

perspectives

by Professor McKinley Burt

No Spare Parts II

In last week's chapter I made the point that there was a direct parallel between the many aspects of the economy of the developing nation of Ghana in Africa, and the subeconomy of blacks in this country. In Ghana, the people are beginning to replace the "inappropriate technology" thrust upon them by the former colonizers with "appropriate technology" built upon many centuries of expertise in such crafts as metallurgy--and upon social organization strategy developed over the same time period.

Unfortunately, African Americans have not begun to replace the systems thrust upon them at the establishment with "appropriate technology" structured around a number of proven and documented technical and social skills. This heritage has been documented in books like Haber's "Black Pioneers of Science and Invention" (Harcourt, Brace & World 1979), and in my book "Black Inventors of America" (National Book Co., Portland 1969).

There are many other sources available now, even exhibits at the superconservative Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. and in the pages of this Observer Newspaper, I have written reams of documentation that blacks for over a century were inventing machines and operating technical enterprises without intervention and guidance from the white establishment. I have cited the 1895 "Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition" where African Americans displayed and sold their patented machinery, mining, locomotives, textile and logging technology, agricultural implements and so forth (see the Congressional Record for August 10, 1894, House of Representatives).

There were many other exposition and demonstrations Philadelphia, Coney Island (The "Third Rail" for subway trains by Woods), and even the "Paris Exposition" circa 1906). There is an immediate urge to speculate where "we went wrong" but, first, let us return to an examination of the current economic scene in Ghana. As I have said, this "No Spare Parts" television documentary narrated by David Suzuki re-

minded me of my experiences in early youth around the black craftsmen in industry.

What happened in Ghana was that the "Cashcrop" economy of cocoa imposed upon the nation, first by the colonialists and then by the international bankers, had frequent downturns that not only left the people impoverished, but left no monies to keep the vital transportation modes going. A tropical climate is hard on both vehicles and roads, and of course there was little money to import new vehicles, African ingenuity, traditions, and millennium-old skills have come to the rescue.

Suzuki takes us on a tour of the Suami Magazine, "one of the biggest unplanned industrial areas in the world; a huge, informal economy has sprung up around the repair and maintenance of automobiles and trucks. Here in the open air, amidst the seeming chaos, lies the hub of Ghana's industrial revolution; the forty thousand artisans who specialize in servicing and repairing trucks and cars, busses, and farm equipment ply a brisk trade here "(In viewing this, I got a mental image of all the African Americans I've known, who work on their own equipment, gathered in one place).

It became clear to Ghana's Technological Center in the 1970's "that high tech equipment imported from industrialized countries had little use in a developing country. Grass roots or "appropriate technology" was instituted and local blacksmiths began turning out nuts and bolts by hand. "Every bolt was individually hammered into its familiar hexagonal shape. Its companion nut is also made by hand and, later, both nut and bolt will be threaded manually with tap and die."

Keep in mind that these Africans on the West Coast of the continent had, by the time the slave traders arrived, developed the craft of iron smelting and blacksmithing to a very sophisticated level. There were three primary divisions: Those who made agricultural implements, those who made cooking utensils, and the makers of weapons. It is no wonder that the British in the American colonies used these slaves to

replace the German bond servants on their iron plantations--and that the American plantation owners used them as the blacksmiths who kept the plantation machinery and transportation in repair (see Lewis, "Coal Iron and Slaves", Greenwood 1970").

Back to today's Ghana. The hand technology I just described achieved the desired result of familiarizing tens of thousands with tools and techniques. The people were soon prepared for the next level of "appropriate" technology they were able to BUILD THEIR OWN MACHINES FOR TURNING OUT HIGHER QUALITY PRODUCTS--even constructing turret lathes, milling machines and the like from the motors and other parts of abandoned cars and trucks. Soon these would be put back on the road and vital transportation restored.

A "neighborhood technology" spread throughout the nation, creating jobs, plants, capital and spinoffs into agricultural machines and food processing machinery. The social infrastructure expanded as well, bringing new services from medical to education and nutrition. It was E.F. Schumacher who said what the advanced nations have forgotten; "The logic of production [for production's sake] is neither the logic of life nor that of society" (see his famous book, "Small Is Beautiful: Economics As If People Mattered," Harper & Row, 1973 & 1989).

Since black people in this country were doing the very same thing right after slavery and up to World War I, 1915 What the hell happened to us? Has it been leadership, mostly social types, politicians and lawyers? Was Booker T. Washington right and our present economic state the result of taking a wrong turn very early on? I noted in the July 22 comments of a contributor to this paper James L. Posey; "Black solutions No Money, No Money." He said "Most of our leaders nationally and locally have no business or economic development background." And certainly no technical and science background at all!

Concluded next week.



Democratic Presidential Nominee Gov. Bill Clinton (left) met with South African leader Nelson Mandela during Mr. Mandela's visit to New York to address the United Nations. This was during the week of the Democratic National Convention. New York City Mayor David Dinkins (right), who headed a black business delegation to South Africa earlier this year, participated in the meeting.



