

Newsletter of

THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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Edited by MICHAEL HARRINGTON

Black America: progress and poverty

by MICHAEL HARRINGTON

During the 1960s black America made progress—some progress.

Then in the late Sixties a number of hammer blows were struck at the cause: Martin Luther King's assassination deprived the black movement of its greatest, most effective leader; the war in Vietnam committed American resources to an unconscionable struggle in Southeast Asia; the war on poverty, which was so important to a black community which is disproportionately and intolerably poor, was a casualty of that Vietnam war; disillusionment among young blacks led to moods of separatism and violence; ghetto riots provoked fear and backlash sentiments among whites.

But in recent years there have been new signs of hope. The Congressional Black Caucus has become a symbol and center of political power in the mainstream; mayoral victories in cities like Detroit, Los Angeles and Atlanta have demonstrated another source of black vitality; and on the whole there seems to be a willingness, indeed an enthusiasm, in black America to confront concrete and specific problems. Militancy is becoming more practical, less rhetorical.

In this context, it is important to get a clear idea of the economic and social position of black people in America today. There is no point in playing down, or ignoring, the gains which have been made, for if such a tactic makes it easier to indict "the system," it also discourages people to be told that all of their sacrifices have led to nought. But neither should we overestimate that progress. We need a sober, serious estimate upon which we can construct a program for action.

Right now, the problem is that official America—white America—is systematically underestimating economic and social racism. Last year, for instance,

Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg, in a widely discussed *Commentary* article, told of the dramatic rise of young blacks into the middle class. Daniel Patrick Moynihan has been using the same figures for some time. And in January, the 1974 Report of the Council of Economic Advisors said, "there has been a long-run narrowing of racial income differences."

Perhaps most ominous is the Nixon Administration's change in the Federal vocabulary. Government documents no longer talk about the poor and poverty; they refer to the "low income population." Speaking about the poor implies that one has a moral obligation to do something about the people one thus describes; the low income population is only a statistic. There is thus a real possibility that conservatives will try to make the poor—the black poor above all—invisible again.

In what follows, the statistics are sometimes a bit complicated, but they are worth following carefully. They come from the 1974 Report of the Council of Economic Advisors, the 1974 study of Social Indicators published by the Department of Commerce and the 1973 Census analysis of the Social and Economic Status of the Black Population in the United States, 1972.

First of all, there have been some gains in black income relative to white, but they have not occurred during the last five years and the signs are that there will be a deterioration in the black position during 1974. Moreover—and this is painful irony for both the black and women's movements—much of the relative progress which blacks have achieved occurred because of a *decline* in the relative status of white women.

In 1972, the median black family income was 59% of the white. This represented a gain as compared to 1964, when the figure was 54%—but it was the same as it was in 1967. That is to say, black families have not increased their share of American wealth in the past seven years (there was no significant change between 1972 and 1974—and there may be a decline taking place right now). All this, one must note, takes place within a context which is intolerable in the first place: that black income is only a percentage of white income.

But then focusing on all black families may be said to be a way of taking the most pessimistic data. Scammon, Wattenberg and Moynihan come to their cheerful

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We've moved...

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Black America . . .

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conclusions by concentrating only on young black families in which the husband and wife are together. This allows them to ignore the misery of black families headed by a woman—53% of which are poor. Thus by taking what the Census Bureau describes as a “relatively small proportion of all black families,” they can suggest that great strides have been made. I will accept the unfavorable terrain on which they make their argument; even there, progress has been intolerably slow and is to a considerable degree illusory since it is premised on the deteriorating position of white women.

“The young black families (head under 35),” Census tells us, “in the North and West where both husband and wife were earners had, in 1971, achieved income parity with their white counterparts.” We omit the Southern blacks (4.8 million of them were poor in 1971); we forget the old and the families headed by women; and things look pretty good. Or do they?

The only way that those young black families achieved parity with their white counterparts was because the wife worked. Indeed black women are in the labor force in much greater relative numbers than white women: in 1972 in the 35-44 age bracket, 71% as against 53% for the whites. And here one runs into a cruel irony. The relative earnings of women as compared to men have been *declining* since 1950.

