

EDITORIAL / OPINION

Along The Color Line

"Black Liberation Radio"

by Dr. Manning Marable

Most oppressed people throughout the world are not controlled primarily by force. Usually, they are denied accurate information by the media or their government, which helps to perpetuate misinformation and political acquiescence. A people kept ignorant can be politically manipulated. In recent weeks, for example, when Chinese students and workers took to the streets in Beijing, the Chinese government used the state-controlled media to keep the masses in line. The vast majority of the one billion Chinese peasants and workers in the countryside have no access to accurate information.

In the United States, we like to say that we have "freedom of the press." In truth, there is only freedom for those who won the press. Although there are nearly thirty million African-Americans, we have fewer than three hundred Black-owned weekly newspapers. Most Black-oriented radio stations broadcast little information which can mobilize the community or provide political education. And the vast majority of white-owned media sources discourage any substantive reporting which targets police brutality against nonwhites, or focuses on unemployment, poverty and institutional racism. In short, the oppressed must find ways to develop their own sources of communication.

In Springfield, Illinois, Dewayne Readus, a blind and unemployed African-American, concluded that his neighborhood needed a local source of information which favored the interests of Black people. In December, 1987, with an initial investment of under \$600, Readus initiated Radio Station WTRA-FM, a low-watt station which had a signal reaching one and one half miles. The station was based in Readus' apartment inside Springfield's John Hay Public Housing Project.

Within months, Readus's programs were reached up to three-fourths of the local African-American community. WTRA-FM featured Black music, but also included commentary programs discussing political and social issues. Readus's radio commentary criticized local housing authority officials, and discussed local cases of police brutality. Victims of police harassment were guests on the station's programs. Within this hard-hitting format, Readus also sought to train young African-Americans in conducting radio interviews and running the equipment. Although WTRA-FM had only one watt of power, it had become a voice for Black liberation for Springfield.

It was inevitable that Readus's activities would come under political scrutiny by those in power. Several months ago, the Springfield Police Department initiated an investigation of the station by the Federal Communications Commission. The FCC inspector visited the station, and demanded to see a "valid radio station license."

Readus replied correctly that there was no U.S. law requiring the licensing of FM radio stations which have less than 100 watts of power. The inspector attempted to intimidate Readus, implying that the radio equipment was possibly "contraband." The police were called in, and Readus charged with an FCC violation which carries penalties of up to \$10,000 or one year in jail. The station was shut down.

Millions of dollars are spent for "Radio Free Europe" which promotes U.S. propaganda. The corporations spend billions here in this country to get Black consumers to purchase their products. Yet when a single African-American exercises his rights to produce a media source dedicated to Black liberation, the government and police responded with repressive measures. Readus observed: "If we just talked about how great things were going, we'd still be on the air. But because we said that things aren't so great around here, they shut us down." DeWayne Readus and other sisters and brothers like him deserve our support, in the battle to liberate Black minds.

Dictators Are Not Welcome Here!

By Dr. Lenora Fulani

Sese Seko Mobutu, the self-appointed president-for-life of Zaire (formerly known as the Congo), arrived in New York City last week en route to Washington, DC where he was scheduled to meet with George Bush. Dozens of protesters were waiting at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel where Mobutu was staying in New York to let this vicious dictator and abuser of human rights know that he was not welcome here! The protest was supported by a broad range of student organizations, long-time anti-Mobutu and anti-apartheid activist groups, grassroots citizens' lobbies, community organizations and others concerned with the struggle for democracy here and around the world; they included the US-Congo Friendship Committee, the All-African Peoples Revolutionary Party, the New Alliance Party, the Rainbow Lobby, the Patrice Lumumba Coalition and the American Arab Relations Committee, which are leading the grassroots movement that is coming together in this country to oppose this greedy tyrant who came to power a quarter of a century ago after collaborating with the CIA to assassinate Patrice Lumumba, the father of Congolese independence.

The hero's welcome given to Mobutu by the President of the United States was a profound insult to the Black people of this country and to our African sisters and brothers. We should not be surprised by it; insults to the African American community come naturally to the white supremacist leaders of both the major parties. But the complicity of some among our official Black leadership in the scheme to make an international peace-maker out of a murderous thug such as Sese Seko Mobutu is nothing less than a betrayal of Black people everywhere.

Last fall this ally of apartheid hosted an official visit to Zaire from P.W. Botha, the prime minister of South Africa; when Zairian students took to the streets of Kinshasa, the capital, to protest this despicable act, they were shot down in cold blood by Mobutu's soldiers.

