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The Portland Observer

(USPS 959-680) Established in 1970

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Deadline for all submitted materials:
Articles: Friday, 5:00 pm Ads: Monday, 12:00pm

POSTMASTER: Send Address Changes To: Portland Observer,
P.O. Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208.

Periodicals postage paid at Portland, Oregon.
Subscriptions: \$60.00 per year

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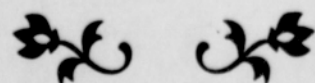
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The Power Of Nonviolent Protest

DR. MANNING MARABLE

In a small Indian village in the highlands of Chiapas state, Mexico, an incredible event occurred recently that was reminiscent of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the desegregation campaigns across the South during the 1960s.

For five years, Mexican government troops have battled against the Zapatista rebels in Chiapas. Since December 1995, the Zapatistas have controlled the mayor's office and town hall of San Andre's Larrainzar, a rural village. In April, 1999, the Mexican government decided to seize the town hall by force. Three hundred state police officers, fully armed, invaded the town hall, overpowering only two Zapatistas who had been guarding the building.

The next day, over one thousand Zapatistas and their supporters, all unarmed, gathered into three long columns and marched into the center of town. There they confronted about 150 armed police in riot gear. The protestors had no weapons, not even rocks or sticks. But together, they shouted and marched forward, pushing the police out from the town hall. Government officials later claimed that the police had retreated "to avoid a confrontation with furious demonstrators." No injuries, deaths or arrests had been reported. And the Zapatistas had made their point: the village was back under their control.

Both Dr. King and Mohandas Gandhi believed in the power of non-violent protest. They saw that it was practical and effective method of protest, especially when confronted by an opponent possessing much greater firepower and resources. Civil disobedience takes tremendous courage and discipline. It endeavors to make the agents of authority to question their orders, to recognize the inhumanity or illegitimacy of their actions. It seeks to achieve justice without the loss of human life on either side.

Several days ago, on the other side of the world, a similar protest was organized in Palestine, called the "Day of Rage." Palestinian activists wanted to send a clear message to newly elected Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak that they would not tolerate the expansion of Zionist settlements in the Palestinian territory, or West Bank. Several thousand Palestinians took part in coordinated demonstrations that were designed not to provoke an armed military confrontation with Israeli soldiers. In Jerusalem, Palestinians organized a general strike. In the Gaza Strip, Palestinian protestors blocked the main thoroughfare near a Zionist settlement. In Hebron, the Palestinian protestors marched through the Jewish section of town to denounce a Zionist housing project.

In the years of the Intifada, from 1987 to 1994, thousands of Palestinian teenagers and young adults were bru-

ally killed, wounded and imprisoned by Israeli authorities. Hopes for a meaningful settlement were delayed with the electoral victory of Benjamin Netanyahu and his reactionary Likud party coalition government. But with the victory of Labor last month, there is the real possibility that the Israelis may finally begin to implement the agreements they promised regarding autonomy for the Palestinian people. Pressure is necessary to push the negotiations process forward, and that is what nonviolent demonstrations may help to accomplish.

In the aftermath of the murder of Amadou Diallo, over one thousand two hundred people were arrested in civil disobedience demonstrations in New York City. The protests were not designed to destroy public property or to physically harass or attack the police. The purpose was to arouse the conscience of the larger community to the immorality and injustices represented by police brutality cases such as Amadou Diallo's. Although Mayor Rudolph Giuliani repeatedly attempted to denigrate the objectives of the nonviolent protestors, his contemptuous and arrogant behavior turned many of his political allies against him. Hastily, the New York Police Department (NYPD) transferred some black and Hispanic cops into the Street Crimes Unit, which had been responsible for Diallo's death. Days ago, I even received a call from an NYPD

lieutenant requesting my assistance in organizing curricula and selecting textbooks that could train police officers to become more racially and culturally tolerant. The police harassments and stops-and-frisks of young black teenagers seem to have declined in the past two months. The lesson is clear: non-violent protests around an important moral or just cause that has broader meaning for the majority of people can change public policies.

