

Editorials

Raise Seems Ill - Timed

Thousands of common, everyday working people have been laid off and thousands are expected to lose their jobs in the near future. No one is quite sure of what's down the road nor if there will be a "down-the-road" for very long.

But, amid this gloom a little star doth shine. The shining star is not, however, hope for the poor but a pay raise for the well-off.

The raise, which has already been approved, will go to some 500 county employees. They will get a seven per cent increase.

County Commissioners have cited keeping good morale in making the raise. They were concerned, however, that the "higher ups" would feel slighted if they got only a five per cent raise while everyone else got 7½. They seemed afraid that if the few who have higher paying jobs didn't get the same raise, County operations would be negatively affected.

With the economy what it is, no one should get a raise. Everyone is aware of the high cost of living. But, no one is more aware of that than those workers who have recently been laid off. "Tough for them", you might say. Or, "They should have found a more stable job." But, the fact is they didn't, and probably couldn't.

Although the Commissioners can not be held responsible for the high cost of living nor poor economic conditions, they can be held responsible for fanning the flames. One of the most direct means to halt rising inflation (and one which every citizen can have a hand in) is to cut spending.

It would seem that County Commissioners and employees are aware of the situation and would be satisfied with "keeping" their jobs at the previous rate of pay instead of aiding and abetting a runaway economy. The Commissioners should have looked twice or thrice at granting an ill-timed raise while most everyone else is in danger of losing their jobs.

Death Row Filled To The Brim

Sam Garrison, warden of Central Prison in Raleigh, has ordered double occupancy for North Carolina's infamous and unique "Death Row". North Carolina has long been the leading state in the nation in number of men to be killed (68). Most are young, high school drop-outs and black.

No one is holding Mr. Garrison responsible for the number of men that the state has scheduled to execute, nor what he must do to accommodate a system that condemns men to die. No one knows where the blame should be placed if you must go beyond that abstract creature called "society".

But, we're not looking for someone to blame; simply to point out the frightening implications of having too little room for far too many men. No matter which angle you look at it, it comes out sick.

If the case before the courts now does not declare the death penalty unconstitutional, what will N.C. then do? Execute 68 men, most of whom are black? Is there nothing wrong with a system that condemns men to die and then pack them up together like sardines to await execution?

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Editor-in-chief.....Ernest H. Pitt

Society editor.....Linda Murrell

Business editor.....Charles T. Byrd Jr.

Publisher.....Ndubisi Egemonye

Administrative assistant...Gloria J. Jones

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CUT-THROAT POLITICS

TO BE EQUAL by Vernon E. Jordan, Jr.

Blacks and minorities are caught in the middle of the trend of changing city and regional government structures.

Just as blacks in some cities have finally reached the point where they've got some political clout, along comes a "good government" movement to dilute that political power by broadening the base of local government through merger with outlying areas.

This poses a cruel dilemma for black people.

On the one hand, there is the reality of power -- blacks holding high local offices up to and including the majority. On the other hand, is the reality of tax resources -- tapping suburban wealth for the revitalization of the inner-city.

The cruelest part of the dilemma is that there are no easy solutions. Each city is different. Each particular case has to be studied and examined from the standpoint of how decisions will impact upon blacks.

Most important is the need to avoid easy assumptions that don't square with reality. Many people assume, for example that a city-county merger will mean more funds for city services, but isn't it even more likely that suburbanites will be more anxious to tax the city's downtown business sections to pay for the roads, sewer lines

and other expenses of the growing suburban economy.

Another assumption is that blacks should not bargain away their political power within the city, especially if it has a black mayor. But many city charters are "weak mayor" systems in which real power is, held by special districts, school boards, autonomous agencies and regional boards.

So there are pros and cons that will change as local factors change, but the one important point for black people is that we must become involved in the process of bargaining and shaping plans for metro government or for restructuring city government.

If regionalism comes about without reference to blacks, black people will suffer for it. That's why it is important to educate and mobilize the public to deal with the issues, so that the community's representatives can make the trade-offs that will protect the best interests of the black community, and even to veto metro government is necessary.

While restructuring local governments could have great impact on the communities they serve and on the services people need, no one should think that shuffling some boxes on an organizational chart will cure everything.

Even radical change in local government structure could easily leave the power arrangements within the area unchanged, services unaltered and the pattern of inner-city black poverty and suburban white wealth unbroken and unaffected.

A lot of "good government" forces find this hard to accept. Like earlier pioneers for civil service and similar reforms they think switching to metro government or other forms of regional government will solve urban problems.

But those urban problems can only be solved by the removal of racial barriers, by full employment, and by a massive infusion of money to provide the housing, health and other services people need.

Structural reform is not a substitute for real changes in the way our society handles human needs and aspirations. But because it can be a force for good or for evil, black people must give it their attention. Already, many cities have switched over to some form of metro government. In some blacks have fared well, in others, not so well.

As yet our experience with this new experiment in government is tenuous -- the jury is still out. But the totality of black experience indicates

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