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THE WITNESS

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Black Theology: Where to, What Next?

James H. Cone
Howard Dodson
Muhammad Kenyatta

Christians on the Edge

Phyllis M. Jones

Maria & Raisa: Free at Last!



THE WITNESS is pleased to present this exchange of letters between Bishop William Davidson of Western Kansas and Dr. Charles V. Willie, professor of education at Harvard Graduate School, whose article "When to Resist Authority" [December WITNESS] prompted the dialogue.

Regrets 'Authority' Stance

Dear Dr. Willie:

I have read with great interest the article in the December, 1977, *Witness* excerpted from your address at EDS. We have not heard much from you lately and I rejoice that your voice has not been stilled completely.

I regret, on the other hand, that you now appear to be in a position of judging the Church from the outside, instead of working from within to make it the kind of perfect community you seem to expect it to be. Unless you want to eliminate from Church membership all those of diverse opinions and make it a club of like-minded people, it is necessary to keep working at the conversion and renewal of the whole body.

Instead of giving even a little credit for the achievement of Minneapolis in authorizing women's ordination, you only point to the fact that much of the Church has not been converted to this position as yet. Instead of noting that the House of Bishops clearly affirmed the Minneapolis decision at its October, 1977, meeting, you only note that in the resolution we did not urge the Presiding Bishop to resign.

Beyond this attitude on your own part which disturbs me, you then proceed to recommend to seminarians that they should also take a position as over against the Church. You would like to supplant the power of the "hierarchy that is stifling the

Church" with seminarians seizing "sufficient power to renew it." In all my ministry I have seen the Church (however inadequately and with whatever meager results) working at the criteria you suggest of being called to repentance, teaching its members how to forgive and be merciful, and trying to be loving and just and fair. If seminarians can do a better job of it and I pray that they will (thank God seminarians have always felt they could!), I hardly see how they can do it in opposition to those who have been working at the task these many years.

It seems to me incongruous for you to speak of incompatibility between the requirement of obedience and that of love, when our Lord Jesus Christ demands commitment and full allegiance of His followers, yet at the same time promises them perfect freedom. In Him there is relationship between obedience and freedom. Why not in the Church? Most Bishops I know are crying for the leadership of priests and lay people who will convert and renew the *whole* body, but they believe it is important that, to the fullest extent possible, none be lost. It is one thing to give leadership to those who will follow; it is quite another thing to educate and persuade and convert those who have no initial intention of doing so. Being essentially a fellowship and a voluntary association, the Church has no enforcement agency to compel obedience as government has, nor does it even have the threat of such sanctions as educational institutions have (you mention how well each of these is doing with reforming society), so it is left with education and persuasion and with prayer—waiting upon the Spirit to move as He will in His good time.

I trust that you will continue to be alert to and observant of the shortcomings of the Church, but I pray that you will see yourself as being responsible with all the rest of us who are called to leadership in it, to work together to overcome, to persevere, and to achieve what is God's will for all His people.

The Rt. Rev. William Davidson
Bishop of Western Kansas

Dr. Willie Responds

Dear Bishop Davidson:

Thanks for your letter in which you raise some important issues to which I will attempt to respond.

My old college president, Benjamin Elijah Mays, of Atlanta, Georgia, has said that *belief* is the basis of *action* and that if one does not act upon one's belief, one does not have a belief at all, but merely an *opinion*. To me it appeared that many

bishops in August, 1974, had opinions about justice for women but no real belief in equality. Without a Special General Convention to change the sexist discriminatory laws of the Episcopal Church against women priests, I, as one of the presiding officers, had to enforce sexist laws that I knew were wrong. Now I could have acted like Pilate; enforced sexist laws and denied that I was personally responsible for oppressing women as I was merely conforming to the will of the Church.

The remainder of this story is history.