This gunrunner has allowed Zaire to be used as a conduit for the arms that the United States supplies to the contras of Angola, Jonas Savimbi's South African/US-subsidized UNITA

mercenaries, in their 14 year effort to bring down the popular MPLA government of Jose Eduardo dos Santos. Now Mobutu is being promoted by the White House as the elder statesman of Africa, a peace-loving friend of democracy who is singlehandedly bringing the 14 year of Angolan "civil war" to an end. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The myth which the corporate-owned media are helping to promote is part of an elaborate public relations campaign now underway to clean up Mobutu's image so that he can go on serving as the point man for US policy in southern Africa. But no amount of Madison Avenue manipulating can transform this dictator into a diplomat. And no amount of red carpet

can cover up the trail of blood and tears that leads from Washington and Kinshasa to Luanda, the capital of Angola, and to Soweto.

If Mobutu cared an iota about the well-being of African people, he would be cleaning up his own backyard--which is a cesspool of human rights abuses. It is to put pressure on this murderer and torturer that California Congressman Ron Dellums has introduced H.R. 1899, which would cut off US aid to the Mobutu regime until there is some improvement in Zaire's abysmal human rights situation.

I am glad to say that a majority of Mr. Dellums' colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus support this very crucial legislation. I am ashamed and angry to say that not all of them do.

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

ECONOMIC JUSTICE: INCREASE MINIMUM WAGE

by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

It was probably an easy task for the President of the United States to veto recently an increase in the minimum wage from \$3.35 an hour to \$4.55 an hour. But for those whose lives he impacted with this decision, it was a devastating blow to any real hope of economic survival. President Bush, of course, does not have to worry about his salary or the livelihood of his family. It was recently revealed that Mr. Bush, like most of the 1988 Presidential candidates, is a millionaire. We do not know if President Bush during his career ever worked for the minimum wage. But we do know that today the vast majority of minimum wage workers can barely make ends meet.

At a time when the world's attention is on other nations, in particular concerning the issues of human rights, democracy and economic reform, it is revealing that one of the richest economies in the world cannot seriously entertain increasing the minimum wage. Economic justice demands a redistribution of the wealth of this nation, especially to the millions of persons who labor the hardest to keep the economic infra-structure of the United States intact. The legislation passed by Congress, however, did not call for a radical redistribution of wealth. Instead, the members of Congress acted responsibly to increase the minimum wage to \$4.55 an hour in a minimum effort to offset the increases in the cost of living as well as inflation for millions of workers in this nation. President Bush vetoed this increase because this would "stifle the creation of new job opportunities and hurt poor peoples' chances of getting jobs." What the President does not seem to understand is that the majority of those working at the minimum wage level are already hurting and barely able to survive.

This veto in no way helps poor people. It, in fact, hurts the poor even more. President Bush's veto will increase the suffering in the African American community, where many of the families are single income. Marion Wright Edelman, President of the Children's Defense Fund, stated that, "this will hit women and minorities particularly hard." Yet, this is consistent with Republican policies concerning economics. For them, the rich should get richer, while the poor get poorer.

This kind of economic injustice points to the inherent contradictions in the present economic system operative in the United States. President Bush's policies only reflect his allegiance to the maintenance of the present economic system at the expense of the poor and those workers whose fortunes are at the bottom rung of the socio-economic ladder. It is unwise for this nation to continue to mistreat those who labor. The market system should not be permitted to thrive while increasing numbers of citizens of this country lay homeless in the streets and while millions of workers take home salaries that are grossly inadequate.

DEMOCRACY HAS PROBLEMS, TOO

by John E. Jacob

Like just about everyone else, I was stirred by the resurgence of democratic movements breaking out throughout the communist world.

After years of police state oppression, citizens of the U.S.S.R. actually voted in relatively free elections, heard free and frank discussions of political issues, including open criticism of their leaders, and watched televised proceedings of their new Congress that included blasts at the secret police and other previous untouchables.

In Poland, the regime allowed free elections that demonstrated overwhelming support from democracy and rejection of communist rule.

And in China, millions of workers and students, through peaceful, nonviolent demonstrations, exposed their rulers as having little popular support -- which was confirmed by the brutal, bloody suppression of the democracy protests.

While the tanks may have won in the short-term, the long-term prognosis suggests that the popular demands for democracy will ultimately triumph.

But while I've been moved by this worldwide outbreak of democracy, I'm also bothered by the smugness with which so many Americans have reacted.

Editorials and think pieces, television commentators and politicians, have all weighed in with self-satisfied statements about how American democracy is the model for the whole world, and about the failure of communism to achieve a decent living standard.

They're all saying -- look at us, we're the way to go, take our political system and our economic theories as the example for your own countries.

I agree that the American model is one example countries might take as they emerge from political dictatorship and economic mismanagement. But it's not the only one.

Sweden and other countries have managed to combine political democracy and economic prosperity without slavishly following the American model.

So let's not get too arrogant -- we're good, but so are others. And the American model has some flaws that other countries have to think twice about before rushing to adopt.

