

FORUM

Balancing the Budget at African-American Children's Expense

Act now before congress cuts children out of the budget! On Feb. 22, the Senate will begin voting on the balanced budget amendment. The amendment proposes to reduce a \$223 billion annual deficit to zero in five years. Responsible deficit reduction and government responsibility are very important to us all. However, this plan would cripple our economy and devastate children and families in need. The across-the-board reduction of federal funds would prevent needed investments in proven programs serving low-income children and their families.

For the 4.9 million poor black children in America today, the passage of this amendment would decrease their chances of escaping poverty during their access to quality health and child care. With the passage of the amendment

Health care reform effort could fail! If the amendment passes, deficit reduction would eat up every dollar of health care savings; nothing would be available to assure that all Americans are insured. This would mean that the 1.4 million black children who were uninsured in 1992 would have a little chance of receiving the quality health care necessary for their physical and educational development. Even if some forms of "health care reform" were to pass in 1994, the funds would not be there to provide care to millions of children and families living in blighted urban and rural communities.

Unemployment would increase! As federal funds are cut, jobs would disappear. Studies show that, if a balanced budget amendment took effect in

1995, there would be 3.4 million fewer jobs available, and the unemployment rate would reach 8.4 percent. In the black community, where unemployment rate would reach 8.4 percent. In the black community, where unemployment reached a staggering rate of 14.1 percent in the aftermath of the 1990-1991 recession, further job cuts could have a dramatic impact. With nearly half of all black children living in poverty, we cannot permit policies which will negatively impact the opportunities of black families to become law.

Tax loopholes would be saved while programs serving middle and low-income families would be slashed! Because the amendment sets up new tougher congressional voting rules, which would make programs cuts easier than tax increases, it would lock in unfair tax loopholes and "tax expenditures" that subsidize luxuries such as vacation homes. The gap between the very rich and the very poor would continue to grow. Millions of families struggle just to pay the rent would be worse off, while the government would continue to subsidize not only the first, but also the second homes of wealthy Americans.

The amendment would sabotage programs that help families work! It would cut the resources necessary to lift families out of poverty and give vulnerable children the means to grow up healthy and ready to learn. Child care, Head Start, WIC, food stamps, employment and training programs, and Medicaid, which are essential for moving families to self-sufficiency,

would be starved for funding. The amendments would make it easier to cut children's programs than to raise revenues. It puts our children at tremendous risk!

Call your senator and representatives and tell them to vote against the budget amendments. They will be in your state from Feb. 12-21 during the



CHILD WATCH

By MIRIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

congressional recess period. Look in your phone book for a local office where you can call them or call the Children's Defense Fund, at 202-662-3599, for their local office phone numbers. On Feb. 22, call your senators in Washington, D.C., to tell them once again to vote against the balance budget amendment. The Capitol switchboard number is 202-224-3121. We cannot allow this threat to our nation's health security and children become national policy.

(Mirian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund, a national voice for children and a leader of the Black Community Crusade for Children)

'For the Past 34 Years, the United States Has Embargoed All Trade to Cuba'

To Americans the little yellow school bus is a symbol for children and education. It is a sign of the future and at the same time brings back fond memories of childhood trips from home to school.

Last summer the little yellow school bus became a different kind of symbol when the Pastors for Peace led a caravan of 95 trucks and cars and three yellow school buses across the United States/Mexican border along



CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

By BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

with 100 tons of humanitarian aid for the people of Cuba. Pastors for Peace, an arm of the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization, had collected this aid, including food, medicine, wheelchairs, Bibles, bicycles, soap, toothbrushes and computers from churches and organization across the United States to be given to the people of Cuba through the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Center in Havana. The buses themselves were to go to a program for mentally impaired persons and to church youth groups in Cuba.

For the past 34 years, the United States has embargoed all trade to Cuba, including food and humanitarian supplies. Thus, Cuban hospitals cannot purchase prescription medicines from U.S. companies and Cuban churches and other humanitarian organizations cannot receive relief. Food itself is a scarce commodity to most Cubans, while we in this nation still grow more than we eat.

Pastors for Peace decided to challenge what they believed was an unjust law. Thus began their caravans, collecting relief in cities across the nation and culminating in a border crossing last summer en route to Havana. But U.S. customs officials were unhappy with this attempt at circumnavigation and while they allowed across two of the school buses, they forced the caravanners to carry across much of the aid by hand and confiscated the third little yellow school bus.

