the meeting of the new block association are tired of things the way they were.

It all started because the Robertson family made up its mind, as they said, that "It just isn't right. No one should have to live this way." And then they determined to work to change things.

This is Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. of the United Church of Christ for the Civil Rights Journal.

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