EDITORIAL / OPINION

Dear Editor:

I was much very interested in the article by Stephen E. McPherson, in the current issue of your paper--"Embattled Urban League struggles for fiscal integrity." Two paragraphs particularly caught my eye:

1) The one stating "that the Fred Meyer organization is only a name that its eastern parents have applied for local identity." I have not checked up on this personally, but recall reference to this in Newsweek magazine in December 1983, I believe, indicating that the original Fred Meyer organization had been divided into two entities by its then-new owners: an operating business which owned the buildings, did all the hiring and firing, and conducted all other aspects of the original business; and a privatelyowned entity that held title to all of the land and collected groundrent from the business (and ,presumably, all other businesses located on the land surrounding the Fred Meyer stores, which the original company had held before that sale). Because this groundrent is very substantial--and only a small portion of it need to paid to the respective counties as the land portion of the property tax--Newsweek added, for the benefit of those who might buy shares of the new Fred Meyer Stores, Inc. (the business entity), that it was not the same company that it was before, meaning, in terms of earning

2) The one referring to the present site being "one of the largest pieces of real estate held by any African American unit in Portland." This is an extremely important point to make. But it is much more important in terms of its land value than in terms of the building. That is, while buildings require a great deal of maintenance to retain their value--and also the property tax burden falls much more heavily on buildings than land-the value of the land itself will continue to rise. Thus, if the Urban League is finding the building too much of a drain on its own resources, but would like to continue holding the land for its rental value (as the private company reportedly does with respect to other Fred Meyer Stores), perhaps it should seek a new owner for the building, alone.

In making these comments, I am mindful that a new interest in land economics is taking root in this country today, after more than a century of the general populace having forgotten how vital land-holding is to economic success in a society where most land titles are privately held. One result of this is that most communities assess the land portion of each property at far below its actual value (which is publicly created), then collect too high a tax from buildings (whose value is privately created) to make up for the loss of the groundrent that title-holders are permitted to keep. But ten cities in Pennsylvania are now beginning to resolve this problem, by taxing land at a much higher rate, and buildings at a lower one. Whenever such a shift of the tax burden occurs, from buildings and onto land, two things happen which should be of special interest to the Black community and others who have, traditionally, been at an economic disadvantage in this country. The first is that the vast majority of property taxpayers owe less total tax on their properties than they do when a single tax rate is applied to the values of land and buildings combined--as is the case here in Oregon and almost everywhere else in the US. For example, in the most recent Pennsylvania city to make this shift, it is estimated that 94% of all taxpayers now pay less tax than they would have, had the old single-rate system been continued, even though the community receives the same amount of public revenue. The market for housing, shops of their own, etc.

You may wonder, If this is such a good deal, why aren't more cities using a two-rate system? The answer is very simple: Most people do not know about it, and those who do, find the present system too profitable for them to want its inequities publicized. Consider, for example, that by 1972, some 95% of all privately-held land in this country "belonged" to only 3% of the population; or that one company in California holds more land than all of that State's residential homesites combined! When it is remembered that everyone who pays rent (whether for a home or a workplace or both) pays enough to cover not only a fair price for use of any building(s) on the property and the entire amount of the property tax, but also the MARKET RENTAL VALUE of the land plus a PROFIT for the landlord, it becomes clearer why a higher tax rate on land (and lower one on buildings) would benefit all tenants: a) lower taxes on buildings would permit lower rents; b) higher taxes on land cannot be passed on to tenants because they are already paying what the market will bear for the site on which they live/work; c) as the tax on land value approaches its market rental value, thus decreasing the profit for landlords, such holdings move onto the market at prices more tenants can afford to buy./

There are now excellent materials available for study in this field, some of which might be readily adaptable to serial study in a newspaper such as yours. Of your columnists, Mr. McKinley Burt has sometimes come close to alluding to these aspects of land economics, so he might already be familiar with the teachings of Henry George (e.g, his seminal work, "Progress and Poverty," which prompted leaders throughout the world to seek solutions to the problems of land use and tenure by creative adjustments in the property tax mechanism) and his present-day followers in many parts of the world. I should add that Oregon is one of only a handful of States where a two-rate system could probably be implemented without having to amend the State Constitution first; most require that land and buildings be taxed alike. Therefore, whenever a significant number of property taxpayers become seriously interested in achieving a greater degree of economic justice in this State, we could probably achieve on a statewide basis what Pennsylvania is aiming for, city by city. Congress has recommended this method to Washington, D.C., and the UN has done so to a number of less developed countries, But, until the vast majority of citizens (i.e., those who would benefit) can mobilize sufficient political pressure to overcome that of the relative few who would no longer be able to enjoy this UNEARNED source of wealth, we shall all have to go on paying increased taxes on our homes, rising income taxes, perhaps even sales taxes, to make up for this loss of public-created wealth to a very small group of private citizens/ corporations.

