

EDITORIAL / OPINION

BAIL OUT THE POOR

by
John E. Jacob

For years we've been hearing about how the deep budget deficit prevents us from affording federal programs that deal with poverty and urban problems.

But there was always something fishy about the excuse that deficits prevent adequate funding for social programs. After all, deficit or no deficit, we poured two trillion dollars into the military in the past half dozen years. And few questioned the reason why the deficit was so large. The cause wasn't runaway spending -- it was the runaway tax cuts that slashed the tax bills of high earners.

Meanwhile, the numbers of the poor speedily increased and the world's wealthiest nation became best known for its homeless. People were forced to live in the streets and to go without adequate food and nutrition all because, we were told, the budget deficit doesn't allow us to do much about our social problems.

Well, the big budget deficit excuse has finally been exploded.

Washington suddenly discovered that the savings and loan industry was in trouble, with hundreds of thrifts insolvent.

Some of them became so through fraudulent means, some by mismanagement, some by external market factors they couldn't master. But all were supposed to be regulated.

So how come government regulators didn't keep those banks up to accepted business standards? And why did the regulators fall down on their job so badly that the mess exploded in a way that supposedly requires Uncle Sam to pay the bills?

Now the government is stepping in with a program to restructure the savings and loan industry. The cost: upward of \$100 billion. Some say it will be a bit less, others say it will be a lot more.

Where's the money going to come from? That's right, from the same government that said it couldn't afford programs that house the homeless, feed the hungry, and create work for the jobless.

When the National Urban League and others called for the equivalent of a domestic Marshall Plan we were told that our ideas were pure folly and that Washington couldn't afford it.

But all of a sudden, it can afford perhaps \$100 billion or more to prop up the S&Ls.

Government always seems to be able to find the money to pay for tax cuts for the affluent, for swollen defense budgets, and for bailouts of troubled corporations.

But when it comes to the poor, there's no bailout money left. While the Treasury scares up the money to save the thrift industry, the poor are likely to be hit with new cuts in Medicaid, low income housing, and education.

President Bush is to be commended for including in his proposed budget some additional spending initiatives for proven programs that serve the poor. But too many of them are paid for by simply cutting back on funds for other programs targeted to the poor. And the Pentagon and NASA are still on the gravy train.

An analysis of the budget by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities suggests that many programs will actually experience reductions below the levels needed to keep pace with inflation.

Now that the fig leaf of "there's no money because of the deficit" has been torn away by the S&L bailout, let's get our priorities straight and implement the domestic programs we need to save our cities and help people out of poverty. Bailing out the poor makes more sense than bailing out failed banks.

ABUSE DOES NOT EQUAL EDUCATION

Lean On Me, the just-out movie about New Jersey high school principal Joe Clark, is described by the folks who put it together as "hugely entertaining." And what could be more entertaining in white America than the story of a Black man who uses a baseball bat to dispense "tough love" to poor Black and Latino teenagers depicted as stupid, violent, drug-addicted savages?

But we cannot afford to be entertained--or misled--by those who intentionally underdevelop and miseducate our children, who blame them and beat them up for their failures, and they try to sell us on a "happy ending" that has them looking forward to making it in a make-believe society from which racism and poverty have been carefully edited out.

The fact is that our children are dying of drugs, of poverty and despair. Who is responsible for the killing? The white corporate-controlled media, all too often aided and abetted by the Black establishment--our professional politicians, our professors, our "entrepreneurs" and our "experts"--want us to think it is our fault. We are told that we don't teach our children the right values, so they end up with a bad attitude, bad friends, and bad morals. But I don't believe that we, or our children, are to blame. And I don't agree with the Joe Clarks of this world that the solution to drugs and dropping out lies in beating young people into obedience so that they can learn how to fit in to a society that has no room for them, a society that neither wants nor values them.

Listen to what another Black educator, Barbara Taylor, has to say about it. Like Joe Clark, Ms Taylor is also a school principal. But she is not a media-made celebrity, nor has she become a heroine to the Powers That Be. Because Barbara Taylor is not under the illusion that abuse equals education. Ms. Taylor is the founder of an independent, community-based day care center and elementary school in Harlem which bears her name.

"At the Barbara Taylor School we teach the children that they need to be political," she says. "And what we mean by being political is knowing what's going on in the real world and being willing to take the necessary risks to change it. Because when children don't do that, they just end up getting used, and abused, and then told that it's for their own good. That's how the Democratic Party and the Republican Party treat the Black community, and that's how Joe Clark treats the kids in his school. Our educational philosophy is based on a theory and practice of empowerment, not adjustment to oppression."

Unlike Joe Clark, who has earned a name for himself--and the admiration of Ronald Reagan--by abusing Black people (in the name of education), and unlike the makers of Lean On Me, who (in the name of entertainment) stand to make huge profits from it, an organization of progressive educators, helping professionals and attorneys called the Association for the Development of Social Therapy has adopted the Barbara Taylor School as an experiment in bridging the gap between professional workers and the community. The ADST has committed itself to supporting the BT School through a sustainer program, fundraising, research, promotion and training.

