

Point of View

BLACK WORKERS AND THE FUTURE OF UNIONS

by Norman Hill

In an introductory statement to the A. Philip Randolph Institute's soon-to-be-published report, "The Changing Economy and Unions: An Analysis and Program of the Black-Labor Alliance," AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland wrote: "Women, blacks and other minorities are the fastest growing groups in the workforce and they tend to join unions in a proportionately higher rate than other workers." He went on to say that "addressing their concerns and increasing their participation in the trade union movement is vital to us."

President Kirkland's statement reflects both the labor movement's continued sensitivity (as evinced by its social, political and economic agenda) to the needs of black workers and their community, and the growing importance of the black labor force to the future growth of the labor movement.

Indeed, the needs and priorities of the labor movement and minority community have become intertwined. This interdependence based on common cause is apparent in several factors. The labor movement has become a primary vehicle for black economic and social progress. The expansion of the black middle class is rooted largely in unionized manufacturing, service and public sectors of

the economy. And as blacks have steadily advanced through the union ranks, the labor movement has become more responsive to minority concerns. The head of the AFL-CIO's Department of Legislation, a key position, is black, and blacks can be found in leadership roles throughout the labor movement. The labor movement, in concert with civil rights groups, has been at the forefront on voting rights, housing, reinforcing the Civil Rights Act, opposing the Bork nomination, and other issues. In turn, the Congress-

in service industries. Today, black workers are not only more unionized than the workforce as a whole, they also represent larger proportions of unionized workers in each major industry. Black workers are 30 percent more heavily unionized than others in construction industries; 20 percent more unionized in manufacturing; and 50 percent more unionized in the service industries, mainly health care. With some 11 percent of the population, blacks represent nearly 15 percent of unionized workers.

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sional Black Caucus has the most solid pro-labor record in Congress.

The recent surge in black voting strength has also made black workers and their communities a valuable ally of the labor movement, particularly in Southern, traditionally anti-union states. As was evidenced in the Bork fight, many moderate Southern senators elected on the strength of the black electorate voted against the nomination. In the same way, pro-labor black voters could influence legislators in areas where labor is weak.

Blacks and other minorities will also play an increasingly vital role in labor's organizing efforts, especially

These statistics clearly suggest that black and minority workers must be included in an overall strategy to organize workers, and that unionized black workers and their allies in the black community are an invaluable asset in recruitment and organizing.

Over the last 20 years, the interests of the labor movement and the black community have converged, particularly in the area of social and economic policy. Organized labor needs black leaders and workers to articulate and disseminate its agenda in the black community, as well as black voter support for its legislative priorities. For its part,

United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

THE WALL STREET CRASH: WHITE MONDAY''

by Benjamin F. Chavis Jr.

Monday, October 19, 1987 was not a good day for the stock market on Wall Street. In fact, it has been characterized by most financial analysts as "the worse day ever." It was the day that the market plummeted 508 points, the worst plunge in the history of Wall Street.

On that day, I happened to be at Emmanuel United Church of Christ in Lexington, Kentucky, preparing to watch the national evening news. The "NBC Nightly News," anchored by Tom Brockaw, began with the statement: "This is Black Monday." Mr. Brockaw was referring to the disastrous day which Wall Street had just experienced. As soon as I heard that the day was being characterized as "Black Monday," I began to take strong exception to the use of that phrase. It was not appropriate to characterize the day of failure and calamity of this nation's financial center as a "black" day.

I know there are some who will say that no harm was meant because this term was first used when the stock market crashed in 1929, signalling The Great Depression. If I had been alive at that time, I would have taken exception then, too. The problem is that this society associates failure exclusively with the color "black" at the same time as it associates success only with the color "white."

Much of the media through-

out the nation also characterized the recent failure as "Black Monday." We all know the power that the media has in forming values. Let us remember the context of this discussion. We live in a racist society. To ascribe negative and positive values, respectively, to the color black and white is to enhance the institutionalization of this country's racist values.

Racism is both subtle and pervasive. That is why the victims of racism cannot afford to become silent and complacent. For too long certain racist connotations have become socially acceptable because they have not been consistently challenged. For example, some people still panic when a black cat crosses their path. Devil's food cake is chocolate cake; angel food cake is white. In movies the good guys wear white hats and ride white horses; the bad guys are identified by the color black. The color white is associated with purity; the color black with impurity. It is okay to tell a little "white lie"; and no one wants a so-called "black mark" on their record. It is within this context that we must be ever mindful of the psychological

damage that is done to the entire society by the use of connotations that have racist implications.

Let's look at what really happened on Wall Street. The major financial decision makers at the time of both historic crashes were almost exclusively white males. Now, this is not to suggest that white males are prone to suggest that white males are prone to failure. But it would have been more accurate, although not appropriate to have labeled this day, "White Monday."

The truth is that there will probably be more bad days for Wall Street. Any financial system that is dependent upon the monopolistic advantage of the rich over the poor will inevitably fail. What we should all learn from this is that in times of great national distress or fear, more care should be taken to prevent the use of negative terminology, particularly when that terminology injures those who had nothing whatsoever to do with the causation of the calamity.

If we are ever to expunge racism from our midst, we must understand the many, insidious ways that racism is manifested throughout our society.

Extremists In High Places: Where Do They Find These People?

by David Kusnet

Former Education Secretary Terrel Bell made headlines recently when he revealed that he had often heard "mid-level right-wing staffers" in the Reagan Administration make racial slurs.

Bell's revelations, contained in a soon-to-be-published book on his four years as a cabinet secretary, came as no surprise to students of

the Far Right's influence over the Administration.

Virtually every administration has its share of incompetents or worse. However, this Administration has appointed a remarkable number of ideological extremists — some of whose records are so embarrassing that they have been forced to resign or have been denied confirmation by the Senate.

For instance, See EXTREMISTS, Page 16

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the black community needs a strong and vibrant trade union movement to protect worker and minority rights, and to fight for a social agenda that calls for full employment, the elimination of poverty, support for civil rights and civil liberties, fair and affordable housing, improvements in education and training, etc. Thus working together for mutual goals, the black-labor alliance can continue to grow into a powerful coalition for social and economic justice.