

EDITORIAL

The Portland Observer

NATIONAL RAINBOW COALITION

Clinton: In Search Of A Foreign Policy For Haiti

Randall Robinson was admitted to Providence Hospital in Washington, DC this week after nearly a month-long fast protesting what he calls President Clinton's racist policies toward Haiti. A combination of factors--the moral power of Mr. Robinson's fast, increased public criticism by the CBC and others in Congress, and reports of renewed terror against the Haitian people by their military rulers--has led to the resignation of the Administration's special envoy for Haiti, Lawrence Pezzullo; is leading to stronger UN sanctions; and has even invoked the threat of military force to restore Father Aristide to power. The NRC urges your continued prayers for Randall Robinson and your continued pressure on the Clinton administration to change its Haitian policy. Let's review the history of U.S. involvement in Haiti as reported by JaxFax, Vol. I, Issue 17.

Haitians were the only people to sand with the U.S. in our War for Independence. Haiti, the world's first independent Black republic, gained its own freedom in 1791. Yet we betrayed the country, intervened, occupied and exploited Haiti--its people and natural resources. After World War II, the U.S. used Haiti as a Cold War pawn. We armed and funded a corrupt business and military elite, supported the governments of both Papa and Baby Doc Duvalier--even though they brutalized their

own people--as long as they were staunchly anti-communist. The Haitian crisis is 100 years old.

Organized opposition forces drove out the Duvaliers in the '80s, but not the corrupt system. However, it was finally forced to hold democratic elections on December 16, 1990. The Bush administration supported the status quo candidate, but the poor rallied around Jean-Bertrand Aristide, giving him 67 percent of their vote. Publicly, the Bush administration gave lip-service to democracy and Aristide's return. Privately, Bush used the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) to undermine Aristide's popular leadership and his economic program to raise the minimum wage. Aristide was overthrown in a military coup on September 30, 1991.

The UN and U.S. responded with an ineffective economic boycott that hurt only the poor. Oil still flowed, assets of the rich remained available, and they were able to travel abroad. Conditions of poverty and brutality worsened for the poor. Thousands risked drowning at sea in rickety boats rather than endure more hardship in Haiti.

In December, 1991, Bush established a policy of intercepting Haitians at sea and declared them "economic" rather than "political" refugees--which denied them temporary asylum and returned

them to Haiti without due process, a violation of international law. Candidate Clinton criticized Bush for this policy, calling it immoral, callous, cruel and unlawful. A week before assuming office, Clinton adopted Bush's policy, going to the Supreme Court to defend it.

Aristide called for the immediate replacement of the Army High Command, Lieutenant General Raoul Cedras; the Port-Au-Prince Chief of Police, Michel Francois; his immediate return; and the annulment of the fraudulent 1992 senate elections. The OAS-UN-U.S. legitimized the military government by making them equal players with Aristide during negotiations. In the Governor's Island, NY, agreement, signed by Aristide under duress on July 3, 1993, the military, police and senate remained in place, sanctions were lifted, and the status quo of power was maintained in Haiti.

The United States helped to create the disorder in Haiti. The Clinton administration must develop the Backbone to apply its sound principles. President Clinton made a commitment to restore order and democracy to Haiti. It must be upheld. The Haitian military must be told, "This shall not stand." A complete blockade of Haiti must be put in place, and military intervention must not be ruled out.

Mandela's Inaugural

Our majesties, your royal highnesses, distinguished guests, comrades and friends:

Today, all of us do, by our presence here, and by our celebrations in other parts of our country and the world, confer glory and hope to newborn liberty.

Out of the experience of an extraordinary human disaster that lasted too long must be born a society of which all humanity will be proud.

Our daily deeds as ordinary South Africans must produce an actual South African reality that will reinforce humanity's belief in justice, strengthen its confidence in the nobility of the human soul and sustain all our hopes for a glorious life for all.

All this we owe both to ourselves and to the peoples of the world who are so well represented here today.

To my compatriots, I have no hesitation in saying that each one of us is as intimately attached to the soil of this beautiful country as are the famous jacaranda trees of Pretoria and the mimosa trees of the bushveld.

Each time one of us touches the soil of this land, we feel a sense of personal renewal. The national mood changes as the seasons change.

We are moved to a sense of joy and exhilaration when the grass turns green and the flowers bloom.