The Barbara Taylor School and the ADST are, together, fighting back against a system that makes entertainment out of our children's degradation, a system that, without fundamental change, offers our children only the future of the ghetto-- drugs, despair, violence and death.

DRUGS VERSUS EMPOWERMENT

As a mental health worker, as a political activist, and as the mother of two Black children--a 15 year old daughter, Ainka, and a twelve year old son, Amani--I am deeply, deeply concerned about the epidemic of drugs that is ravaging our communities. I know you share that concern. Because we understand that drugs are killing our children--killing their bodies, killing their minds, and killing their souls. Why are our children dying? Because there is no room for our children in white America and the Powers That Be would rather see them dead--physically, emotionally, and mentally--than alive, angry and empowered.

There are really two drug problems in the Black community--the problem of illegal drugs that make people "high," and the problem of the legal kind of drugs, pushed by the doctors and the social workers, that are supposed to cool folks out.

What I am saying is that drugs have an economic function--they make big money for big time dealers, legal and illegal, and they put a few dollars in the pockets of people in the community who don't have and can't get "respectable" work because there isn't any to be had. It's the small time dealers and users who usually get scapegoated when the politicians decide to make a show of dealing with the drug problem. The real wheelers and dealers stay behind the scenes and rarely get touched.

But drugs, legal and illegal, have a very important political function as well. Not only do they make huge profits for those who deal them, both are designed to keep our children--especially our young men--out of it: out of the world, out of their minds, and out of control. Because if you are "high" on crack or down on thorazine, or chained to a methadone clinic every day of your life, you're not in any place to fight back against the racism and poverty that brought you there in the first place.

As a developmental psychologist who has worked with drug abusers, I have often heard it said that politics and psychology don't or shouldn't mix. But I disagree. There is no such thing as a politically "neutral" psychology. A psychology which measures mental health, "maturity" and development in terms of how well people can adapt to a world where middle class white men are "normal" and defines mental illness in terms of "maladjustment"--such a psychology is not neutral. Such a psychology is embedded in politics and politics is embedded in it. Regardless of who practices this brand of psychology, it is fundamentally conservative--which means that it is fundamentally racist, classist and sexist--because it validates, rather than challenges, the status quo. It is a psychology of disempowerment, which functions (whether intentionally or not does not matter) to keep our people in our socially prescribed places--at the bottom.

Over the last ten years my colleagues and I have been developing a Social Therapy--a theory and practice of psychology that refuses to leave Black people at the mercy of a system which regards Black lives as expendable. Social Therapy has discovered that, contrary to what we are taught in traditional psychology, development can take place at any age; the human capacity to develop--to change--is in fact unlimited. It is society that places limits on our development, not anything inherent in us. Especially if we are Black, if we are poor, our development is not just ignored, it is intentionally stifled and stunted. In fact, drugs are a major means by which the misdevelopment and underdevelopment of Black people and other people of color is accomplished. When we are forced to adapt to a society which stops development.

That's why I help people to become active changers of their environments, including themselves and their emotionally, rather than passive objects of a racist and anti-poor social and emotional environment. Empowerment and development is what we need to stop drugs in our community.

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HOWARD UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: VICTORY FOR THE MOVEMENT

by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

Reminiscent of the successful student protest of the late 1960's and early 1970's, Howard University students recently staged a successful sit-in protest around number of justice issues. There are many who believe that African American students of today are not as aware or involved in what was called "the freedom movement" which reached its peak in the 1960's. Student leaders of Howard University and their student supporters proved this belief to be incorrect, however. The protest not only was successful in getting new commitments from the administration to improve financial and administrative procedures, but also the administration of the university has committed that there would be more African American studies courses and other curriculum changes demanded by the students.

One central demand that was achieved by the students was the calling for the resignation of Lee Atwater, chairman of the Republican National Committee from the Board of Trustees of Howard University. The students concluded that Mr. Atwater had a record of racial prejudice and bias against the African American community because of the role he played in the election campaign of President George Bush. You might recall that during the 1988 election, the Bush campaign was accused of racist political advertisement to attract white voters who had anti-African American viewpoints through its sensational use of the Willie Horton ad. Mr. Atwater was chairman of the Bush election committee.

Yet one of the aspects of the Howard University student sit-in was that it appeared to have learned some lessons from the past which enabled the protest to be effective. For example, the student's demands were very specific, which facilitated the negotiation process. Secondly, the students wisely had their own security detail which kept the situation from becoming violent. They also had a team of attorneys working with them. We are also aware that the Mayor of Washington, D.C., Marion Barry, played a key role in preventing the Washington, D.C. police from storming the building that was occupied by the students. Likewise, the Reverend Jesse Jackson was instrumental in assisting the negotiation process.