The Rev. Lucius Walker, founder of Pastors for Peace, and 13 others who were on strike. They stayed aboard the seized school bus in 100 plus degree weather, surviving only on water and juices brought to them by many supporters until the Federal government relented and allowed the school bus to cross the border. That bus is now in Havana at the Ebenezer Baptist Church.

Members of the religious community are not alone in their belief that the Cuba embargo is unjust to the eleven million Cubans who suffer from widespread shortages of food, medicine and fuel. Congressman Charles Rangel of New York has introduced legislation into the House of Representatives (HR2229) calling for an end of the trade embargo with Viet Nam. Rangel points out that U.S. companies are losing \$6 billion every year that they are not allowed to do business with Cuba. "This bill addresses not only the humanitarian issues that we all care about, but also the vital issue of free

trade," said Rangel, adding, "It's ridiculous to deny U.S. companies the opportunity...because a small interest group wants to starve the Cuban people into submission." A hearing is scheduled on the bill by the House Ways and Means Committee on March 15th.

Meanwhile, the Pastors for Peace is beginning its third caravan which is scheduled to cross the Laredo border on March 9th with 145 tons of aid. Already two tons of relief supplies have crossed the U.S./Canada border bound for the caravan, despite the passage of a 1992 bill which makes it a violation to transport goods destined for Cuba across U.S. territory. It's not clear why customs officials allowed the group to cross the border, although there are some indications that the Clinton Administration may be reconsidering the embargo.

In early March, watch the newspaper and television for news of the U.S.-Cuba Friendship Caravan, which will include contingents not only from the United States and Canada, but also from Mexico, England, Sweden and Germany. There will be over 100 vehicles and 10 little yellow school buses. Pastors for Peace asks those who believe that people in Cuba should have food, medicine, wheelchairs and other humanitarian aid to write or call the White House, the State Department and the U.S. Department of the Treasury (of which the Customs is an agency) during that time. And if you're interested in supporting Congressman Rangel's legislation, let your congressperson know.

The right to food and to medicine is a fundamental human right. How long can the U.S. go on denying this?

(Bernice Powell Jackson is Executive Director for the United Church of Christ commission for Racial Justice.)

'There Are Parallels Between Anti-Semitism and the Exploitation of Racism'

Last November, Khalid Abdul Muhammad, National Spokesman for the Nation of Islam, delivered a speech at Kean College in New Jersey. Over three hours, he presented an analysis which was blatantly anti-Semitic and filled with hatred.

Muhammad declared that Jews were "the blood suckers of the black nation"; that Jews "have our entertainers in their hip pocket" and "our athletes in the palm of their hand." Muhammad stated that Jews "call yourself Reubenstein, Goldstein, Silverstein because you (have) been stealing rubies and gold and silver all over the earth." He even revived the controversial statement of Louis Farrakhan of a decade ago, that Adolf Hitler was "wickedly great." The Holocaust was attributed to the role of Jews, who had "undermined the very fabric of (German) society."

As the text of this speech was circulated, largely by the Anti-Defamation League, conservative Jewish leaders and journalists used the issue not only to condemn Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam, but the vast majority of African-American leaders and officials as well who had any relationship with the Muslim community. Rosenthal of the New York Times, for example, pompously and falsely asserted that "with few exceptions, black political and intellectual leadership has kept silent about...the surge of anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic propaganda among blacks, particularly among young and more educated blacks." Rosenthal attacked Chavis of the NAACP, the Congressional Black Caucus and Jesse Jackson for establishing a dialogue with Farrakhan, insisting that black mainstream leaders "are willing to ally themselves with the salesmen for a new Holocaust." In recent weeks, virtually every African-American national figure has criticized or denounced the anti-Semitic slurs and sentiments of the Jewish community and African-Americans, characterized previously by differences over affirmative action

and Israel's relationship with the former apartheid government of South Africa, has become even worse.

Let us separate the key issue which are part of this growing political controversy. As much as I reject and oppose the political perspective of Muhammad, he had a right to speak at Kean College, or any other public institution. If Patrick Buchanan, Newt Gingrich, and David Duke have a legal right to spew their respective political poisons, and to advance an unconditional program of oppression for black people, Muhammad must be permitted that same freedom. To extend the right to speak only to those with whom we agree is a dangerous doctrine. "Freedom" is always and only to those who think differently.