Therefore the statistics showing the young, intact black families at par with the whites is based on the fact that, in the North and West, women black high school graduates earn 102% of their white counterparts' income and that the figure for black women who graduate from college is 111%. Black women have an edge within a systematically underpaid group. Moreover, the numbers about young black families conceal the fact that they have to work harder to be “equal,” i.e. the wives *must* have a job. When the black wife does not work, then the family income drops down to 68% of the white.

In short, even the most optimistic figures, the ones upon which people who exaggerate black progress base themselves, reveal that there remains an intolerable factor of racial discrimination in the economy *under the very best of circumstances*. What of the worst of

circumstances?

In 1971, a bad year for the black poor, 30.9% of the non-white population in the United States was below the poverty line—as compared to 9.9% of the whites. That meant that blacks, who are about 12% of the population, had a per capita rate of poverty three times that of whites. In 1972, there was some improvement. In 1974, there will almost certainly be an increase in the number of the black poor. Indeed, the Bureau of the Census even computes that there was a growth in the number of black poor people in 1973 (and most certainly an increase in black families headed by a woman which are under the poverty line).

The reason that one can be so certain about an increase in black poverty in 1974 is that unemployment

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Yes, there is an energy crisis

In case any readers have been taken in by President Nixon's declaration that the crisis is over, or have assumed that it is because it is no longer necessary to wait in line an hour for a few gallons of gas, we present a few facts (which will be analyzed in detail in a subsequent issue).

The amount of extra money which will flow out of the advanced nations to the oil producing countries is in the range of \$40 billion this year (the OECD figure) to \$50 billion (the *London Economist*). If a significant portion of this enormous sum is not reinvested in Europe and the United States, a depression could result; if it is reinvested and overwhelms the Western money markets, inflation could increase much more rapidly. As the *Economist*—which regards the oil boycott as a mere episode, a “hiccup”—put it, “At a stroke, the oil problem has altered the whole international trading scene.”

The poor nations will have to pay an extra \$9 billion in oil prices. This will wipe out the gains they have made from the recent commodity boom.

The United States remains economically and militarily vulnerable to Middle Eastern pressure.

Within the United States, Sanford Rose of *Fortune* sees these effects: “Higher oil prices will raise wages and profits in the oil industry while hurting the great mass of consumers, i.e. the wage earners and profit recipients in all the other industries. This transfer of income could be painful. The oil industry uses much less labor and more capital than do most other industries. And so the transfer of income will benefit mainly profit recipients rather than wage earners.”

Finally, Senator Frank Church's hearings have given us good reason to believe that the industry systematically reduced productive capacity in the Sixties in order to get high prices and profits. That is to say, all the problems just listed were created by oil corporations with the aid of the United States government.

—M.H.

Newsletter of

THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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The following people helped to put this issue out:
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Organizing working women

The following three articles are adapted from longer presentations given at a workshop on "Organizing Working Women" at the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee's midwest conference in February. Elizabeth McPike, who serves on the political action staff of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, has been actively involved in the founding of the Coalition of Labor Union Women. She also serves on the national board of the DSOC. Day Creamer is the co-ordinator for Women Employed. Heather Booth is the director of the Midwest Academy, a training school for community, labor and radical organizers.—Editor

Labor's 'special problems'

by ELIZABETH MCPIKE

I'm going to quote from an article distributed in 1947 by the American Labor Education Service: "It is true that in many cases, customs and attitudes from an earlier period must be overcome before women feel entirely at home in unions or are made to feel entirely welcome." Those conditions and obstacles have not changed very much. There still has not been a concerted, aggressive attempt to organize women, and the image of unions remains largely male. Unions, therefore, are not seen as a welcome place for women. They are not perceived as organizations which speak to women's problems or help to develop our potential.

I want to emphasize one point. Obviously, I don't want to place all the blame on the unions. Bosses still don't want workers organized—especially when those workers are low skilled and low paid, as most women are. So unions trying to organize women face the same resistance that's always been encountered in organizing the unorganized.

