

Point of View

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"ALONG THE COLOR LINE"

THE SEARCH FOR DEMOCRACY

PART II

By Dr. Manning Marable

In the 1980's, governments throughout Europe and North America adopted a conservative model for economic development and social relations within their societies. Represented by Ronald Reagan of the U.S. and Margaret Thatcher of England, the conservative model of government advanced an ideology of extreme materialism, individualism and the unveiled exploitation of labor. It declared that there was no implied or real "social contract" between citizens and the government. People had no "natural right" to benefits such as health care, education, public assistance during times of need, or shelter.

The conservative political perspective viewed the government as a collection agency for fleecing working people, eliminating civil rights and environmental protection laws, giving fewer and fewer social entitlements which addressed human needs. With the fall of Communism and the end of the Cold War, this ideology of conserva-

tism has come to dominate politics throughout the world. Even with the important defeat of the Reagan-Bush administration and the victory of Bill Clinton and the Democrats last year, many of the regressive social assumptions about the role of government have remained. Clinton's retreat from the Lani Guinier nomination to the Justice Department, his refusal to increase the minimum wage, his failure to support working people by his position favoring the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), all indicate the long-term impact of Reaganism within both major parties.

Fortunately, there is a democratic opposition from below which challenges the conservative politics, the racism, sexism and class warfare inherent in that perspective. There are many examples of a new level of resistance and progressive change: for example, Bernie Sanders' independent political movement in Vermont; the progressive environmentalist movement in dozens of communities, fighting against environmental racism,

the dumping of toxic chemicals in Latino, Black and working class neighborhoods; the revitalized civil rights movement, symbolized by the emergence of the Reverend Ben Chavis as new national secretary of the NAACP, and by the successful March on Washington, D.C., held this August. What is missing is a comprehensive approach linking all of these progressive leaders, organizations and activities. We need to build a powerful, democratic political realignment, based on a new progressive social contract which empowers the masses of American working people.

But such unity must go beyond an approach which simply states what is "wrong" about our system of government and the economic system. It isn't enough for us to declare what we are against. We must affirm what we are for. We must advocate an affirmative, dynamic social vision of the kind of democracy we need.

The place to begin is to identify and to bring together all groups which experience aliena-

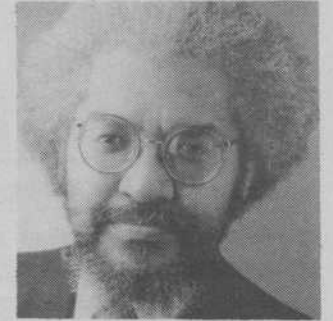
tion, discrimination and oppression within our society: members of trade unions; women; gays and lesbian; the unemployed, the homeless and people on fixed incomes; people of color — African-Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans and others; and all Americans who do not have a basic quality of life, such as health insurance, quality shelter, and education. We must go beyond interest-group politics, which looks at social change like a game of poker, in which someone wins while the others must lose.

We must get to know one another, sharing our common experiences, learning a common language or political action and social commitment. As Malcolm X observed a generation ago, we must move from a "civil rights" struggle to a "human rights" perspective, which has the power to mobilize millions. It is only through day-to-day struggles and joint dialogue that we will learn to transcend the barriers of misunderstanding between groups and political tendencies. Progressive unity among the

broadest social forces in America can be constructed only at the grassroots level, in thousands of union halls, women's centers, churches and schools.

It isn't enough to complain about politicians and the system. The power to achieve change is already in our hands. The next movement for a deeper and more meaningful democracy requires us to go beyond the limits of our imagination.

Dr. Manning Marable is Pro-



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Editor,

I applaud you for providing a "voice" for the Blacks of our community. You do an honorable service to all people by publishing this paper. I believe everyone benefits from trying to understand "the other side," and this is precisely why I read the Sentinel-Voice.

