

Another NORTH—SOUTH DIALOGUE

By Laura Parks
Prospects for a fruitful outcome of the present series of North-South talks remains as distant as ever. It is not that the men and women at the present conferences are wicked or evil individuals, far from it, it is simply that they represent Western industrial states caught in a savage economic killing ground from which there seems to be no escape. Simply stated the once proud and economically mighty North has become an economically impotent colossus shorn of its carelessly gathered wealth over the generations and is now confronted with the greatest profit squeeze in its turbulent history. This condition has frightened the Northern establishment

from Washington to Bonn, in West Germany. It has made the North-South discourse very difficult. The demands of the South are persistent, make a lot of economic sense, and in view of colonial and neo-colonial practices by the North are morally just. The Southern demands are echoed to a very large extent by the Brandt Commission Report. When the Brandt report first appeared the impression was created that its members were deeply concerned with the possibility that potential Third World social turbulence would lead to bloody confrontations between the North and the South which in their wake could have devastating conse-

quences in the North. The Brandt report was not a starchy eyed do gooders document. It was a document primarily concerned with the future good and welfare of the West, but which reorganized that this could not be achieved without massive aid from the North flowing to the South in the form of industrial know-how, technology, capital and scientific knowledge in all areas of its varieties. In recent months a noticeable change has been taking place. Now there is much less emphasis on potential mass turbulence in the Third World at some future and unknown time. Suddenly the source of turbulence is seen to be within the North as it grapples with insurmountable economic problems, here and now. The social peace of the North is now seen to depend on establishing wide ranging economic ties with the South. But important obstacles lie in the way. A new North inspired concept is being put forward by the Northern establishments, namely that the South must rely on self help rather than on the generosity of the West. This idea is ad-

vocated by people like British Prime Minister Thatcher and President Reagan who seem willing to take extraordinary

domestic and foreign risks as they cut back on every conceivable form of government spending, including international aid expenditures. They argue a version of the "trickle down" theory which in this case states that when the North is prosperous this prosperity will somehow "trickle down" South. At the moment then the Northern establishment is unwilling to make the kind of commitment to the South which the South wants. (Continued on Page 15)

Meeting Black Housing Needs:

Harlem's Webb & Brooker, Inc.

By William R. Morris, ASPC
Washington Housing Consultant

In 1975, *Builders Magazine*, in a feature article, called them "Masters of Management." Today after twelve years in the business, Webb & Brooker, Inc., is the undisputed largest black-owned property management company in the nation with a \$3.5 million annual payroll, collecting over \$24 million a year for clients which include some of the country's foremost financial institutions. The firm currently manages apartments, office, and commercial space — nearly two million square feet of it.

The first thing different one notices when visiting the firm's offices at 2534 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard in New York City's Harlem community, is that none of their large plate glass windows — a quarter block of frontage — is broken. And there's not a sign of graffiti on the walls, nor are the windows hung with iron gates at night as you would expect in this part of the city. One reason for this phenomenon is that the firm, in many ways, serves as a role model for Harlem's youth, a community in which there are not nearly enough black entrepreneurs. Another, in spite of their heavy schedule, is taking the honor class of a nearby school on an annual trip to Washington, with visits to the White House by invitation. And then there's their active participation in the business, civic and political life of Harlem.

In 1969, Gene Webb teamed up with George Brooker to establish Webb & Brooker. Their idea was to turn around run-down slum properties. And the idea paid off for them. They have never asked for a Small Business Administration loan, or any other kind of government assistance, making the distinction between government "business" and "assistance". The firm's continued success stems in part from their business philosophy: free enterprise. Long ago they decided they would not take the traditional black business course of depending on government assistance to succeed.

The degree of professionalism expected by the firm is reflected in their "educational policy" for employees. Seminars and real estate conferences are attended by all employees, and those who want skills and professional training — whether managerial or secretarial — will see the cost matched by the firm. And, even though the money they collect in rents isn't their own, it is leveraged well. Reaching beyond the deposit of funds in black banks, they have set up in business all the vendors supplying the properties they manage, from fuel oil carriers to carpenters — turning over each dollar many times in the community before spinning them away.

While still maintaining an impressive list of apartment buildings that they turned into profitable operations, Webb & Brooker also manages Triple A office buildings for companies like Prudential Insurance Company and Manufacturers Hanover Bank. One of their most intriguing challenges today is a modern fifteen-story steel and glass office building with 230,000 square feet of luxury office space on 125th Street in the heart of Harlem. Another big challenge is the historical Dunbar Apartment complex, 536 apartments built for blacks in 1929 by John D. Rockefeller and named for black poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar. Today, in an advanced stage of deterioration, the Dunbar is undergoing a major renovation and conversion to a resident-owned cooperative as part of Harlem's renaissance, and to prevent the displacement of existing residents. "We intend to make this a showcase residence in Harlem," says Brooker.

Gene Webb, a young looking but tough talking 62, started out in life as a poor boy from Alabama who just barely finished high school. Today he is a trustee of two colleges, Miles and Stillman, in his native state. He is chairman of the firm and also United Mutual Insurance Co.; a director of Freedom National Bank; and a Federal National Mortgage Association Advisory Committee member. His partner and the firm's president, George Brooker, 55, was reared in South Carolina and serves on New York City's Big MAC Board and on the Board of Governors of the prestigious Real Estate Board of New York. He is a past chairman of New York's Urban League, holds the respected C.P.M. designation of Certified Property Manager from the Institute of Real Estate Management, and is active in many other professional and civic associations. Both men are active in the Realtors and Realists, the major black and white real estate trade organizations.

Featured again, this year, as the cover story of *Builders Magazine*, Webb & Brooker is truly a model of what black businesses should be. They have successfully demonstrated what whites, and other blacks, thought could not be done. They are doing their thing... and doing it well. They learned that while it is nice to talk idealism, money talks louder — and makes people equal.

Not one to abandon Harlem as many blacks had done, the firm decided sometime ago to remain in the black community and to help with its revitalization, a change that is now beginning to take place. Webb says of Harlem's future: "It's not going to be cast either black or white. It's going to be determined by whomever can afford to live there, and that's the way it should be."

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