

CONFERENCE REPORT

OF

RACISM: A NATIONAL POLICY?

November 19, 1983
Albany, New York

Sponsored By:

Capital District
Coalition Against
Apartheid And Racism
Box 3002
Pine Hills Station
Albany, NY, 12203
Tel. No. (518) 489-1767

NAACP
Albany Branch
93 Livingston Ave
Albany, NY, 12207
Tel. No. (518) 462-1823
(518) 465-6974

January 1, 1984

Dear Conference Participants and Endorsers

Much has happened over the last few years in the struggle for social justice. We in the Capital District have done a lot we can be proud of.

In September 1981 when the South African Springbok Rugby team came to play in Albany, the whole Capital District community joined together to protest their presence here. The Social Action Center at 221 Central Avenue, Albany, has been formed by a wide range of activist groups as a place to meet and exchange information. The black community defeated a gerrymandering attempt by the city administration during the last re-drawing of election districts. The election of Sandra Temple was another sign that the black community was no longer doing business as usual.

When the Klan rallied in Vermont many people went from Albany to protest. Young people concerned about "justice" from the criminal justice system have organized the Charles Andrews Defense Committee. Community and labor activists demonstrated to support the Greyhound strikers locally by not riding scab buses, walking the line with the strikers, and participating in two militant rallies. In June 1982, hundreds of us boarded buses bound for New York city to join in

the biggest anti-nuke rally ever. On August 27, 1983, hundreds again boarded buses, this time bound for Washington D.C. where we joined our brothers and sisters to demand Jobs, Peace and Freedom.

Our concern about racism abroad shows up in many different ways. We have been loud and strong in our protests of entertainers who have performed in South Africa - Ray Charles, Linda Ronstadt and Chick Corea being some of the targets of our protests.

On October 22, 1983, many of us were part of a world wide protest against the deployment of Pershing and Cruise missiles. Our opposition to US intervention in Central America is vividly displayed by the large billboard at the corner of Clinton and Ontario streets. And when the US invaded Grenada many many people showed up for an evening demonstration in front of the Albany Armory to express their outrage. These are but a few examples...there are many more.

As we look back at all of our accomplishments, we must also look ahead to the future. We all know there is much to be done.

The NAACP and the Coalition Against Apartheid and Racism felt very strongly that the issue of institutional racism needed to be brought to the forefront in our struggles and that it why this Conference, "Racism: A National Policy?" was conceived. Our goals were fairly ambitious:

1. We wanted to study the links between the movement against institutional racism and other social justice movements.
2. We wanted to provide a forum for deeper political analysis than is other available in our day to day political activities.
3. We wanted to encourage discussions among people who do not usually work together.
4. We also wanted to show, by giving a local and a national perspective to the workshops, that we are all part of a larger movement.
5. Finally, we wanted to provide a way for participants to become educated about these issues so that we could all better participate in the movement for social

justice.

Judging from your evaluations and comments we reached our goals.

At least 120 people attended the conference and 14 organizations endorsed the conference. We urge you now to read this report and use it in any way you think is valuable. Share it with friends, bring it to your organization's attention. Also, we encourage you to participate in this movement by attending future meeting of the Coalition or the NAACP or any other organization that is dealing with these issues.

Coalition Against
Apartheid And Racism
Wednesday, January 11
7.30 p.m.
340 1st St.
Neighborhood Resource Center
Downstairs

NAACP
Tuesday, January 17
7.30 p.m.
Urban League
Corner Livingston and Ten Broeck
Albany

Looking forward to hearing from you

Conference Committee:

Lillie McLaughlin
Vera "Mike" Michelson
Anita Thayer
Ode11 Winfield

For More Information: 465-6974 or 489-1767

WORKSHOP REPORTS

1. Rising Racist Violence

Panelists: Michael Amon-Ra and Alice Green

Racist violence must be seen with at two different levels: physical and psychological.

Physical violence is obvious and manifests itself in the schools where corporal punishment affects black children disproportionately, with white vigilante groups (Klan/Nazis), and in the police department. (Amon-Ra spoke about the recent Congressional police brutality hearing in NY city.)

Psychological violence is more subtle and takes place when blacks and the poor are trying to achieve justice in the courts, in the educational system, in employment and when trying to obtain services like health care jobs and housing.

Community response to racist violence was discussed. The community must be vigilant and educate others. We can't allow bureaucratic tactics to stunt the community's ability to monitor racist violence. We must also respond to negative racial images when they are portrayed in the media.