People frequently define politics as "the art of the possible." For the oppressed, politics must be the struggle to achieve what others perceive as "the impossible," our primary criteria for successful politics should not be whether our candidates get elected, but whether we have lifted the political discourse of this nation, in such a manner that real problems and viable solutions are being addressed. If we confine our notions of politics solely to voting, we may be able to replace Tweedledee, but we'll never transform the system as a whole.

Nonviolent direct action protest techniques need to be taught to our young people in our churches, mosques, community centers and at institutions across the country. We need to reproduce Diallo-like civil disobedience demonstrations at hundreds of police stations and city halls throughout this country. To paraphrase the great abolitionist Frederick Douglass, "Without struggle there is no progress."

Jubilee 2000 And No Less

By Bernice Powell Jackson

In December I attended the World Council of Churches Assembly meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe, where Christians from a round the world came together to pray and worship and to talk about the issues of faith which confront us in this world. The issue of the enormous global debt which is threatening the very survival of the world's poorest nations was at the heart of our deliberations. Indeed, these leaders of Protestant and Orthodox churches around the world joined the call for Jubilee 2000, the cancellation of all the debts of the world's poorest nations, which had already been endorsed by Pope John Paul VI and the bishops and archbishops of the worldwide Anglican communion. It's been a long time since the leaders of the Christian faith all agree on any issue, but they all agree that it is sinful for the rich to take from the poor.

What has brought them to this position is the realization that the world's poorest nations now owe somewhere between \$127 - \$250 billion, depending on how one counts. Thus, Zimbabwe, where our meeting was taking place and which has the world's highest death rate from HIV/AIDS, pays 37% of its Gross National Product to the repayment of the interest alone on the debt they owe. Precious dollars which might go to AIDS prevention and treatment must be shuttled instead to debt repayment and the same is true for other services to the people, including education and farm subsidies and assistance. This is true despite the high taxation rate of 40-45% which Zimbabweans now pay.

Indeed, some African nations spend four times as much servicing debt each year as they do on health care for their citizens. And according to figures released by Jubilee 2000, for every dollar given in development aid to these poor nations, three dollars goes back to rich countries in debt-service payments.

The irony of all of this is that many of these poor nations have provided free or very low-cost resources to the developed world and now are being forced to pay for the goods and services it helped create. At the world Council of Churches meeting, for example, we were reminded by one African church leader that millions of people were stolen from Africa to provide free labor for the world, and such natural resources as gold, oil, diamonds, and many metals were stripped from African countries for a small portion of their value. "When you count all of that, we don't owe you anything," he said pointedly.

Now, at the latest so-called G7 meeting of the leaders of the industrialized nations, there was call for the forgiveness of some of the debt burden of the world's poorest countries. Their estimates of their proposal would provide \$65-90 billion in debt relief for some 33 countries, most of which would be in