While I resigned from high office in the General Convention and the Executive Council, I did not resign from "the Church" as your letter implies. We have different conceptions of "the Church." I consider "the General Convention" and "the Executive Council" to be units of "the Episcopal Church" but not "the Church." Indeed, I have continued to serve as a communicant member of local parishes. Presently I am a member of the choir and vestry of Christ Church, Cambridge. It too is a unit of "the Church" as is "the General Convention" or "the Executive Council."

My memory about what the Scriptures have to say about the meek and lowly versus the high and mighty cause me to believe that the perspective of one who has been a high officer and is now a lowly communicant member may be as valid and as useful as any "within the Church;" so I am bold to speak out as a member "in the Church" and not as one "outside the Church."

My basic reason for asking seminarians to cease *obeying* their bishops was for the purpose of asking them to cease cooperating in their own oppression, which is as damning to the bishops who demand obedience as it is to those who acknowledge that one human being has the right to rule another. Although elevated to high office, bishops are not without sin. And any bishop who believes that he or she has the right to demand obedience is on shaky religious ground.

There is one point in your letter on which you and I fundamentally disagree; and it is that freedom and obedience are compatible. I would contend that your interpretation of the Scripture is in error if you derive from the Gospel the idea that the demand for blind obedience also acknowledges the possibility of perfect freedom. Beyond the Scriptures, there is evidence from our national governmental system in contemporary times of what happens when obedience is demanded of those with whom one is associated.

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THE WITNESS

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BLACK THEOLOGY

Where to, What Next?

by Muhammad Kenyatta

Muhammad Kenyatta is Director of the Black Theology Project of the Theology in the Americas, a program which grew out of a conference in Detroit in 1975. At that conference Christians from both North and South America covenanted to consider the divergences and convergences of their approaches to Christian faith and life. Mr. Kenyatta recently helped organize the Black Theology Conference in Atlanta where James Cone and Howard Dodson were featured speakers. [Articles in this issue are excerpted from their papers]. We welcome Mr. Kenyatta as guest editorial writer for the March WITNESS.

The birth of the Black Theology Project (BTP) in the post-Nixon era of our country represents the renewed hopes, sharpening analyses and festering frustrations among Black Christians and within Black communities generally. This effort by activist Black churchfolk to recreate national as well as parochial frameworks for social justice advocacy signals a renewed spirit of ecumenical purpose, a spirit that had been effectively assassinated with Martin Luther King, Jr. in Memphis, April 4, 1968. This renewed spirit manifested itself in the awesome display of Black political power, organized via church leadership, which insured the November 1976 defeat of Nixon appointee Gerald Ford.

Furthermore, as evidenced by BTP's unapologetic linking of international and domestic issues, the Black ecumenical movement is entering a new phase of maturity in its ethical and sociological analysis. This new phase was harbingered by Martin Luther King Jr.'s espousal of the anti-Vietnam War movement in his historic April 1967 Riverside Church sermon and by the radical internationalism of the Black Manifesto rhetoric affirmed by many Black theologians in 1969. However, in the present era, intensification of southern Africa liberation

struggles and radicalization of African Christian leaders have been the prime catalysts of global consciousness within American Black theology. The resonances between Africa and Afro-America ought not be underestimated in assessing the politicization of Black Christianity in both southern Africa and North America.

James H. Cone's "Where Do We Go From Here?" affirms the resurrection of the Black Church as the locus of hope and leadership for our people's historic aspirations. Yet Cone acknowledges the persistent contradictions that challenge and often compromise Black church leadership in practical reality. Howard Dodson's "Review to Renew" incisively surveys the analytic and strategic questions which confront Black churches and communities in the context of objective realities, internal and external. It is an obvious, yet profoundly suggestive observation that Dodson's questions are equally significant for other North Americans of whatever race or religious persuasion.