Several suggestions came out of this workshop: (i) Cases of police brutality should be publicized in a way that will help the community see the extent of the problems; (ii) Truly independent Civilian review boards should be established to monitor police behavior (there is state legislation pending); (iii) Community education should be undertaken so that the people know their rights if arrested; (iv) The community and community groups should be educated about the extent of racist violence and institutional racism in general; (v) We should support alternatives to incarceration particularly those which focus on the obligations offenders have towards their victims.

2. Criminal Justice System: A Tool of Oppression

Panelists: Kabili Tyari, N.B.J.P.P. and Vroman Wright, Horizon House

Mr. Tyari set the tone for this workshop by stating "as long as we can remember, poor people, especially in the black and brown communities, have been victims of abusive and sometimes criminal acts committed by the racist criminal justice system."

This workshop focused on how the American government both nationally and locally uses the criminal justice system to oppress Blacks and other racial minorities. The American prison population is about 60% Black and 25% Hispanic. Yet the Court system and police forces nationally have no more than 2-5% minority employees even in minority communities. During the discussion, it was agreed that change could come about if more people became aware of the disproportionate impact of the criminal justice system on racial minorities.

3. Should The First Amendment Protect The Klan And Nazis?

Panelists: Professor Stephen Wasby, SUNYA and Mark Mishler, Esq., National Lawyers Guild

Professor Wasby argued that for us to call for the exclusion of anyone from the protections of the First Amendment is to hand the government a weapon that will be used against the progressive movement. Wasby said that this principle means we must ever "grit our teeth" and aid and strengthen the rights of the Nazis despite our knowledge that they want to destroy the progressive movements.

Mishler replied that although legal precedent from First Amendment lawsuits brought on behalf of the Nazis may be helpful to the left in some instances, there is no guarantee that our movement's rights are protected. The only definite result of protecting the rights of the Klan and Nazis is that the right is protected. Mishler also pointed out that the Klan and Klan like groups lost their First Amendment protections with the enactment of the post-civil war amendments to the U.S. Constitution which abolished slavery and outlawed discrimination. These amendments state a government policy not to protect racism that is stronger than the first amendment rights of hate groups. Protecting the Klan and Nazis who pose a serious danger to minority people is like protecting the man who falsely yells fire in a crowded theater.

Several workshop participants expressed concern that the movement's disregard of the "civil liberties" view of the First Amendment could alienate activists from middle class allies.

4. Electoral Politics: A Solution or A Problem?

Panelists: Robert Chrisman and Issac Bracey, NAACP

The major focus of this workshop centered around considerations of electoral politics as a possible solution to some of the problems afflicting the black community. A secondary focus was that although electoral politics is crucial to the survival of blacks, blacks must realize and remember that the political power structure will rather respond to perceived than real needs.

Electoral politics, described as a double-edged sword, has value because through participation, blacks can effectively organize, educate, and mobilize the masses. These were cited as lasting and necessary objectives. On the other hand, blacks need alternative political avenues. The traditional parties (both Democrats and Republicans) were cited as instruments for managing and maintaining the status quo. Consequently blacks will always have to choose between the lesser of two evils. Traditional parties cannot cater to black needs without first catering to the needs of the state.

In spite of this, blacks cannot ignore electoral politics because so much of their lives are affected by it, particularly when the greater of the two evils wins as dramatized by the election of Ronald Reagan. The solution then is for blacks (and oppressed others) to make electoral politics practical - both in application and theory. Blacks must forge a consensus as to what politics is, and what it can do for them. Then blacks must work to gain political clout as "power brokers" to insure that they can control the impact of electoral politics

on their community.

5. Racism: A Foreign Policy?

Panelists: Merton Simpson, ASAPFA and Coalition; Maggie Kirwin, Central American Solidarity Alliance; Karen Brammer, Non-Violence Project; Maria Muscarella, Capital District Committee For Palestinian Rights.

Panelists who are activists from local groups presented a brief overview of the US foreign policy in Southern Africa, Central America, the Middle East and on the Arms race. The panelists discussed (1) how the US role has been detrimental to the interests of the majority of the people in these regions and (2) how the US government's attempts to maintain supremacy and control in these regions by supporting unpopular regimes are being challenged by the people there. The panelist on the arms race discussed the alarming nature of stockpiling of nuclear arms. She pointed out that while researching for her presentation, she found out how the policies and regulations of the US government reflected a racist and anti-Third world attitude even on the issues of nuclear power and arms. Concern was expressed over the militaristic posture of the Reagan administration in dealing with international issues. Each of the panelists mentioned the work of his/her group in educating and informing the community about the US role in these regions. During the discussion period, many members of the audience raised concerns about the policies of the Israeli and US governments in the Middle East, particularly in Lebanon.