Thank you for putting out a fine newspaper! Sincerely,

Elizabeth R. Dana Congratulations to Wings of Love

Thanks to those who helped save this unique community in our city. Thanks to the family of Wings of Love for pulling together and surviving so that others may benefit by what they have done. Often a person can be tried and judged by the media with no attorney to

dispute heresay testimony or words taken out of context.

Sometimes those most eager to find fault would never consider sheltering

even one individual or ever think of being personally inconvenienced in any

I can only respond with my own testimony. Sister Mayes has many times been the only one I could call to shelter someone in a crisis. When the vouchers ran out, the person's problem didn't fit the criteria, or when the situation was just too tough for the other agencies to handle -- I called Sister Mayes. She always said yes...though there was never any money or promise of funds. I called on her night or day.

Although minority led organizations are usually the first to fall by the wayside when tried this way, the beautiful brothers and sisters at Wings of Love have kept this from happening.

Without a word in her own defence, Sister Mayes has brought meaning to the scripture, "You shall know them by the fruit they bear".

I suggest that if KOIN T.V. reissues the Jefferson Award, that they give it to Sister Mayes of Wings of Love, who has worked so hard with such a humble spirit.

Elisa G. (Lisa) Clay Friends of S.O.S. (Sisters on the Street) To Be Equal

Voter Registration Reform

By John E. Jacob

It may seem out of season to be thinking about changing the way we register to vote, but this is the best time to reform a system that actively discorages many people from exercising their right to vote and thereby undermines political democracy.

In last November's presidential election, for example, there was the lowest voter turnout since 1924 -- barely half of the voting age population

Only 52 percent of African American citizens voted, a sharp decrease from 1984's 56 percent. In the South, the African American voter turnout plummeted to only 48 percent.

And that was in a presidential election that dominated the media for months -- voter turnouts in state and local elections are far lower, often falling below 20 percent in many places.

Other countries routinely have voter turnouts above 70 and even 80 percent, and if we lag that far behind them it can't be due to reasons that should affect all insustrial democracies -- reasons such as voter apathy, the felling among many people that their votes won't matter, and other explanations that are often advanced for low voting levels.

A major difference may be that those countries take voting as a right more seriously than we do. Often, our official outlook on voting appears to be that it's a privilege and the tougher we make it for citizens the better. That, in turn, is a hangover from the old days when voting was indeed a privilege of the propertied, and women the poor, and African Americans were denied the

In our more enlightened times, we don't explicitly bar people from voting; we just throw up barriers to make it more trouble than they think it may be worth. The results are similar.

Reform of such an anti-democratic voting system has to focus on registration, since the overwhelming majority of people who register actually do vote. But in many places registration is made difficult, if not impossible, for working people and minorities.

The Congress is currently considering legislation that would help to sweep away the tangle of inconsistent registration procedures that disourage potential voters.

Among the proposals is the vitally important one of Election Day registration. That would allow people to register on the day they vote an essential step to bring everyone to the voting booth -- people who recently moved those who were stirred by a late-campaign event, and those who make a last-minute decision to participate.

With proof of identity and residence, and other safeguards, Election Day registration should not increase the danger of fraud, and in fact there has been no such increase in the three states that currently employ it.

Another proposed reform would be to require all states to have a system of mail-in registration. That's essential in many rural areas where a trip to town to register imposes severe financial and transportation hardships.

Another initiative would allow registration services to be provided by any government agency and by any private agency that agrees to voluntarily register voters. And still another plan would automatically register people applying for drivers' licenses.

As well as removing barriers to registration, Congress should limit removal from the registration rolls without strong cause. In most places, not voting in one or two elecions means you have to go through the registration process all over again.

The steady decline in voting and the height of the barriers discouraging minority electoral participation demand voter reform laws now.

PENINSULA PARK

Don't Believe The Hype

By Dr. Lenora Fulani

Many millions of words have been written and spoken by African American leaders on the subject of southern Africa and the struggle Against apartheid. But what about the Congo-Zaire, where our sisters and brothers are dying of poverty and repression under the brutal dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko?