I'm aware, too, of the "special problems" of organizing women. Some of those problems are real, but to call them special is simply define them from a male perspective. From a female perspective, we could say, "Yes, men have different patterns of work, yes, men respond to different issues, and yes, we have to develop a strategy that relates to the 'special problems of organizing men.'" The real problem is to find the right strategy that relates to the 'special problems of organizing men. for every worker. The phrase, "special problems" has been used too long to camouflage and excuse the lack of real commitment of resources to organizing women.

A second problem has been the male image of unions and the obstacles this poses to organizing women. The leadership of unions is male, particularly on the national level, but also, if less so, on the local level. Most organizing staffs are almost exclusively male. Last summer at an AFL-CIO sponsored seminar for women, I talked with some men who were involved in a textile organizing drive in the South which wasn't doing well. When I asked what the problem was, they said that they had eight organizers, but that seven were men and the lone woman staffer was being dragged to all the meetings and being worn out.

Let me give you a few examples of how more female input would change this. In Ohio, a couple of weeks ago, I talked with women who were bus drivers for a school system. They were interested in organizing the

clerical workers of the school board. But management had called each worker separately into a meeting and scared them so badly that they were unwilling to come to a general meeting of the union. So to get these women together, they decided to put on a "Bee Line" party—a line of clothing that many working women sell at home and get a 10% profit on what they sell. Now what man would even have thought to have such a party? In other places they have Tupperware parties. In California, in an organizing drive for women clerks, the women organizers put out a newsletter called "Clerk's County," which had a definite female slant to it. One column "Dear Clara Clerk," brought out all the problems and demeaning circumstances clerks work under.

In both areas—commitment of resources and the union's overwhelmingly male image—some things have been tried. There are women's committees, as in my union; conferences sponsored by unions and state labor federations and women's caucuses like the NEA's. I don't want to go into these in great detail because they haven't had much effect. This is because there has been little opportunity and no mechanism for building support at the local level. Any success they have had, such as in legal areas, has not been seen by women members as being won by them, and therefore has had little effect upon their sense of power or their sense of themselves. There hasn't been an organization on the local level to which women can relate. I think part of that vacuum will be filled by the Coalition of Labor Union Women. I'm not sure what form CLUW will take. Hopefully, at our Founding Conference the emphasis will be on growth at the local level and not on a laundry list of resolutions. Women who have problems within their unions and with management must be able to get encouragement and develop skills and action strategies with other women.

There still has not been a concerted aggressive attempt to organize women, and the image of unions remains male.

There are models to look at. In California there is a group called Union WAGE (Women's Alliance to Gain Equality). Radicals with a definite political point of view started Union WAGE. But its activities have been so practical and concrete that Union WAGE has broadened its base, attracted large numbers of women to its ranks, and legitimized itself within the existing union structure. When protective labor legislation—which forced employers to pay time-and-a-half, carfare, and other benefits to a vast number of women outside of unions—was about to be knocked out, Union WAGE joined with the AFL-CIO to publicize and lobby against repealing the laws. The group puts out a newsletter which plays up any organizing drives in industries that employ a lot of women; it just had a big spread on the TWA stewardess' strike. Union WAGE provides an organizational format which can win victories and make women feel part of those victories. I think CLUW can do the same.

I want to end by going back to the women in Ohio who planned the Bee Line meeting I believe they represent the kind of women who will join CLUW. And

they will bring to CLUW, just as they have brought to their own local union, an attention to unorganized women. Remember, most working women who now belong to unions most likely did not belong at some point in their working lives. Six out of seven working women in this country are not now organized. And as they begin to organize, they bring with them the memories of their unorganized sisters. One of the women bus drivers in Ohio had been a waitress for twenty years, since she was sixteen years old. She wouldn't let me channel our discussion into anything but "How are we going to organize those waitresses?" So I'm very hopeful. If you could talk to some of the women who come to these meetings, you'd be optimistic, too.

Battles in the Loop

by DAY CREAMER

I want to talk about Women Employed (WE)—why we created it and what we do. Last February, I convinced the Loop YWCA, where I worked, to let me begin a project with working women in the Loop. We began with the ideas that working women were already expressing: that women should work, that women should get promotions, that women should be respected on the job. We were also aware of the other things these same women were saying: don't talk to us about this women's lib stuff because they're a bunch of crazy bra burners; don't talk to us about labor unions because they're for men. Neither of those stereotypes is true, but that is what women in the Loop were saying.