We must be honest about the root factors in the debate about Muhammad, Farrakhan and the charges of anti-Semitism in the black community. There is anti-Semitism among some African-Americans, as well as racism and prejudice among some Jews towards black people. But anti-Semitism has never been a mass movement among African-Americans, and no national black leader is calling for anything which approaches a "new Holocaust."

There are real tensions and disagreements, to be sure, which separate key elements of the Jewish community and African-Americans. The intolerance and discrimination which Jews have experienced in this country never equaled the fierce oppression which African-American people suffered—and continue to experience. There are parallels between the bigotry of anti-Semitism and the exploitation of racism, but the two dynamics of discrimination are not identical. Jews as a group are middle and upper class, while an ever-growing number of African-Americans are trapped in a cycle of

poverty, unemployment, drugs and violence. To say simplistically that the two groups have identical interests is simply not true. But it is equally false to assert that Jews are "turning against" black interests. Consistently, even in the recent mayoral election in New York City, Jewish voters are among the strongest white supporters for black candidates and issues.

Nothing can ever justify the articulation of hatred. The color of prejudice transcends the barriers of black and white. The great strength of black



ALONG THE COLOR LINE

By DR. MANNING MARABLE

freedom movement—from Frederick Douglass to Martin Luther King—has been the realization that our struggle for equality is for all humanity, not just for ourselves. When we surrender this moral and ethical principle, we sacrifice our greatest weapon for democracy all people who experience this discrimination.

(Manning Marable is Professor of History and Political Science and Director, Institute for Research in African-American Studies, Columbia University.)

'A Justice System that Criminalizes Offenses Other Countries Punish Lightly'

Do I see the first glimmering of a new war on the poor shaping up? It seems unlikely since we now have the first national Administration in a decade that's committed to more equitable national policies. And there's a greater understanding of the danger growing inequality poses to America's social stability and economic future.



TO BE EQUAL

By JOHN E. JACOB

But there's a lot of free-floating middle class insecurity out there that may be channeled into repressive measures against people on the bottom of the ladder instead of on more productive measures to help everybody move up the ladder.

And this is a congressional election year, with all the temptations that offers for political candidates to play on the fears of the voters and to seed

scapegoats for their problems.

A case in point is the new crime bill now gathering support in Congress.

By the time it gets to a vote, it may be loaded with repressive features that don't hinder crime and saddle us with a primitive, unworkable criminal justice system.

Some aspects of the new, more punitive approach to crime could lead to an expensive prison-building spree that locks up people who don't belong in prison and keeps them there longer than necessary.

We already have a criminal justice system that criminalizes offenses other countries punish lightly; imposes longer sentences that similar crimes draw in other countries, and operates in a way that is biased against young African American men.

The end result is a system that doesn't deter crime and fails to rehabilitate offenders. Reforming the federal crime code makes sense, but not if it just encourages a war on poor young men.

And welfare reform makes sense, too, but not if it just encourages a war on poor people.

The Administration will propose a welfare reform measure that would force people to work after two years on the welfare rolls, something that sounds appealing but will require huge investments in child care and job creation if it is to work.

The states are jumping on the bandwagon, with reform plans that are even more obviously punitive.

Virginia, for example, is considering welfare changes that would force recipients to work within a year of going on the rolls, and drop them altogether after a second year, whether or not they have a permanent job.

That doesn't sound like reform to me—it sounds like punishing people for being poor.

Welfare reform needs to encourage work and independence, but that requires the availability of child care, health care, job training, jobs, and a panoply of social services to help people get on their feet.

Any so-called welfare reform plan is to cut costs, not to help people in need.

Another sign of the start of a war on the poor is the growing callousness about the homeless.

Increasingly, the media are painting the homeless as a threatening force to be repressed, instead of as unfortunate people who need affordable housing, jobs, health care, drug treatment and other services tailored to their actual needs.

So there's a growing trend to paint crime, welfare and homelessness as aspects of a growing underclass that threatens the middle class, instead of as the inevitable results of a stagnant economy and a discriminatory society.

(John E. Jacobs is President of National Urban League)