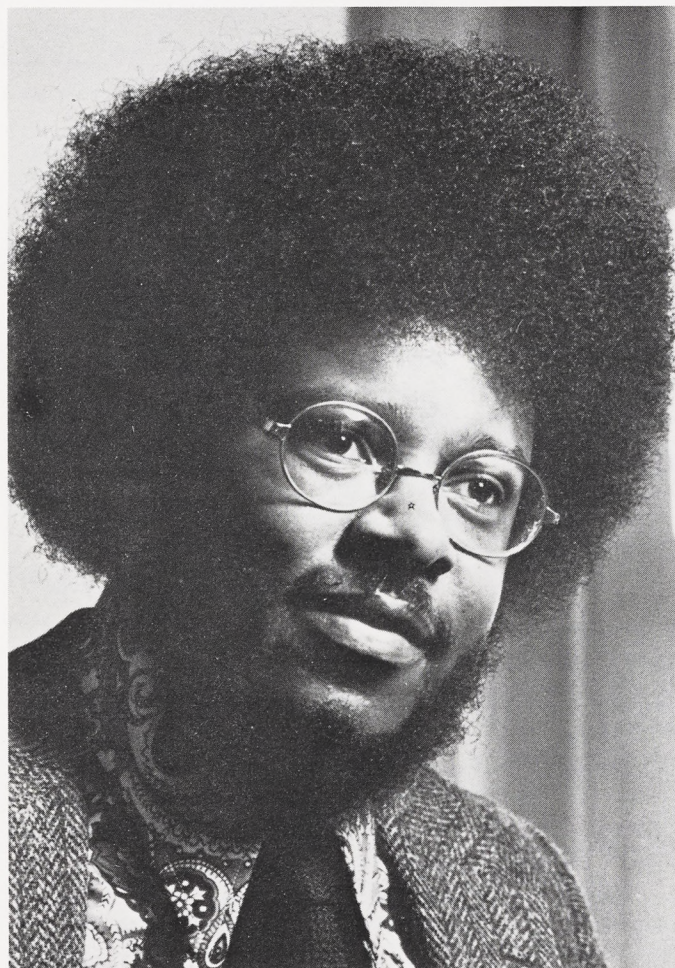
However, lest we get lost in euphoria of renewed hopes or debates about ethical-sociological analyses, we must not forget the deep frustration, even

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BLACK THEOLOGY

Where Do We Go From Here?

by James H. Cone



The Rev. James H. Cone is Charles A. Briggs Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary, New York City.

"The time has come for Black theologians and church people to move beyond a mere reaction to White racism and to extend our vision of a new socially constructed humanity into the whole inhabited world. We must be concerned with the quality of life not only in U.S. cities but also in Africa, Asia and Latin America."

When the Black Power Statement was written in July 1966 by an *ad hoc* national Committee of Negro Churchmen, we faced a dilemma. We knew that to define Black Power as the opposite of the Christian faith was to reject the central role that the Black Church has played in Black people's historical struggle for freedom. Rejecting Black Power also meant that the Black Church would ignore its political responsibility to empower Black people in their present struggle to make our children's future more humane than intended by the rulers in this society.

But to locate Black Power in the Christian context was not easy. First, the acceptance of Black Power would appear to separate us from Martin Luther King, Jr., and we did not want to do that. King was our model, having creatively combined religion and politics, and Black preachers and theologians respected his courage to concretize the political consequences of his confession of faith.

Secondly the concept of Black Power presented a problem for Black theologians and preachers not only because of our loyalty to Martin Luther King, but also because many of us had been trained in White seminaries and had internalized much of White people's definition of Christianity. Our intellectual ideas of God, Jesus, and the Church were derived from White European theologians and their textbooks.

To accept Black Power as Christian required that we thrust ourselves into our history in order to search for new ways to think and be Black in this world. We felt the need to explain ourselves and to be understood from our own vantage point and not from the perspective and experiences of Whites. When White liberals questioned this approach to theology, our response was very similar to the bluesman in Mississippi when told he was not singing his song correctly: "Look-a-heah, man, dis yere *mah* song, en I'll sing it howsoevah I pleases."

Thus we sang our Black Power songs, knowing that the White Church establishment would not smile upon our endeavors to define Christianity independent of their own definitions of the Gospel. For the power of definition is a prerogative that oppressors never want to give up. Thus from 1966 to the present, Black theologians and preachers, in the context of the church and the streets, have been

searching for new ways to confess and to live our faith in God so that the Black Church would not make religion the opiate of our people.