The 100,000 or so women working in the Loop are increasingly dissatisfied. The question we faced was: How do we create organizational momentum to take advantage of women's dissatisfaction with their jobs? We wanted to create a situation where women could come together to learn to struggle and to learn what some victories might mean in their own offices. We also saw the need for a climate where women could come together without worrying about losing their jobs—as people often do during union organizing. We presented a forum where women could come together, yet have more protection than if they were meeting on the job.

When we started the organization, one of the first things that happened was the sharing of mutual experiences, like the boss making some kind of nasty remark. But imagine the first time there were 300 women in the room, and the boss said, "Look, the best thing you have going for you is that you underbid men in the job market." And all the women sat around and said, "Wait a minute. This isn't exactly what we had a mind." Each woman in the group realized that something was being said, not just to her, but to 299 other women as well.

The second issue, directly related to the first, was the whole question of feeling maladjusted. How many women have wondered what they could do to get ahead or be respected in their job? Now they began to talk with other women and found that everybody had the same problem. They thought: maybe we're not maladjusted; maybe we shouldn't adjust to the situation—maybe we should change the situation.

But we wanted to move further. We wanted to create a pressure group to begin to fight for the rights of working women: equal pay, promotional opportunities, decent benefits. We're raising these old issues in a new, organizational way for the first time, enabling women to begin to win their rights.

First, we organized a campaign against Kraft Foods right here in Chicago. Kraft employs over 500 women at their headquarters—and we heard complaints from there. Then somebody sent us a copy of their payroll records, which were confidential—and no wonder—the wage gap between men and women was about \$11,000. Most of the women in WE hadn't directly talked with anyone in management. So, about 40 of us went to talk to the vice president for personnel. We sat down and said, "Here's our study. We demand equal pay for equal work, promotional opportunities," etc.

The first thing that the vice-president said was, "Listen, girls . . ." (The first time he said it, everyone said "women"; the third time he said it there was more anger in the room.) Then he said, "Well, you know you're such a beautiful group of lovely ladies . . ." Each of us had experienced that on her job. It was a minor thing—except that it was disrespect. The women were fighting mad. We asked, "O.K., how do you explain the situation of women at Kraft?" He answered by telling us about the "history" of Kraft. They began with little yellow cheese trucks, with heavy trays, and, he told us, only men could be hired to deliver the cheese, so only men got promoted. One look around the room told us that none of those flabby guys ever lifted any heavy trays.

In any case, that was the first incident. Women began to come to WE, saying, "this is a good development." But many of them were harassed, which created a sort of underground at Kraft. Women started feeding us more information about what was going on there. They told us that the house organ, the *Kraftsman*, was coming out soon. So we put out a *Kraftswoman* to tell what was really happening at Kraft.

Ultimately, we filed various kinds of suits—our main weapon, besides the bad publicity we gave Kraft. We went after them on affirmative action. Companies with federal contracts must have affirmative action plans. So we went to the Department of Agriculture and said, "We want you to do an investigation of Kraft; the affirmative action plan you've approved doesn't mean a thing; women won't be in any better position a year from now." The USDA did investigate, and though the final report isn't in yet, it's clear something has happened—Kraft is begging the government to give them technical assistance to change things!

"We can make changes. It's up to all of us working together. We don't have to remain isolated in our own offices."

Women Employed exists to help women organize and develop leadership where they work—if they're not ready to unionize, to give them another form of activity where they can learn similar fighting skills.

Women Employed relates to the labor movement in several ways. We've cooperated in specific organizing drives, leafletting, meeting with women, encouraging them to get involved. In one campaign, we worked with some feminists who weren't too interested in the union. By working with them on women's issues, we got them involved in the organizing drive. We also try to help women workers who are ready to be unionized—even if the actual organizing drive may be two or three years away—decide which union they want to go with. We're trying to work closely with women's committees

in local unions—maybe to the point of direct affiliation of the committees to Women Employed. There are some advantages to that. In one Federal department, we're working with the union's women's committee, but we're also going after the Federal Civil Service Commission in the name of WE. When a problem gets too hot, sometimes we can take it on, because management can't retaliate against WE. Women Employed can go in and be outrageous.

