

COMMENTARY

Eliminating third-world debt humane, right thing to do

Special to Sentinel-Voice

In December I attended the World Council of Churches Assembly meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe, where Christians from around 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 billion to \$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.

Civil Rights Journal

By Bernice Powell Jackson



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.

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 measures 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 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.

I don't pretend to be an economist. But, for me, the richest nations' proposal to forgive some of the debt just isn't enough.

We must cancel all of the debt. The rich cannot with good conscience or in faith, take money from the poor. Especially when the poor have already given so much.

There are not many slates which can be washed clean, but this is one of them which can be.

Let's start the new millennium with a truly clean slate for the world's poor. What greater act of faith could there be?

Carl Rowan's Commentary

Russian ploy in Kosovo threatens relations with U.S.

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The Russian ploy of rushing troops into Kosovo and blocking the Pristina airport from NATO forces was a reckless act — made less than tragic by the existence of a nuclear stalemate.

Whoever ordered this grandstanding act of defiance gambled that the United States

and its NATO allies would never risk a nuclear war over the temporary brazenness of 200 or so Russian troops.

Or — drunk or sober — Russian President Boris Yeltsin may have felt that the United States owed him big time for helping to arrange a peace deal, and that he had to be sure he got a peacemaking role in Kosovo, or he would be left naked to his communist, hard-line enemies in Russia.

Whatever the truth, this party-crashing episode in Kosovo and negotiations to decide what Russia's role there shall be are raising some serious questions about what is going on in the Kremlin and where U.S.-Russian relations are headed. It is remarkable that Republicans in the United States, who don't want to call the bombing of Yugoslavia a victory, are using Russia's behavior as proof that it was a blunder.

The NATO allies gambled that the Russians would not risk a nuclear war just to defend Yugoslavia's Slobodan Milosevic and his cruel grasps for power.

Sure, the powerfully destructive bombings by NATO have humiliated



CARL ROWAN

Russia and its generals. They exposed the magnitude of Russia's weakness in any conflict with NATO short of a nuclear war. They also intensified the frustrations of Russians who still don't understand how the Soviet empire broke up in a losing military and economic "Cold War" with the United States.

The bombings emboldened the Russian hard-liners who still don't want to believe that their country is now just a second-rate power with a dangerous and unusable nuclear arsenal.

In terms of both current face-saving and future ambitions, Russia surely has a need to be part of a peacekeeping force in Kosovo. But unless her troops are part of a unified command, Russia can be a maker of great mischief in this tragic province.

NATO forces could have overwhelmed the little Russian garrison at the Pristina airport in just a few minutes. But NATO commanders realized that the problem is diplomatic and political, and that a violent encounter between NATO and Russian troops was no way to begin a delicate and dangerous peacekeeping mission.

The United States and NATO were right to ignore Russian feelings when they stood in the way of a moral uprising against Milosevic and ethnic cleansing. They are now right in giving a cool and deliberate response to the inexplicable and dangerous Russian ploy in Pristina.

Music icon James Brown disgracing the black race

Tony Sweet

Special to Sentinel-Voice

I was reading your review of James Brown, and I nearly had a nervous breakdown, only because I'm up on history.

When James Brown said, "It's you parents! You got to take time out to love your children, give 'em a hug, sit down, eat breakfast with them," I said "Negro please!"

I've been in show business for 20 years. I know the 411 on James and that man is out of his mind. I'm 37 years old from Mount Vernon, N.Y. and I came up in a time of Martin Luther King, Muhammad Ali, and real, pure funk music. Back in the late 60's and early 70's, James Brown was our sanity and our cultural connection. He made us love saying it loud, being black and proud. Because of him, we felt better about ourselves.

But something happened to James in the late 80's and early 90's, and we covered for him. It's a black cultural secret, but Brown is an embarrassment. A black person cannot get a decent conversation out of him. I've been backstage with him and to see how he acts around white people is humiliating. The only thing missing is Shirley Temple (if you catch my draft). When he gets around black people, he is evil as hell! You don't believe me? Take your black self around James, especially if you're darkskinned, and watch how he acts! He'll hurt your feelings.

When you see him on white talk shows, he's in ebonics verbal hell. You can't cover that fact up.

Why do people still call him "the hardest working man in show business?" He's done his thing already! James is a funk prophet, on the same level as Malcolm and Martin, musically. James is an icon, but at this point in his career, he should have his own record company, at the very least.

He could also be doing so much more for the black community. Perhaps he could open centers for misguided black youth who are caught up in today's hell. He should be a mentor you can talk to. I envision him talking to gang members, who are looking for positive answers that will lead them down the right mental path. Since his music is the root of hip hop beats, he needs to be the godfather of sanity, not just soul, for today's youth.

Instead, he's a man you can't reach mentally. James' was monster! "King Heroin," "Brother Rapp," "Funky President," and "I Don't Want Nobody to Give Me Nothing" went real deep with the black nation. The man sold out and we, as a nation, are too asleep to know it. James Brown is not about the get down. He's a let down!

Tony Sweet, comedian and entertainer, hosts a local radio talk show on KLAV 1230 AM at midnight every Sunday.

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