Their term *Black Theology* was created in this social and religious context. It was initially understood as the theological arm of Black Power, and it enabled us to express our theological imagination in the struggle for freedom independently of White theologians. It was the one term that White ministers and theologians did not like, because, like Black Power in politics, Black theology located the theological starting point in the Black experience and not the particularity of the western theological tradition. We did not feel ourselves accountable to Aquinas, Luther or Calvin but to David Walker, Daniel Payne and W.E.B. Dubois. The depth and passion in which we express our solidarity with the Black experience over against the western tradition led some Black scholars in religion to reject theology itself as alien to the Black culture. Others, while not rejecting theology entirely, contended that Black theologians should turn primarily to African religions and philosophy in order to develop a Black theology consistent with and accountable to our historical roots. But all of us agreed that we were living at the beginning of a new historical moment, and this required the development of a *Black* frame of reference that many called *Black theology*.

The consequence of our affirmation of a Black theology led to the creation of Black caucuses in White churches, a permanent ecumenical church body under the title of the National Conference of Black Churchmen, and the endorsement of James Forman's "Black Manifesto." In June 1969 at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta and under the aegis of NCBC's Theological Commission, a group of Black theologians met to write a policy statement. The statement was influenced by my book, *Black Theology and Black Power*, which had appeared two months earlier. *Black Theology* was defined as a "theology of Black liberation."

Black theology then was not created in a vacuum and neither was it simply the intellectual enterprise of Black professional theologians. Black theology like our sermons and songs, was born in the context of the Black community as Black people were attempting to make sense out of their struggle for freedom.

To be sure, we have talked and written about our "dream," which has not been realized. Indeed, every Sunday morning Black people gather in our churches, to find out where we are in relation to the actualization of our dream. If people have no dreams they will accept the world as it is and will not seek to change it. To dream is to know

what it ain't suppose to be. No one in our time expressed this eschatological note any clearer than Martin Luther King Jr. in his "March on Washington" address in 1963: "*I have a dream that one day my four children will live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.*"

What visions do we have for the people in 1977? Do we still believe with King that "we as a people will get to the promised land?" If so, how will we get there? Simply by preaching sermons and singing songs? What is the Black Church doing in order to actualize the dreams that it talks about? These are hard questions, and they are not intended as a put-down of the Black Church.

I was born in the Black Church in Bearden, Arkansas, and began my ministry in that church at the age of 16. Everything I am as well as what I know that I ought to be was shaped in the context of the Black Church. Indeed, it is because I love the Church that I am required, as one of its theologians and preachers to ask: "When does the Black Church's actions deny its faith? What are the activities in our churches that should not only be rejected as unchristian but also exposed as demonic? What are the evils in our church and community that we should commit ourselves to destroy?"

Bishops, pastors, and church executives do not like to disclose the wrongdoings of their respective denominations. They are like doctors, lawyers, and other professionals who seem bound to keep silent, because to speak the truth is to guarantee one's exclusion from the inner dynamics of power in the profession. But I contend that the *faith* of the Black Church lays a claim upon all church people that transcends the social mores of a given profession. Therefore, to cover-up and to minimize the sins of the church is to guarantee its destruction as a community of faith, committed to the liberation of the oppressed.

If we want the Black Church to live beyond our brief histories and thus to serve as the "Old Ship of Zion" that will carry the people home to freedom, then we had better examine the direction in which the ship is going. Who is the Captain of the Ship, and what are his economic and political interests? This question should not only be applied to bishops, but to pastors and theologians, deacons and stewards.

Unless we are willing to apply the most severe scientific analysis to our church communities in terms of economics and politics and be willing to confess and repent of our sins in the struggle for liberation, then the Black Church, as we talk about it, will remain a relic of history and nothing more. God will have to raise up new instruments of freedom

so that his faithfulness to liberate the poor and weak can be realized in history. We must not forget that God's Spirit will use us as her instrument only in so far as we remain agents of liberation by using our resources for the empowerment of the poor and weak.