I believe that Women Employed is a very important model for organizing right now. We're following similar efforts in Boston, New York, and San Francisco. We're organizing women and moving them toward trade unions. I also think that it's legitimate in and of itself for us to create the momentum to build on other social change issues. Working women need this forum, and are ready for it. It's a matter of reaching them and saying, "We can make changes. It's up to all of us working together. We don't have to be isolated in our own offices."

Liberation & social change

by HEATHER BOOTH

I'm going to address myself to some general trends in the women's movement. I'll touch on some of the confusions and misconceptions that are floating about, and suggest some positive steps.

I'll begin with an old riddle: a father and son are travelling in a car and there is a terrible accident; the father is killed. The son is taken to the hospital and is lying on the operating table. The surgeon walks in, looks down at the boy and says, "My God, that's my son!" The question is, how could that be, if the father was killed in the accident? The first time I heard this story, I was baffled. Now it occurs to people that the doctor was the boy's *mother*; the surgeon was a woman.

People didn't get the riddle for two reasons: women aren't *seen* as surgeons, and in reality very few women *are* surgeons. This illustrates the two aspects of the women's movement: changing consciousness—how women are seen—and changing social reality. A great advance has been made in the battle of ideas—a majority of the population now agrees with the idea of equal pay for equal work, for example.

But our lives haven't changed that much. The struggle against discrimination and for structural change is in its infancy. Women are not being hired faster than before; most affirmative action plans are farces. As the economic crisis intensifies, women are among the chief victims. For example, when Southern Illinois University laid off one hundred people because of the energy crisis, they were all women. The whole National Organization for Women (NOW) chapter was fired after it had filed suits charging the University with discrimination. In the airline industry, those stewardesses facing layoffs are the ones who were most active in the unions or in Stewardesses for Women's Rights.

Let me outline three principles for work in the women's movement.

First, aim for achievable reforms that will really improve women's lives. The Bell Telephone suit, won by NOW, is a good example. The company spent much more on legal fees than the \$38 million of the total settlement—they knew that more was at stake.

Second, give women a sense of their own power. By winning improvements through organized struggle, women can give substance to the slogan "sisterhood is

powerful." When people know that these reforms were won by a particular group, not given gratis by an authority who can take them back, the movement gains strength and can win majority support. Building real mass-based organizations is the key item on the agenda.

Third, and most difficult, is to start to alter the relations of power, and begin to restructure this society. But to do this, not just talk about it, organizations have to build up sufficient strength and mobilize majority support through concrete victories.

Now I want to talk briefly about where the women's movement has come from and where we're going.

The movement was started by women who were generally well educated and middle class. A split emerged between the moderate, "women's rights" wing of the movement and a radical, "women's liberation" wing. At first, the women's rights group was rather narrowly oriented, emphasizing fair professional advancement for women, rather than a mass appeal. The radical women, who tended to be younger and more in touch with the cultural changes going on in this society, talked about revolution, class identification, and the need for a mass movement for the most oppressed.

But NOW, which was a leading force for women's rights, had a base among working women. Because they all had jobs, the process of being screwed by power taught them how it worked. They also had experience in the political structure, and saw the potential of electoral politics as an arena for women. NOW included women from the UAW, the Communications Workers, and other unions (some of them even had to fight in their unions to stay in NOW). But there was some understanding of the needs of working class women and some recognition of unions as an authentic instrument of working people.

Meanwhile, in radical women's circles, liberation often became a matter of how you talked or dressed. These women had the luxury of not having to struggle for power. Radicals should recognize that it isn't possible to be a fully liberated individual in an oppressive society.

A great advance has been made in the battle of ideas. . . . But our lives haven't changed that much.

As the movement developed, the distinction between radicals and moderates became less important than the distinction between effective action and inaction disguised as ultimatum rhetoric. For example, the Chicago chapter of NOW recently held a joint meeting with local 1066 of United Steelworkers, which has 3000 members including 1000 women, who are discriminated against. NOW brought Federal contract compliance agencies into the plant to aid those women, and initiated a suit against the steel industry on the scale of the suit against AT&T.