Inequality here is more pronounced than in most other western nations. Unemployment is high -- at Depression levels for African Americans. Our education system is a mess, especially in its failure to train the disadvantaged. Crime and drugs are rampant. Racism is entrenched in too many aspects of our national life.

Sure, the system works well enough for most people, but how many Poles or Russians would embrace a model that provides much less social services and employment security than others?

And how good a model can we be, if our inner cities are rotting, if homelessness is widespread, and if nearly 40 million people have to share apartments, stand in line for hours to buy a pair of shoes, or live in constant fear of the secret police.

But they are very relevant to Americans who truly want their nation and their society to be a flawless model for the rest of the world.

I take little satisfaction in the fact that my country has more freedom and a better economic system than do China, Poland and the U.S.S.R. I think more of myself and of my country than to compare my society with politically and economically backward nations.

The real comparison should be with what American democracy ought to be; with how much better we can become, with how much more we have to do to make our system work for each and every American.

VANTAGE POINT

TRAINING ORGANIZERS AND LEADERS FOR THE FUTURE

During the era of the sixties, a number of African-American communities benefited from the existence of local regional and national educational institutes and training centers where various forms of leadership and skill development training was provided. Frequently these centers or institutes were organized by cadres of political activist as part of their programmatic thrust.

Ideologically these centers ranged from a civil-rights orientation, to militant reformist, to Black Nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and Socialism. Ideological diversity notwithstanding, these centers and institutes functioned to groom individuals and groups for work within the African-American community, particularly at the grass-roots level. The notion of being trained to be a "community organizer" was quite popular among activists and aspiring young leaders in the sixties. Many of us received our inspiration and began to acquire our skills at conferences, workshops, and at training centers and institutes.

The Pan-African Community in Chicago, Black Peoples University in Philadelphia, Malcolm X Unity House in San Francisco, Lynn Eusan Institute in Houston Texas, People's College in Nashville, the Pan-African Work Center in Atlanta, The Panthers Den in Milwaukee and the Uhuru Center Cultural-Education Institute in Youngstown, Ohio are among the institutes and centers that provided vital services in terms of leadership and skill development training at the local level.

On the regional and national levels the Political School of Kawaida in Newark, the Cabral Institute in Washington, D.C., Malcolm X Liberation University in Greensboro, N.C., The Center for Black Education in Washington, D.C. and the Urban Training Center for Christian Mission in Chicago serviced thousands of African-Americans for work in the movement for Black liberation and empowerment. Taken together these numerous local, regional and national training centers functioned to equip interested and eager potential workers and organizers with a Black oriented political perspective, philosophy or ideology. They also equipped their trainees with valuable community organizing and leadership skills and instilled a commitment to work and struggle for the betterment of African-Americans and African-American communities locally and nationally. These centers were crucial to the success of the movement in the sixties.

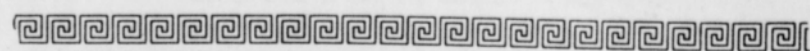
As we approach the decade of the nineties, any strategy for Black empowerment or model for African-American community development must take into account the need to properly educate and train our people for service to the African-American community. This is particularly important for our youth. At a time when there is a renewal of activism by African-American young people, we need to make certain that these young people are prepared with an Afro-centric perspective and the necessary skills to effectively work for African-American Community empowerment in this period.

The National African-American Community needs training centers or centers for community organization and development to provide the kind of direction and training that will equip hundreds even thousands of people to work for the improvement of Black people. Of even more vital importance are centers for community organization and development that can provide leadership and skill development training at the local level. Regional and national centers might facilitate networking between the centers in various local communities.

As African-Americans, we cannot underestimate or neglect the "how to" aspect of our struggle for empowerment. Its one thing to RAP, but its quite another thing to know HOW TO construct the MAP or plan for action that can produce concrete results. How do you identify the issues of greatest importance to your community and those issues that offer the best prospect for SUCCESSFUL organizing? How do you identify the key centers of power and influence within your community that you will need to be aware of as you develop a plan of action? What techniques can be utilized to effectively mobilize people around an issue?

How do you organize an economic boycott or selective buying campaign, organize a picket line, or a demonstration? How do you organize a press conference, use media to help you mobilize the community or design a good poster or leaflet to generate support of your mobilization? How do you plan a workshop, a conference or a convention? Want to organize a economic development or educational project, how do you go about it? Want to run for public office, how do you organize a campaign? what about computers and the use of new technologies in our political empowerment strategies?

Beyond the rhetoric, we need to teach, train, instruct and equip our people to plan, organize and implement effectively. Building centers for community organization and development in communities across this country where people can be equipped with the philosophy of liberation and the tools to achieve our liberation is a major priority for Black empowerment.



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