

Point of View

To Be Equal

COMBATTING AIDS AND DRUGS

by John E. Jacob

It's incredible how this nation sat back and allowed the twin plagues of AIDS and drug abuse to run rampant without clear, forthright policies to contain them.

Since the two are linked, and since the costs and public concern about both are rising, a glimmer of hope prevails that we'll finally get on track.

An indication of positive movement is provided by the President's AIDS Commission. This was a moribund body good for little but acting as the target of jokes or protests, until retired Admiral James Watkins was named Chairman and whipped it into shape.

The Commission has finally come up with a report that sensibly identifies intravenous drug abusers as the group that should be targeted for programs to cut both drug abuse and the transmission of AIDS.

We've always known that one method by which AIDS spreads is through the shared use of contaminated needles used by drug abusers. And we've long known that many drug abusers want to kick their habit, especially since AIDS has been identified as a realistic danger.

But drug treatment centers are too few and are under-

staffed. Thousands who want treatment are turned away.

The Commission proposes a massive increase in treatment programs for drug abusers — about \$1.5 billion per year.

Even if AIDS weren't the



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scourge it is, we need to help drug abusers overcome their habit and lead productive lives. The AIDS factor makes it crucial to do so.

Intravenous drug users now account for about a fourth of all AIDS patients, and are implicated in 70 percent of AIDS cases transmitted heterosexually and in AIDS among newborn infants.

The extent of the AIDS risk involved can be seen by estimates that in New York City alone 100,000 drug abusers are carriers of the AIDS virus and some 10,000 more are infected each year. In some neighborhoods, one of five men is said to carry the virus.

The Commission's recommendations would result in 3,300 new drug treatment centers available to serve up to half a million people.

Congressional penny-pinchers will complain that we can't afford the centers, but if we can't, how can we afford the medical bill estimated at \$40 billion for new AIDS cases in the next four

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years or so?

The Commission's findings may also finally spur a serious effort to attack the drug problem. While our neighborhoods have been devastated and our young people deprived of their futures, the response to drugs has been largely limited to rhetoric.

But more needs to be done, including more and better drug education programs for our kids; international diplomacy to cut the flow of drugs, and serious law enforcement efforts that clamp down on the crack dealers.

Combating the drug plague will also take the full resources of minority communities. In many places, citizens are actively participating in working with vulnerable young people, feeding information about drug

United Church of Christ

Commission for Racial Justice CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

by Benjamin F. Chavis Jr.

ECONOMIC SANCTIONS AGAINST AMERICAN RACISM

The crowd of more than 2,000 which overflowed Bethany Baptist Church one recent evening in Brooklyn, N.Y. was clearly serious. They had come to hear about an economic strategy which would confront the heightened racism and racist violence in New York. As I looked around the church I saw African Americans from every walk of life and every age group. When a speaker asked all to stand up who were ready to participate, everyone stood with an air of excitement and anticipation.

As Bob Law, the African American host of the nationally syndicated radio show "Night Talk" and an organizer of the campaign, told the crowd, "We have a moral imperative not to cooperate with our own oppression. The economic pillars of our society, to whom we give millions of dollars every year, must be held accountable for the climate of this city."

Discussions about the campaign were first held last December. Then in January of this year, over 40 prominent African American leaders from New York came together and formed the Committee for Economic Sanctions Against Racism in New York. Their statement of Purpose declared: "The racist atrocities being perpetrated against our community must be stopped. If we are to receive justice, then... collective action by African American leadership is necessary.

dealing to law enforcement groups, and working to push the dealers out.

But those efforts won't come to much if local, state and federal government bodies don't do their bit. That means programs that cut the demand for drugs and strict policing to cut the supply. And the real way to end the drug scourge is to replace despair and hopelessness with opportunities for productive lives.

Unified mass action by the African American community is essential."

On Saturday, February 18th, the first phase of that mass action got underway. Scores of picketers converged on Macy's Department store, one of the first targets of the economic sanctions campaign. Hundreds of police officers were already covering each entrance when we arrived at 9:00 a.m., an hour before the store opened.

Macy's had been picked by the Sanctions Committee after research showed that the store — the largest in the world, and based in New York — had racist policies. Macy's sells South African made goods, does not invest in any African American banks in New York, and does very little business with African American media. Also, the store is surrounded by the poverty of those consigned to New York's degrading "welfare hotels," yet it contributes nothing to non-profit, cooperative housing for low-income families in New York.

Equally important, African Americans, though visibly employed, are often stuck in low-paying cashier jobs for years while younger whites are often moved into the fast-track executive management programs.

Additionally, Macy's, as a key pillar of the economic life in New York City, has untold influence on the climate of this city. When Eleanor Bumpurs, a 67-year-old African American grandmother, was shot-gunned to death during an eviction, the white police officer who killed her not only went unpunished, he was also promoted to detective. And the business community of New York remained silent. African Americans and Hispanic Americans are routinely brutalized in New York by the police or by other white citizens, yet they usually go unpunished. And the business community of New York remains silent.

The Rev. Calvin O. Butts,

Executive Minister of Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem and another organizer of the sanctions campaign reminds us, "We must let the captains of industry of New York know that there will be no more business as usual."

As one of those arrested during the "Day of Outrage" which recently closed down the Brooklyn subways and Bridge, I understand the continuing importance of demonstrations. But our history also teaches us the necessity to link racial injustice protest to economics. The powers-that-be often don't hear you until you begin to disturb their cash flow. In 1987 the African American community spent \$290 billion, yet its national spending power has not been used effectively as a tool for racial justice.

Many who offered their support during the initial demonstration at Macy's understood this. Several shoppers, who were about to enter the store, went, instead, to another store. Some shoppers were so incensed that they re-entered the store to return the goods they had just bought. And one group of Italian tourists, when told, through an interpreter, of the nature of the protest, picked up placards and walked the picket line with us!

Yes, African Americans are on the move in New York and, together with the support of others of good conscience around the country, we will succeed in turning this city and state around. And if this strategy can work in New York, it can work in other cities across the nation.

Register

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