The main weakness of the women's movement today is the shortage of this kind of concrete project. It isn't enough for a woman just to believe in the right things; the movement must offer her a way to change her social environment. If women are ever going to be truly liberated, it will be largely through the concrete activities of organizations like NOW, Women Employed and the Coalition of Labor Union Women. □

Black America . . .

(Continued from page 2)

is already on the rise. The only question is, how far will it go? The Nixon Administration is betting that it will "only" hit 5.5% of the workforce; a mainstream economist like Paul Samuelson put the figure around 6%; some union experts expect it to go beyond that.

But then even these dismal numbers are too optimistic. The industry most hit by the energy crisis is, of course, auto. The auto plants most affected are disproportionately located in Detroit and in Michigan. That is where one finds some of the best paid black jobs. Among the states, black pay is most nearly equal to white pay in Michigan (the United Automobile Workers, more than any other institution, is responsible for this fact). Therefore, not only will blacks be the "first fired" from the miserable jobs to which they were "last hired," but some of the best paid blacks will be out of work because of the energy crisis.

We do not need to speculate on these trends. From Nixon's own economic advisors, we know that the number of the black and white poor increased between

Ahead of his time

"This Administration has proved it is utterly incapable of cleaning out the corruption which has completely eroded it and re-establishing the confidence and faith of the people in the morality and honesty of their government employees. The investigations which have been conducted to date . . . have only scratched the surface. For every case which is exposed, there are ten which are successfully covered up and even then this administration will go down in history as the 'scandal-a-day Administration.'

"It is typical of the moral standards of the Administration that when they are caught red-handed with pay-off money in their bank accounts the best defense they can give is that they won the money in a poker game, a crap game, or by hitting the daily double.

"A new class of royalty is being created in the United States and its princes of privileges and pay-offs include the racketeers who get concessions on their income tax cases, the insiders who get favorite treatment on government contracts, the influence peddlers with keys to the White House, the government employee who uses his position to feather his nest. The great tragedy, however, is not that corruption exists but that it is defended and condoned by the President and other high Administration officials. We have had corruption defended by those in high places. If they won't recognize or admit that corruption exists, how can we expect them to clean it up?"

—Nov. 13, 1951—*Sen. Richard Nixon in his denunciation of the Truman Administration at the Hotel Statler, Boston.*

1969 and 1971. That happened because of Richard Nixon's disastrous economic mismanagement, and more than anything else because of his unsuccessful attempt to "trade off" higher unemployment for lower prices. The Administration is trying to engineer the same "trade off" in 1974, and once again, the results will be an increase in the population of the other America.

For the black movement, then, and for the whole democratic Left, full employment is a critical demand. If we can achieve—or even approximate—that goal it would benefit all workers. But, just as the expanding economy of the 1960's reduced the numbers of the poor and enormously benefitted blacks and other minorities, full employment now would be the most effective possible anti-poverty program. The UAW has advocated nationalizing the railroads (instead of further subsidizing their incompetent private managers) and putting the unemployed to work creating a modern, efficient train system. We need to insist on more programs like that, for federally financed non-profit jobs.

In this case, as in so many others, the economic demands of both black and white workers—and the black and white poor—coincide. It would be a mistake, I think, to argue for a program to simply deal with the problem of black poverty. A full employment program will create jobs and higher wages for the entire work force. If that is done, blacks, who have the highest unemployment and lowest paid jobs, would be the prime beneficiaries, yet the policy would not appear to white workers as a tax levied against them. In considerable measure, the way to racial justice in the American economy is through class justice, i.e. a just and growing share of the pie for *all* working people.

This does not, of course, mean that special efforts aimed at the particular problems of blacks are unimportant. Far from it. Given the rising unemployment in 1974, black America will have to fight a defensive struggle to keep from being pushed even further into poverty. In that context, the demands for equality now—for affirmative action, against separate lines of seniority, against whatever racist practices survive in the labor movement, for keeping anti-poverty programs—are crucial. But when better days come, the black movement must be prepared to go beyond those immediate necessities and help build a movement for social and class justice.