6. Racism: An Economic Policy?

Panelists: Damu Smith and Maria Markovics, United Tenants of Albany

Our economic system of capitalism has a disproportionately negative effect on racial minorities in both bad and good times. Per capita income of blacks is 58% of white per capita income. Black women suffer the most economically especially single heads of households. Black youth unemployment rate is between 65 to 75%. The U.S. Army's 40% black may see the Army as the only solution to unemployment. Urban displacement and stratification also have a greater adverse effect on black and poor residents. Military spending exacerbates employment problems because military spending is not labor intensive.

The workshop concluded that to struggle against economic racism, there must be solidarity between those who are working and the unemployed, the struggle against racism and sexism must be joined, there must be a renewed effort to organize those most effected, and organizations representing tenants, displaced residents, the employed and the unemployed must be built, re-built and strengthened.

DAMU SMITH ON AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

Damu Smith¹ gave a detailed and comprehensive overview of the history of the US foreign policy. Smith discussed the racism practiced towards Native Americans as their land was being taken away in violation of treaties signed with them, the slavery of Afro-Americans and their uprooting from the African subcontinent, and racial discrimination towards national minorities from the third-world. He then moved to the international scene and discussed how racism that was and is being practiced at home was and is also reflected in the US government's dealings with the people and governments of the third world.

Smith talked about the Vietnam war and discussed the racist attitude of the U.S. policy makers towards Asian life. He discussed in great detail the voting record of the US government at the United Nations on international issues, including the apartheid system in South Africa, anti-colonial and liberation struggles of third world people and Palestinian problem. He mentioned how the US government's repeated allegations that the UN is now controlled by the third world is nothing but outright racism. "The US has boldly demonstrated a racist mentality directed at the majority of the world's people." He unequivocally denounced the US invasion of Grenada and pointed out how the American people were being duped into believing that the invasion was justified even though "for most Americans the history of Grenada began the day the invasion took place." Smith called upon people to investigate and act; he appealed to them to organize and oppose the racist policies of the US government both at home and abroad.

(Note: The Conference Committee hopes to have available tape of this speech in the near future)

Note

Space does not permit us to include an account of the morning address by Michael Amon-Ra, President of NY Chapter National Black United Front (NBUF), and the afternoon address by Robert Chrisman, editor of Black Scholar Magazine.

Excerpts From Build the Movement: A Speech by Lillie McLaughlin, 1st Vice President, Albany NAACP

"Organizations are the backbone of the movements for justice, peace, jobs and freedom... Organizations working on social justice issues...have a challenge and a responsibility...to deepen the work they are doing by making the links (and the connections) to other issues... Taking up this challenge can only strengthen your struggle... Racism can't be 'dialogued away' as Michael Amon-Ra said. Racism can't be solved in a vacuum. The issues of people of color are not just jobs, housing, education and voting rights. Those issues include...supporting the peace movement. They...include opposition to US intervention anywhere in the world."

"If you don't belong to an organization (then) join one...there probably already exists an organization working on whatever you are interested in. Our problems will not be solved by individuals acting alone. It can only be done through

1. Damu Smith is a founding member of Black American Network for Disarmament, Peace and Justice.

collective action...of individuals working with others...(and) organizations working together. It is the responsibility of all of us to help make social change organizations stronger...and to realize that each issue, be it peace, feminism, welfare rights, civil rights, whatever are a piece of a 'vision of the future'. A future without sexism, militarism, capitalism and racism."

"It is our responsibility to struggle, to fight for that future. To be creative in our actions, to be bold in our fight, to be aggressive in our struggle. That future can be ours."

Community Resources Referred to During Workshops

1. NYS Coalition For Criminal Justice, 362 State Street, Albany, 12210
2. Charles Andrew Defense Committee, P.O. Box 1503, Albany, 12201
3. Albany Branch of NAACP, 93 Livingston Ave, Albany, Tel. No. 462-1823
4. United Tenants of Albany, 65 Columbia Street, Albany, Tel. No. 436-899
5. Capital District Coalition Against Apartheid and Racism, P.O. Box 3002, Albany, 12203, Tel. No. 489-1767
6. Central American Solidarity Alliance, C/O Social Action Center, 221 Central Avenue, Albany, Tel. No. 434-4037
7. Non-Violence Project, C/O Social Action Center, 221 Central Avenue, Albany, Tel. No. 434-4037
8. Capital District Committee for Palestinian Rights, Box 9052 Delaware Station, Albany, 12209, Tel. No. 436-8008
9. New York Civil Liberties Union, Alice Green, 90 State Street, Albany, 436-8594
10. Horizon House, 39 Delaware Street, Albany, Tel. No. 449-2297
11. American-South African Peoples' Friendship Association, C/O Social Action Center, 221 Central Ave, Albany, 434-4037