That spiritual and physical oneness we all share with this common homeland explains the depth of the pain we all carried in our hearts as we spurned, outlawed and isolated by the peoples of the world, precisely because it has become the universal base of the pernicious ideology and practice of racism and racial oppression.

We, the people of South Africa, feel fulfilled that humanity has taken us back into its bosom, that we, who

were outlaws not so long ago, have today been given the rare privilege to be host to the nations of the world on our own soil.

We thank all our distinguished international guests for having come to take possession with the people of our country of what is, after all, a common victory for justice, for peace, for human dignity.

We trust that you will continue to stand by us as we tackle the challenges of building peace, prosperity, nonsexism, nonracialism and democracy.

We deeply appreciate the role that the masses of our people and their democratic, religious, women, youth, business, traditional and other leaders have played to bring about this conclusion. Not least among them is my Second Deputy President, the Honorable F.W. de Klerk.

We would also like to pay tribute to our security forces, in all their ranks, for the distinguished role they have played in securing our first democratic elections and the transition to democracy, from bloodthirsty forces which still refuse to see the light.

The time for the healing of the wounds has come.

The moment to bridge the chasms that divide has come.

The time to build is upon us.

We have, at last achieved our political emancipations. We pledge ourselves to liberate all our people from the continuing bondage of poverty, deprivation, suffering, gender and other discrimination.

We succeeded to take our last steps to freedom in conditions of relative peace. We commit ourselves to the construction of a complete, just and lasting peace.

We have triumphed in the effort to implant hope in the breasts of the millions of our people. We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans,

both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of the inalienable right to human dignity--a Rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.

As a token of its commitment to the renewal of our country, the new interim Government of National Unity will, as a matter of urgency, address the issue of amnesty for various categories of our people who are currently serving terms of imprisonment.

We dedicate this day to all the heroes and heroines in this country and the rest of the world who sacrificed in many ways and surrendered their lives so that we could be free.

Their dreams have become reality. Freedom is their reward.

We are both humbled and elevated by the honor and privilege that you, the people of South Africa, have bestowed on us, as the first President of a united, democratic, nonracial and nonsexist South Africa, to lead our country out of the valley of darkness.

We understand it still that there is no easy road to freedom.

We know it well that none of us acting alone can achieve success.

We must therefore act together as a united people, for national reconciliation, for nation building, for the birth of a new world.

Let there be justice for all.

Let there be peace for all.

Let there be work, bread, water and salt for all.

Let each know that for each the body, the mind and the soul have been freed to fulfill themselves.

Never, never and never again shall it be that oppression of one by another and suffer the indignity of being the skunk of the world.

The sun shall never set on so glorious a human achievement! Let freedom reign. God Bless Africa!

Vantage Point

The Crucial Battle Over Health Care Reform

For the last several months the issue of health care reform has been a dominant issue on the American agenda. America has the most expensive health care system in the west, yet by some estimates 37 million people have no health care coverage and another 20 million are inadequately covered. There should be no doubt that the health care crisis in America is real. The crucial question is how to solve the crisis. On this question there are some fundamental differences of approach which Black people, people of color and poor and working people need to assess very carefully.

From my vantage point the heart of the question is about what principles and values should guide public policy in the United States into the 21st Century. Should health care be for people, a basic human right guaranteed to all human beings in this society on an equitable basis irrespective of race, gender, class or disability? Or should health care be for profit, a privilege which society feels obliged to provide as long as the interests and status of the corporations and the wealthy are protected? The health care for people or health care for profit issue is the crucial question which ordinary Americans must answer in terms of the outcome of health care reform and the future direction of the nation.

President Clinton campaigned on a pledge to make health care reform a key cornerstone of his presidency. He has indeed kept faith with that promise. The problem is that President Clinton, in a manner similar to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) initiative, is promoting and advancing a concept which first and foremost preserves and protects the interests of the big business - in this instance the big insurance companies. His highly publicized concept of "managed competition"

fails to deal with the biggest single problem crippling the health care system in the U.S.: the enormous cost of having thousands of insurance companies (multiple payers) engaged in the "business" of health care. Various have estimated that 25% of health care cost in the U.S. are attributable to the paperwork and administrative cost required to process claims with thousands of insurance companies.