But in the long run that will take some rather dramatic structural changes in American society, a fact that can be seen in the very documents which provide the numbers for this analysis of the black position in the economy.

During the past generation, the Council of Economic Advisors admits in its 1974 Report, there has been no change whatsoever in the shares of wealth in this country. Even with greater opportunities for schooling and skills and more training for the poor, their relative position has not improved one whit. Insofar as they have made gains, it has been through sharing in the general, and utterly maldistributed, advance of the economy. The rich, despite all of the "radical" innovations of the 60s are just as outrageously better off.

The Social Indicators report gives the fantastic fig-

ures for wealth distribution in the United States. (If Karl Marx were living now, he would not have to spend long, hard hours in the library culling his statistics of injustice; some Federal agency would have done all the work for him and he would be able to buy all the material for a denunciation of American society from the Government Printing Office.) The Government is currently using 1962 figures, but one must remember that there has been no positive change since then, so these figures are accurate for 1974.

The poorest 20% of the American people own 0.2% of the nation's wealth.

The next poorest 20% own 2.1%.

The middle 20% own 6.2%.

The 20% after them owns 15.5%.

The top fifth owns 76%.

That means that the richest fifth of the American people own three times as much wealth as the other 80%. It is this incredible fact which provides the context in which one must view the problem of black poverty. The overwhelming majority of the society, black and white, is dispossessed; the blacks are the most dispossessed of all (three times as much as the whites). If the political connections can be made, there is a majority of the society, black and white, which has a vital self-interest in the redistribution of wealth. That is the key to changing the relative position of blacks in the American economy. □

Twenty years of *Dissent*

by STANLEY PLASTRIK

When the ninety-fifth number of *Dissent* magazine appears this April, it will mark the 20th Anniversary of that publication, a remarkable record of longevity for magazines of the democratic left.

The issue, which will bear the date Spring/1974, will be a special one containing 240 pages. In addition to a smaller-than-usual section containing analysis of current issues such as the energy crisis, the special issue will contain reprints of articles chosen by the editors as the best and most representative pieces printed during the magazine's existence. This will include essays by Ignazio Silone, Leszek Kolakowski, Lewis Coser, Irving Howe, Henry Pachter, Michael Harrington and many other talented writers. While many of these essays were collected in anthologies in the past, almost all of them have since been out of print. The anniversary issue will indeed be a choice collector's item!

Dissent, founded in 1954 by a group of democratic socialists whose best known members were Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, originally came into existence to take a stand against the McCarthyite wave of intellectual repression and in favor of opening up the socialist movement, then largely confined to a life of small, mutually hostile sects. Over the years its purpose and objectives have considerably widened and deepened. These form the basis of a long study, critical and objective, by Joseph Epstein in the anniversary number in which he examines the history of the magazine. Rooted

Some upcoming events . . .

Energy Conference

"Everything you always wanted to know about the energy crisis: but the oil companies were afraid you might ask." With Michael Harrington, labor leaders, economists, environmentalists discussing the implications of the energy crisis and what we can do about it. Harkness Auditorium, Butler Hall, Columbia University, New York City, Saturday, April 20, 10 a.m.

"Organizing for social change"

New England regional conference of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, with Brendan Sexton, Michael Walzer, panels on trade union activity, organizing women, programs for a new war on poverty. Saturday, April 20, Science Center, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

"Socialist issues"

Irving Howe on literature and politics, Mike Harrington on the energy crisis, Ronnie Steinberg Ratner and Rose Coser on feminism and socialism, Saturday, April 27, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 10 a.m.

Eugene V. Debs-Norman Thomas Dinner

Honoring Ralph Helstein, president emeritus of the United Packinghouse Workers. Saturday, May 4, Midland Hotel, Chicago, 7 p.m. Contact Marion Shier, 3106 W. Touhy, Chicago.

in the fundamental notion that a socialist world must be democratic, or nothing, *Dissent* has provided a running commentary on the major events of the crowded past two decades. In addition, it has attempted to grapple with the major intellectual and theoretical trends of this period: the New Left movement, the neo-conservative challenge to equality, Watergate and the attack on democratic American institutions, Marxist revisionism and new currents in Marxist thought.