It is our hope that the officials at Howard University will learn something from this protest. Students who are trained and educated to think and act objectively and reasonably will not tolerate administrative insensitivity and bureaucratic lethargy. My comments are not meant to throw stones at Howard University, but, speaking as an alumnus, I was greatly dismayed that University officials were so slow to deal with legitimate student complaints. Thus, the victory of the Howard University students is a victory for the cause of justice. It is our hope that this will signal a rebirth of the kind of student activism and leadership that is so desperately needed in the

BLACK AGENDA MUST DICTATE AFRICAN-AMERICAN ROLE IN POLITICAL PARTIES

The "grand mound of rebound," Philadelphia 76 Sixer super-star Charles Barkley voted for Republican George Bush for President in the 1988 general election. According to a recent article in U.S.A. Today, Barkley was stunned by criticism from his family who were dismayed that he would vote for a Republican for President. After all his family complained, the Republicans are for the rich people. How did Charles Barkley respond? "That's why I voted for him, because I'm rich," Barkley is said to have informed his family.

In a real sense the Republican strategy for capturing support within the African-American community relies heavily on the hope that a sizeable segment of the Black middle class will abandon traditional concerns for civil rights, and social justice and support the Republican party because of what they perceive to be their "class interest;" that is to say because they see themselves as wealthy, well off, or "rich". Indeed the Republicans are taking straight aim at a new generation of "buppies", young Black upward mobile professionals in hope of building on the "Barkley syndrome".

This absence of an explicit philosophy or ideology in approaching the question of voting and the selection of a political party could pose grave dangers for African-Americans as we grapple with the questions of survival and development for the masses of our people. The Republican Party after all has in fact been the party which historically has identified with and promoted the interest of the rich and the power to the detriment of minorities, working people and the poor. After some impressive leadership around emancipation, and civil-rights after the civil war, the Republican party abandoned their "loyal" devotees in 1876 in the infamous Hayes-Tilden Compromise which kept the Republicans in the whitehouse, but left the fate of southern Blacks to the southern states. Since that time, the Republican Party has not only been pro-rich, but anti-civil rights.

Does this mean that African-American who join any political party Democratic, Republican, Independent, Socialists, etc. should do with eyes wide open and with a sense of mission and purpose. Since the era of Roosevelt, the Democratic Party has been the party that has in the main supported the interests of African-Americans, minorities, working people and the poor. But even the Democratic Party has been guilty of violating the interests of African-Americans and working people. The rate of progress towards civil-rights, labor reform, and social legislation has often been slowed to a snail's pace by southern conservative "Democrats". Dubbed "Dixiecrats" in the fifties and sixties, and "boll weevils" in the seventies, these conservative Democrats and alliance with a largely conservative Republican Party were often able to stymie Black progress.

On the other hand there have always been a few within the Republican Party who have been relatively forthright on issues of concern to African-Americans. One thinks of former Senators Javites and Keating of New York, former Mayor Lindsey of New York City, Senator Clifford Case of New Jersey, Mathias of Maryland, Lowell Weicker of Connecticut, and Mark Hatfield, the Senior Senator from Oregon to mention a few.

The point is that African-Americans must approach politics from the vantage point of our collective interest as a national community. African-American will either remain on the sharp cutting edge of progress and the transformation of America into a true political and economic democracy or we will be absorbed into the sickness of an America which places profit, greed, materialism, and power above the interest of human development and fulfillment for all the people of America and the world.

African-Americans need to retain a "progressive" agenda for change in America, and wage struggle for the implementation of that agenda in the Democratic, Republican, or any other party which might emerge. Those African-Americans who chose to join the Republican Party should be fighting to develop the liberal-progressive wing of that Party and challenge it to move beyond its racism to be a party relevant to the interests of the masses of African-Americans, minorities, working people and the poor. African-Americans who cast their lot with the Democratic Party should obviously do likewise.

Beyond cosmetics, and empty symbols, there must be substance for African-Americans. That's why a progressive African-American agenda is always critical to our development as a people. For as an old African proverb puts it, "if you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there."

PORTLAND OBSERVER

OREGON'S OLDEST AFRICAN-AMERICAN PUBLICATION

Established in 1970

Alfred L. Henderson/Publisher

Leon Harris/General Manager

Gary Ann Garnett
Business Manager

Joyce Washington
Sales/Marketing Director

Lonnie Wells
Circulation Manager

Marie Decul
Photographer

PORTLAND OBSERVER
is published weekly by
Exie Publishing Company, Inc.
525 N.E. Killingsworth St.
Portland, Oregon 97211
P.O. Box 3137
Portland, Oregon 97208



(503) 288-0033 (Office)

Deadlines for all submitted materials:
Articles: Monday, 5 p.m.; Ads: Tuesday, 5 p.m.

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Subscriptions: \$20.00 per year in the Tri-County area.

The PORTLAND OBSERVER -- Oregon's oldest African-American Publication--is a member of The National Newspaper Association -- Founded in 1885, The Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association, and The National Advertising Representative Amalgamated Publishers, Inc., New York.

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