While President Clinton and Hillary Clinton occasional attack the insurance companies for their greed and lack of support for the Clinton plan, they have never reached the logical conclusion that health care should be for people and not for profit. The Clintons have steadfastly refused to support proposals that would eliminate the insurance companies from the health care system altogether. Instead they have proposed a "free market" for profit system that would provide different levels and quality of health care based on economic status and ability to pay. Poor and working people would be guaranteed a "bare bones" package of benefits while the wealthy would still be able to purchase the best health care that money could buy.

The alternative vision is a health care system that places the needs of people first; a system that is equitable (treats everyone the same in terms of benefits irrespective of income/status), provides for maximum choice in terms of doctors, hospitals, clinics etc. and saves the taxpayers and the nation money by reducing the overall cost of health care. Of equal importance, such a system should advance the principle that people are more important than profit and that the guarantee of basic human rights i.e., jobs, housing, health care, education, clean environment will make for a much more healthy and humane society. This vision is captured in the concept of a single payer health care

system modeled after the Canadian system.

Though this concept has virtually been dismissed as impractical by corporate America, the President and the political leadership of both parties, there is a bill before the Congress which is generating considerable grassroots support. The McDermott-Conyers Bill has more sponsors than any other health care proposal in Congress. In addition to Cong. Conyers, most of the members of the Congressional Black Caucus and the Rev. Jesse Jackson support the health care for people principle as reflected in the single payer concept and the McDermott-Conyers Bill. And, though single payer has been subjected to a virtual media white out, the leading budgetary agencies within the Congress have indicated that single payer would be the least costly of all the current proposals, saving the American taxpayer billions of dollars in reduced health care cost. The key to this cost savings is the elimination of the health care profiteers - the insurance companies. As is the case with Medicare, a non-profit government agency would be the sole/single payer thereby saving billions of dollars in unnecessary overhead/administrative cost.

As of this writing the conventional wisdom is that the insurance lobby is too powerful for single payer to have a chance of passing Congress. In the final analysis, however, the power of the people can be greater than any lobby. To that end an organization of grassroots activists from around the country, Single Payer Across the Nation (SPAN, 216-241-8558) is determined to make a decisive difference on the critical question of health care for people or health care for profit. I believe it is a question/issue which each of us must decide and act on in terms of the health and well being of this nation into the 21st Century.

Civil Rights Journal

We Need A Health Care Revolution

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

A few months ago I was in the emergency room of a Cleveland hospital waiting for a friend. While I sat there a mother with two small children came in seeking medical care. Her children's eyes were red and swollen; clearly they were suffering from what is commonly called pink eye, a highly contagious condition which children often get.

What was just as clear was that while this condition must be treated, it was not really an emergency room case. Yet for many poor mothers, the emergency room is the only medical treatment facility which they know. For some, it is the only treatment center anywhere near where they live.

There's something wrong with the health care system in America. Stories like the one above prove that. Statistics also prove that. Statistics show that while white Americans are living longer, African Americans are living shorter lives.

For example, African American babies are more than twice as likely as white babies to die before they celebrate their first birthday. The rate of AIDS among African Americans is more than triple that of whites. Young African American males experience

a homicide rate more than 700 times that of white males. African Americans face high rates of alcoholism and drug addiction. African American children are more likely to have high levels of lead poisoning. Indeed, African Americans face disproportionately higher mortality rates from cancer, heart disease and stroke, cirrhosis, and diabetes.

There's something wrong with a health system in the wealthiest country in the world which allows these disparities to exist and even to grow. There's something wrong with a health system that does not address these issues head-on with a single payer, culturally-sensitive, community-based health treatment and education program for everyone, especially for the "least of these."

What we need in the communities

even with all the talk about health care reform in the country today, little is being said about the unique needs of our community with health care problems more closely parallel to those of Third World countries than those of white America.

Take, for instance, the need for health care providers to be members of the community they serve. A generation ago the majority of African Americans received their medical treatment from African American doctors. When I was growing up in Washington, D.C. in the 1950's and 60's for example, I never saw a white physician until I was an adult. My doctor and the doctors of all my family members were African Americans. Today, it is estimated that less

than 20 percent of African Americans receive their health care from African American physicians.

That is not to say that white physicians cannot give quality health care to African American patients. But they have not lived many of the community experiences and cultural sensitivities that someone from our community has.

The civil rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer once said, "I am sick and tired of being sick and tired." She wasn't talking about health care then, but I couldn't agree with her more.

(Note: Write to your Congressman at the House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515. Write to your Senators at the U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510.)

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