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Jimmy Higgins reports . . .

FROM TEXAS WITH LOVE—In dismantling a SAM anti-aircraft missile which had been captured intact, some Israeli technicians came across something interesting. The missile, which was a present from the Soviet Union to the United Arab Republic, had stamped on the integrated circuit within its warhead, "Texas Instrument Company."

WHO KILLED MASS TRANSIT?—The conservatives tell us the greedy unions did in the railroads and the urban transit systems. Some free marketeers would have us believe that the rush to the automobile was the expression of consumer sovereignty. But Bradford Snell in testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly had a different answer. Snell pointed to General Motors' monopoly, not only in the automobile and truck industries, but in the manufacture of buses and diesel trains as well. Carefully documenting his case, Snell argued that GM set out to undermine competing forms of transit and to maximize its profits by maximizing auto sales. Typical, according to Snell, was the campaign GM, Standard Oil of California and Firestone Tire carried out to convert the interurban electric railroad system in Los Angeles to buses. The end result was the creation of a smog-filled "ecological wasteland."

PUZZLING POLLS—Some saw it as a sign of his vindication when Richard Nixon ranked third in the December Gallup poll listing the ten men Americans most admired. An enterprising Chicago journalist, Michael Miner, saw it as a cause of bafflement. As he reported in the February *Chicago Journalism Review*, Gallup and Harris had announced days before the "most admired" survey was released that the President had the approval of less than 30 per cent of the public. How to explain the discrepancy between the polls? Miner called the Gallup organization and was told, "When he's as low as third . . . that's bad." Further, it was explained that the poll was taken by asking 1500 Americans to

list their first and second choices (though Gallup ignored the preferences) of the man they most admire. About 75 of those 1500 (5%) named Nixon, which was high enough for him to finish third. What's more, about 500 of those polled, one-third of the sample, named no first choice for the world's most admired man.

LABORING FOR NIXON — Even if George Gallup and James Buckley say that he's in trouble, Richard Nixon has one public figure he can turn to for constant support: Teamster President Frank Fitzsimmons. Last month, Fitz sent out a letter to every Teamster local in the country, urging support for the President and mobilization against impeachment efforts. There was an embarrassing slip-up, though; the letter ended by exhorting the truck drivers, dispatchers, warehouse workers and other Teamsters as "leaders of business and industry." With or without the slip-up, the letter was ineffectual. The Washington (state) Teamster publication came out for impeachment in March, and various locals across the country have cooperated with the AFL-CIO and the UAW on labor impeachment activity.

MEANWHILE the Fitzsimmons-Nixon alliance is being called into question. Former Teamster President Jimmy Hoffa says that the government bar to his union activity was imposed as a favor to Fitzsimmons which was rewarded by turning over union legal business to former White House counsel Chuck Colson. Hoffa has gone to court to have the ban lifted so that he can accept a job as business manager of his old local. If the court rules in his favor, look for Hoffa to win back the international presidency easily at the Teamsters' next Convention in '76.

TEXAS LIBERALS have suffered several setbacks in their efforts to reform the Texas Constitution. First of all, the state legislature refused to convene a special Constitutional Convention. The solons decided instead to sit as the Constitutional Convention themselves. And the influence peddling and lobbying pressure liberals feared is rampant. Rep. Mickey Leland's attempts to write guaranteed health care rights into the Constitution were beaten back in committee. The Texas Good Roads Association, a contractors' group, defeated a proposal to open up the huge Highway Fund for mass transit use. Despite endorsements by prestigious leaders of the legal profession (including Leon Jaworski), a system of merit selection for judges was rejected. And the conservatives on the Board of Regents triumphed in their efforts to keep the permanent university fund intact, thus depriving smaller schools, many predominantly black, of a larger share of the state's education money. Meanwhile, sheer ignorance triumphed as the legislators decided not to extend full voting rights to ex-convicts. The Convention did agree on one reform—the clause guaranteeing pensions to Confederate war widows will not appear in the new Constitution.

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