I doubt that you will print this letter because I am White, and your publication does not seem to be receptive to alternative options. This is slightly racist, but I will restrain the accusation due to the great need for the Black community to unite. But why must hatred be the motivating emotion?

Your paper maintains an "anti-everything White" and "pro-everything Black" attitude in most of it's articles. This, of course, is a childish retaliation against society. It's like a "you hit me, so I hit you back" attitude. Unfortunately, an eye for an eye only makes the world blind.

Most offensive to me are James Tate's anti-Metro articles. Tate described Metro as being about one step worse than the

Nazi SS troops. He contends that Metro conspires to hold down the Black community by citing specific cases of corruption or brutality.

Metro must make thousands upon thousands of arrests every year - and out of these, less than a handful warrant a civil complaint. Compare this service record with that of other occupations - repairmen, politicians, priests - these jobs also have their "bad apples," but I don't see other groups destroying the entire profession.

Obviously, Tate's very livelihood comes from the Black community's belief that there is a Black vs. White struggle. (He ends his article with "The Struggle Continues!") Don't you see that Tate is playing the Black community for fools? There should be no reason for the NAACP or the NAARPR to exist if Blacks finger pointing ceased. Imagine if Blacks ceased their paranoid accusations of racism and took responsibility for their own lives; ceased their preoccupation with skin color like the (See Letters to Editor, Page 4)

TO BE EQUAL

DOMESTIC DISARMAMENT URGENT

By John E. Jacob

I'm always amazed how Americans outraged over incidents like the attacks on U.S. soldiers in Somalia can stay calm about the carnage here at home.

More Americans are killed by firearms each year than were killed in the entire Korean War. Every quarter of an hour, another American dies of bullet wounds.

And with increasing frequency those Americans are small children, caught in the crossfire of drug gang shoot-outs or shot by other children who have access to weapons.

The same day last month that a U.S. helicopter was shot down in Somalia killing three soldiers, four people, including a four year old, were shot and killed within sight of the U.S. Capitol.

This is a nation whose capital city, Washington, D.C., is becoming the murder capitol of the world; where an estimated 20 percent of schoolchildren carry weapons, where over 15,000 people were killed by

firearms last year.

We are the best-armed people in the world, but far from the safest. Some 67 million handguns circulate among the population, and probably twice that number of other firearms.

"We need guns for safety," is the standard response of those who oppose handgun bans or other limitations on firearms.

But the opposite is true — the mere presence of guns makes us less safe.

A recent study published in the New England Journal of Medicine reports that people in homes with guns were almost three times more likely to experience homicide than people in homes without guns.

Other studies have shown that easy availability of guns in a city results in higher homicide rates.

Until now, passing restrictive gun laws has been next to impossible. But the time may be turning.

New Jersey and Virginia passed handgun control laws this year and some states are

also outlawing assault rifles, commonly used by drug gangs.

And Congress is finally seriously considering the so-called "Brady Bill," which would impose a waiting period for gun-buyers. The bill may finally pass this year after being smothered in committee for years.

But those laws stop far short of the domestic disarmament that is so urgently needed.

No one disputes the right of people to use weapons in hunting or other sports, but since when are assault rifles and handguns sporting goods?

Proposals have ranged from an outright ban on all sales of guns to a national registration program for guns and their owners.

Some people would outlaw all gun imports and limit domestic production. Others would place high taxes on guns to recoup some of the estimated \$1.5 billion in health care costs associated with shootings.

It wouldn't surprise me to see some of those ideas turned into law before too long.



JOHN E. JACOB

Public disgust at the slaughter has become too great for even well-heeled lobbies to overcome. And as politicians respond to their constituents' demands for stricter gun laws, they are beginning to understand that they can defy the gun lobby and get away with it.

Polls indicate that a solid majority of Americans, including gun owners, back stricter controls of guns.

It's time to stop the violence and it is clear that the way to regain control of our streets is to get control of the guns that are turning our neighborhoods into war zones.

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