This past Sunday morning the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem played host to the Gevakin Choir, which is on an extensive tour of Black and white Baptist churches throughout the United States. The tour is sponsored by the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society. The choir's name is derived from the first letters of Gospel Evangelical of Kinshasa, the capital of Zaire.

The tour is part of a propaganda campaign by the regime of Mobutu Sese Seko designed to convince the American people that this brutal dictator and friend of apartheid is a humane and progressive African leader who deserves our support and respect. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In 1961 Mobutu Sese Seko aided the CIA in its assassination of the beloved Congolese independence leader, Patrice Lumumba. In the 24 years since he seized power in a CIA-orchestrated coup, President Mobutu has acquired a personal fortune in excess of five billion dollars while the Congolese people have become the poorest of the world,s poor; half of the children in Zaire die before they are three years old and one-third of those who survive past the age of three will die of malnutrition.

These crimes against African humanity were not mentioned during the Mother's Day service at which the choir from Zaire sang--despite my written request to Reverend Calvin Butts, Abyssinian's pastor and a longtime leader in the Black community, to cancel Gevakin's visit or at the very least to permit someone familiar with the actual situation in Zaire to make a statement on behalf of the Congolese people.

The American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society, which is sponsoring the tour, operates a large number of missions in Zaire. Unlike many of the US-based churches there, the Society has a reputation not only for refusing to take a stand against the atrocities committed by Mobutu but for working hand in glove with this murderer of African people.

The explicitly political nature of the Gevakin Choir tour became evident during its appearance at the 19th Street Baptist Church in Washington, DC (whose paster, Reverend Moore, was recently appointed US ambassador to the southern African country of lesotho by President George Bush). At that event Congressman Mervyn Dymally made a statement in support of the Mobutu regime. Mr. Dymally--Mobutu's best friend on Capitol Hill--is and adamant opponent of HR 1899, legislation introduced by Congressional Black Caucus chairman Ron Dellums of California that would cut off US aid to Zaire unless there is a substantial improvement in the dismal human rights situation there. So far 14 of the CBC's 23 members have agreed to cosponsor the bill with Mr. Dellums. But Mr. Dymally--anxious to maintain his position as the main broker between a circle of Black Los Angeles investors on the make and members of the Zairian elite looking to sell their country to the highest bidders--doesn't want to kill a goose that lays such golden eggs.

Dr. Leñora Fulani is the national chairperson of the New Alliance Party and a practicing Social Therapist in Harlem. She can be contacted at the New Alliance Party, 2032 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10027 and at (212) 996-4700.

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

Lessons From Panama

By Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

In the wake of President George Bush's call for the people and military of Panama to overthrow General Manuel Antonio Noriega from power, the old adage "what goes around, certainly comes around" appears to be true in this situation. No one wishes continued hardship on the people of Panama. No one who is interested in the cause of justice and freedom would deny that there needs to be a change in Panama. Yet, it should be of great concern not only to the people of Panama, but also to people here in the United States and throughout the world that to date President Bush has not admitted to his role nor the role of the United States in helping to prop up General Noriega in the first place.

During the Reagan Administration years, Noriega was viewed as a strategic ally of U.S. intelligence agencies knew of Noriega's involvenment in the transportation and selling of drugs to sources in the United States, Noriega was tolerated and even supported.

It is important for African Americans, Latin Americans and others to remember the paternalistic and exploitive relationship that the United States has had as a matter of policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean. In the echo of Bush's inference that U.S. military forces might have to be used to protect or evacuate U.S. citizen in Panama, we still remember the unjust imvasion of the African Caribbean nation of Grenada.

Of course, what is happening in Panama was not the same situation that was happening in Grenada when President Reagan ordered the invasion. The point that we are raising is that the very persons and forces that help to set Noriega up as a military strong man in Panama now have the loudest voices calling for Noriega's overthrow. The United States should not use Noriega's contradictions as an excuse to launch an invasion of Panama. The reason why the people of Panama are having problems now is because of the history of U.S. overt and covert intervention into the internal affairs of that

Just as the invasion of Grenada was wrong, any thought of invading Panama is also wrong. What Latin America and the Caribbean people deserve is a little less tampering and violation with the sovereignty of the nations of this region and more effective assistance in helping to eliminate poverty, drugs and exloitation which has become commonplace in this hemisphere largely due to the history of U.S. military intervention and multi-national corporate exploitation.

With all the problems that drugs have created throughout the United States we believe that Bush should first lead the charge against the drug barons who have found haven and great livelihood in many cities of this nation. Noriega in Panama for the United States is as Malcolm X once said, "This is a case of the chickens coming home to roost."

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