Joseph E. Elliott (center), president of Encyclopedia Britannica Educational Corporation, holds an oversized copy of a check for \$10,000 he presented to the Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA) recently during the American Library Association convention in San Francisco. BCALA will use the funds for a reception for 1,000 librarians at its first annual convention in September. Accepting the check from Elliott are (from left) Dr. John Tyson, state librarian of Virginia; Sylvia Sprinkle-Hamlin, deputy director of the Forsythe County (N.C.) Public Library; Satia Marshall Orange, head of children's department at Forsythe County Public Library; Rubye Kyles, assistant executive director of the Columbus (Ohio) Metropolitan Library; and Dr. Alex Boyd, director of the Newark (N.J.) Public Library. All are BCALA conference planners.

House Urges Continued Funding Of Multnomah County Gang Intervention Project

A must-pass funding bill approved by the House last night directs the Justice Department to keep up its past support of Multnomah County's gang intervention program. The bill provides more than \$72 million nationwide to fight youth gangs and crime, about \$64 million more than President Bush recommended earlier this year.

"This so-called 'law-and-order' Bush Administration has got its priorities all wrong," Says Congressman Les AuCoin. "What we need are more re-

sources to deal with the problems of youth gangs, teenage crime, and drug abuse. As a member of the committee that wrote this bill, I'm proud that we recognized that, even if the White House doesn't.

Last year, AuCoin helped the county secure a \$500,000 federal grant to support its innovative anti-gang efforts. The 1993 budget for Juvenile Justice programs urges the Justice Department to keep funding Multnomah County's gang intervention program at the same level

in the coming year. The anti-gang program also receives strong support from the state and local governments and involves various community organizations.

"Multnomah County's program help kids stay out of gangs by restructuring their values systems, building positive behavior, and giving kids alternatives to crime, drugs, and gang involvement," AuCoin said. "Building self-esteem and giving kids positive choices is one of the best ways to fight the influence of gangs."

African American Views On The Environment: Conclusion

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

I stated in the July 22 article in this series, "the world is indeed a Global Village and the continents are poisoning each other." Today I will carry that concept beyond the conventional media reports on the destruction of tropical forests in the lands of peoples of color. We will deal with some issues that the media seem reluctant to address.

Few Americans, yet today, realize that the United States is one of the chief COLONIAL POWERS in the world--never-mind the Hawaii and Alaska are now designated as "states," certainly the economic and political hegemony is maintained. And in the Caribbean there is the situation of Puerto Rico and of the Virgin Islands. In common here, we have the economic and political control of peoples of color by American industry and agricultural corporations which are not answerable to either the indigenous population of American voters.

And then there is the situation in the SOUTH PACIFIC where the United States controls (owns) tens of thousands of square miles of island territories under "United Nation Trusteeships." Like the "country" of Panama in this hemisphere (and in reality, all of Central America and most of South America), these island territories occupied by people of color have no real control over their resources or sovereignty. Particularly, most of the Americas may not negotiate treaties with European nations because of that "Monroe Doctrine" invoked long ago to "protect the strategic interests of the United

States."

It is not Broadway plays and Hollywood movies like "South Pacific" we must look to for an understanding of the economic and political dynamics controlling the Pacific territories of the United States. We will take for a model the large island of Palau which in the last year has been the frequent topic of documentaries on Public Television. Most of the population looks exactly like the black residents of Northeast Portland, a fact attested to by African American naval personnel in respect of their home cities.

The U.S. has a large naval presence here ("strategic interests"), amid increasingly vitriolic, even violent confrontations with American administrators. Of particular concern to the Palau people is the U.S. demand that NUCLEAR POWERED SHIPS AND SUBMARINES be allowed to use the harbor facilities. A short while back the Palau people, within the limited sovereignty granted them by the United Nations, voted decisively against any such environment-threatening activity--they now have a "NUCLEAR FREE CONSTITUTION" (Like Portland's "Nuclear Free Declaration").

Predictably, the United States has reacted with anger and has been accused by the people of procuring vote frauds, even murder of a key politician opposing the nuclear hazard. The Americans are pushing for a special referendum which would guaranteed storage space for nuclear bombs. The United Nations has demanded that the U.S. respect the constitution of these people to no avail. These people do not

have the clout of Okinawa where two-thirds of the people want all American Naval installations closed down.

The people of Palau were well represented at that "World Conference of Indigenous Peoples On Territory, Environment and Development" which took place just before that "World Summit on Environment" in Brazil. They expressed a well-founded concern that if America got a foot in the door, then they might well have to face other environmental concerns. All Pacific Islanders remember the decades of nuclear bomb testing in the area by both the French and Americans--and that the devastation (and radioactivity) may last for many centuries.

It is interesting to note that under the "gentle" hand of U.S. administrators the economy of Palau is deteriorating with high unemployment and increasing crime--this, among a people who were noted for their fine family and other social relationships. The pressure is on, and in one documentary an American administrator was interviewed at length. It was like listening to the Dixiecrat senators, Russell or Bilbo, reincarnated; as condescending and denigrating as you would expect from an Indian agent in the old west--not from a U.S. Navy Admiral.

It is to be hoped that ALL peoples wherever and whoever are going to keep up the good fight against the environmental desperados of this world. By the way, did you know that John Audubon was black--the son of a West Indies woman and a French sea captain? Will they disband the "Audubon Society?"

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