

## C O M M E N T A R Y

## Unionization: Test for labor, Yale, citizenry

By Jesse L. Jackson Sr.  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

On Labor Day, Yale University, one of the nation's wealthiest private universities, was the site of a major worker strike. More than 2,000 workers marched on the anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s March on Washington, calling for Yale to negotiate on wages, job security and pensions. Five union retirees staged a sit-in at the investment office that handles the university's billion-dollar endowment funds, protesting the fact that they cannot make ends meet on the pensions Yale awards workers after decades of loyal service.

The Yale Corp. is a notoriously tight-fisted, hard-nosed, anti-union employer. It has suffered brutal labor strikes over the last decades as graduate students, service and technical workers have fought for decent wages and benefits. In this, the corporation sadly reflects the worst in the culture of the modern corporation.

Today in America, the gulf between the top floor and the shop floor has reached obscene depths. Last year, CEOs made an average of 200 times the average worker made, far above the 40-60 times that is the average in Europe or Japan. CEOs reward themselves million-dollar annual pensions, even as they slash worker pensions and cut retiree health benefits. A recent study by the Institute for Policy Studies shows chief executives of companies that had the largest layoffs and most under-funded pensions, and that moved operations offshore to avoid U.S. taxes, were rewarded with the biggest pay hikes in 2002, on average. Many CEOs are rewarded for crushing any attempt of workers to organize a union,

and to gain a fair share of the profits that their work produces.

Unions, now representing less than 8 percent of the private workforce, are verging on extinction. Their decline is not a reflection of worker attitudes: The vast majority of workers would like to be represented at the workplace. No, their decline comes from the spread of aggressive anti-union tactics, many of them illegal under the toothless National Labor Relations Act. Companies routinely fire workers who lead organizing efforts, threaten workers with loss of their jobs if they vote for a union, threaten to shut down plants to foil successful union drives, refuse to negotiate in good faith with unions once they are formed, and use permanent replacements to effectively erase the right to strike.

The results are apparent: America's middle class is shrinking; stark inequalities are growing. Workers are working longer for less, with fewer benefits, while executives at the top rake off more and more of the companies profits in sweetheart employment contracts approved by directors of their own choosing. While Enron CEO Ken Lay was enjoying three vacation homes in Aspen alone, his workers were watching their life savings disappear, locked into company stock that they were not allowed to sell.

This growing inequality is not good for Yale or for America. It erodes the very foundation of our democracy—a broad, successful middle class. It saps the key to America's prosperity — that we all grow together. Now we suffer a slow growth economy, in no small part because workers are feeling less secure, bearing greater debt,  
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## Bush shocked, awed into reality over Iraq

By George E. Curry  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

George W. Bush finally has been "shocked and awed" by the rising cost and casualties in Iraq, as well as the realization that efforts to rebuild the war-torn country will not be successful without assistance from the United Nations.

That was made clear in Sunday night's nationally televised address from the White House. It was not so much what Bush said — though the speech lacked the swagger and bluster of some of his earlier comments — but what he proposed.

Let's begin at the beginning. The major pretext for invading a country that had not attacked the United States was that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction and posed a threat to Americans because of his ties to the Al Qaeda global terror network.

To this day, Iraq's weapons of mass destruction have yet to be found. This has seriously undermined Bush's credibility both at home and abroad. Even members of his administration now admit that Hussein's ties to Al Qaeda were tenuous at best.

Bush's greatest mistake was trying to go it alone in Iraq. When the United Nations refused to sanction military action in Iraq, the U.S. thumbed its nose at the U.N., dismissing it as being irrelevant.

Under the direction of Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, the United States launched its "shock-and-awe" attack on Iraq, unleashing a barrage of bombs on what they said were carefully selected targets.

On May 1, slightly more than a month later, Bush stood on the deck of an aircraft carrier to announce: "Mission accom-

plished."

In some ways, the mission was just beginning.

Not only was no effective plan in place to quell Iraqi violence and looting that followed, American soldiers became sitting ducks. So much so that the number of American casualties suffered after the war (149 as of this week) now exceeds the 138 combat deaths. That was shocking.

And lawmakers are in awe over how much money it is costing to attack and rebuild Iraq. In his address, Bush announced that he will ask Congress for \$87 billion for the fiscal year that begins next month; about \$75 billion of that is earmarked for Iraq. That's in addition to the \$79 billion Congress approved for the war. Further, administration officials say an additional \$30 billion to \$55 billion and 15,000 troops are needed from the international community.