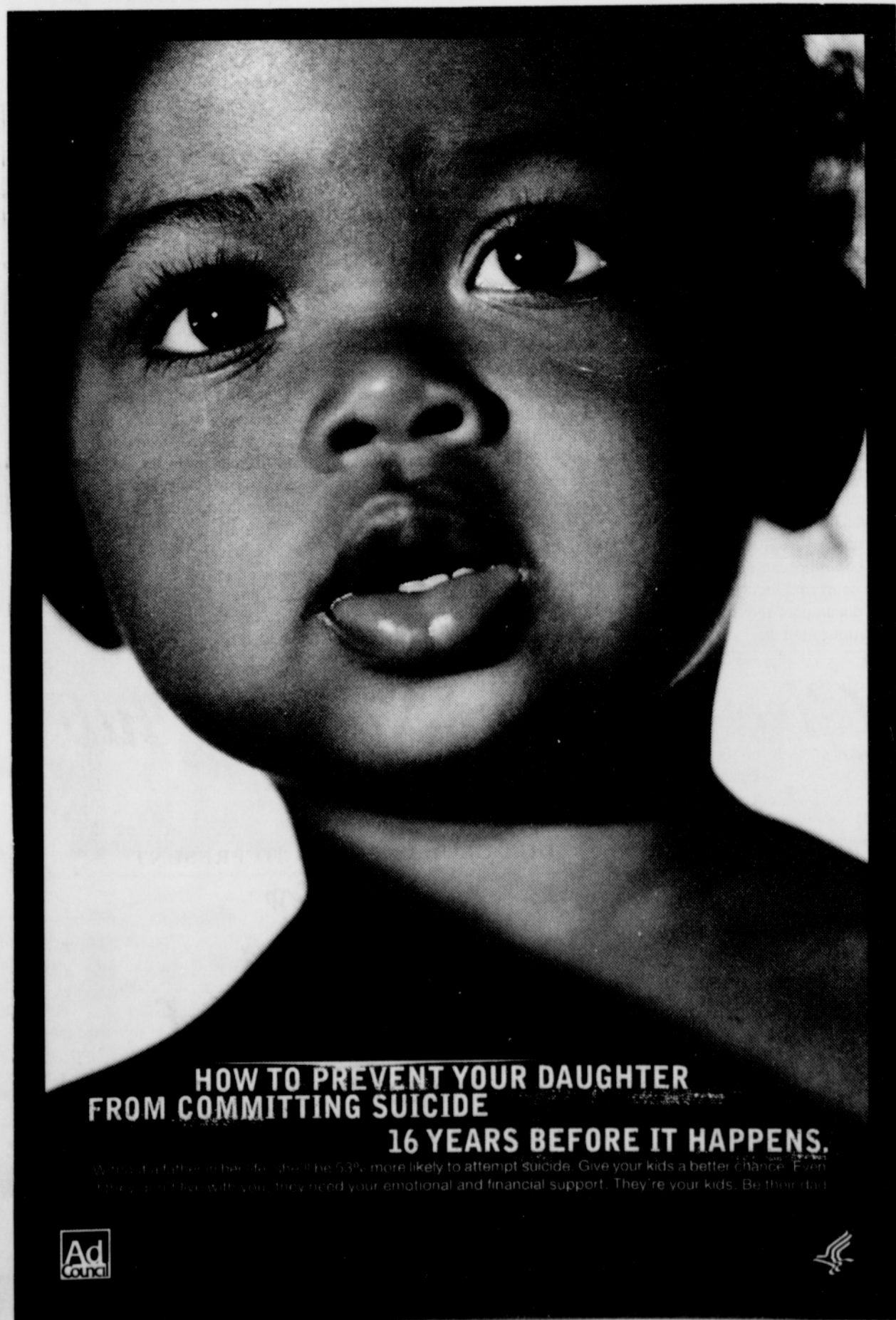
Africa. Their rationale for the less-than total debt relief is that total cancellation would require enormous budgetary outlays by the G7 countries. But some economists argue that the total debt could be canceled at little budgetary cost to the U.S. and other creditor countries and would pose no fundamental risks to international financial institutions or commercial banks.

The reality is that the huge debt is unpayable and all the richest nations are doing is extracting interest payments on loans they know cannot be

repaid. Moreover, according to Oxfam, one of the world's food programs, even with these new measure a country like Mozambique would be paying twice as much a year for debt payments as for primary education. According to Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs, the G7 initiative is simply "tinkering around the edges," and it does not get rid of the debt, or free up needed resources for health and education in poor countries and leaves the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in control of the economies of the indebted nations. Clearly,

this is one case where a partial solution does not solve the problem.

Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney is now preparing to introduce legislation which would cancel one kind of international debt, bilateral debt, or loans between the poorest nations to the United States and would require the IMF to do the same as a condition for its receiving U.S. funds. More than a dozen members of congress have agreed to co-sponsor this legislation, but many more are needed. **Continued on Page A6**



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