By contrast, the cost of the 1991 Persian Gulf War was \$82 billion in current U.S. dollars. Acting in concert with other nations, the United States paid only \$9 billion of that amount. Looked at another way, if the money being spent on Iraq was used at home, we could more than double the amount the federal government allocates to education. Even more would be available if Bush's \$674 billion tax cut were repealed.

Rather than engage in more domestic spending, the administration will increase the federal deficit, which had been eliminated during the Clinton years, to \$475 billion in 2004. It will go even higher, probably topping \$600 billion, before the rebuilding effort in Iraq is complete.

Bush's mishandling of the war will un-  
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## Candidate John Kerry fence sitting on Iraq, racism

By Ron Walters  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Have you ever seen a race where the lead runner, called the "rabbit," started off running and shocked people when it kept on running and won the race? Well, some are afraid that the current race for president is a little like that right now.

Many people think that U.S. Sen. John (D-Mass.) Kerry is really the candidate who will emerge victorious, but that Dr. Howard Dean, the former Vermont governor, has started off like a house afire and will eventually burn out; then Kerry will come on and eventually win.

That scenario may well be true, but you couldn't tell it from Kerry's formal announcement for president at Patriot's Point, S.C., recently. To begin with, many pundits scratched their heads at why

Kerry would announce in South Carolina rather than in his home state and city of Boston. But I can understand the strategy of trying to get a "twofer" by establishing that he was not just a Northeast regional candidate and that he could compete in the South with Sen. John Edwards (D-N.C.) and, not incidentally, Al Sharpton.

Sharpton is expected to do well in the South and right now, Edwards is reported not to be doing so well in the polls there because the Black vote has not warmed up to him.

Kerry may be concerned that he could suffer the same fate—that is, to win or place second in the Northeast primaries and then come South and fall flat on his face. So, he is trying to make nice in South Carolina, hoping that he can build a beach-head to

other areas in the South.

All of this says that the Black vote, especially in South Carolina, is key. It constituted 25 percent of the entire electorate in 2002 and in a Democratic primary, probably constitutes up to 50 percent of the vote. So why would you suppose that Kerry's speech would include just one line about civil rights and his prepared text didn't even mention African-Americans.

He extemporaneously offered that discrimination should be ended with respect to African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians and Native Americans. The prepared text only mentioned gays and lesbians.

Maybe, it's good that Kerry went South, so that his staff can understand the necessity for him to appeal more effectively to the Black vote.

This outing just didn't get it.

But I'm still puzzled. One of the strong themes of Kerry's announcement party was his connection to the military, establishing his strength on this issue by invoking his credibility as a genuine war hero in Vietnam. One of the clearest signals of both his military theme and his wish to link to the South was to find former Georgia Sen. Max Cleland sitting on the stage with him. Cleland was also a highly decorated war hero and a former colleague of Kerry's in the Senate.

But Kerry's position on the war is weak. It goes something like this: I believe in the war (so I am protected on the conservative flank), but by the way, I oppose how Bush is conducting the post-war arrangements (so I am protected on the liberal flank).

Vagueness on the war has become the sore point with many activists and Democrats. Sure, it is a fact that Democrats such as Joe Lieberman, Bob Graham, Dick Gephardt and Kerry all sided with Bush on the war, but now want to have it both ways. Dean, on the other hand, is getting a big push because of his clear opposition to the war and the post-war occupation of Iraq by the United States.

Ultimately Kerry's fence straddling seriously undercuts his credibility on the issue of defense and security with core Democrats. But then, the gang of four, led by Kerry, are betting that Dean, the rabbit, burns himself out on issues such as his opposition to the war and then they (who were handicapped to win all along) will come on in the finish to win the race.

Meanwhile, Dean who, like Sharpton, also has taken the strongest positions on race and racism, just keeps on outrunning the pack, presenting the clearest, strongest issues. You'd think the "fab four" would get it. They do, but then they are just biding their time.

How Blacks react to this will be important, since the "fab four" have been the weakest on questions of race overall. Will we take it and fall in line, hoping to score with the group that is supposed to contain the eventual winner, or will we have the courage to push those who have had the correct positions all the way? I don't know. These days I find that courage is in pitifully short supply.

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