It is very easy for us to expose the demonic and oppressive character of the White Church, and I have done my share of that. But such exposures of the sins of the White Church, without applying the same criticism to ourselves, is hypocritical and serves as a camouflage of our own shortcomings and sins. Either we mean what we say about liberation or we do not. If we mean it, the time has come for an inventory in terms of the authenticity of our faith as defined by the historical commitment of the Black denominational churches toward liberation.

Young Blacks contend that the Black churches of today, with very few exceptions, are not involved in liberation but primarily concerned about how much money they raise for a new church building or the preacher's anniversary. This critique of the Black Church is not limited to young college students. Many Black people view the church as a hindrance to Black liberation, because Black preachers and church members appear to be more concerned about their own institutional survival than the freedom of poor people in their communities. "Historically," many radical Blacks say, "the Black church was involved in the struggle but today it is not."

Whatever we might think about the unfairness of this severe indictment, we would be foolish to ignore it. For connected with this critique is our international image. In the African context, not to mention Asia and Latin America, the Black Church experiences a similar credibility problem. There is little in our theological expressions and church practice that rejects American capitalism that is so oppressive in Third World countries. The time has come for us to move beyond institutional survival in a capitalistic and racist society and begin to take more seriously our dreams about a new heaven and a new earth. Does this dream include capitalism or is it a radically new way of life more consistent with African socialism as expressed the *Arusha Declaration* in Tanzania?

I think that the time has come for Black theologians and church people to move beyond a mere reaction to White racism in America and begin to extend our vision of a new socially constructed humanity in the whole inhabited world. We must be concerned with the quality of human life not only in the ghettos of American cities but also in Africa, Asia and Latin America. For humanity is whole, and cannot be isolated into racial and national groups. Indeed there will be no freedom for anyone until there is freedom for all.

What's All This Jive About Black Theology?

Black theology is no "jive." It is an historical movement of Black people. It began before our ancestors left Africa and it has persisted, in one form or another, in every stage of our development to this day.

We are an African people in diaspora. We are a religious people in the quest of our God-given destiny. Almost all of us believe in God. More than 18 million of us belong to some church or religious organization. White missionaries taught us about a pale-faced, blue-eyed savior named Jesus who would make us—

"civilized"
"respectable"
"cheerful"
"good"
"obedient"
SLAVES.

But we found something different in the Bible. We re-interpreted White Christianity and created a Black Christianity which had to do with—

manhood and womanhood
persevering under undeserved suffering
destroying the institution of slavery
worshiping God in our own way
understanding America as "Egypt-land"
understanding Jesus as "Liberator"
understanding the gospel as
LIBERATION

With this new African-American religion, we left the White missionaries and their churches. We organized independent Black churches. We created Black-led congregations. We made our churches the weapon of our struggle against dehumanization, racism, political oppression, economic exploitation, and cultural domination.

This is, therefore, what Black theology is all about. It is the way Black people (Christians, in this context) think about God and act on his promise of liberation through Jesus Christ. In the hands of preachers and scholars it gets involved in more complicated ideas, propositions, feelings and assumptions about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy spirit, and Black peoplehood. *But essentially it is Black God-talk and Black God-action—from the slave baracoons of the 17th century to the mass Black churches of the 20th.* It is not mystical "jive." It is something very real to our people. It is "how we got over." It is "how we overcome." It is how we will triumph over every form of oppression and help to make a new world of freedom and equality for all people—by the power of God.

—From: *Orientation Papers, Black Theology Project*

This means that we must stretch our vision by connecting it with other oppressed people's visions so that together all the

victims of the world might take charge of their history for the creation of a new humanity. As Franz Fanon has taught us, if we wish to live up to our people's expectations, we must look beyond European and American capitalism. Indeed, *"we must invent and we must make discoveries . . . For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new (humanity)."*

I realize, with Merleau Ponty, that "one does not become a revolutionary through science but through indignation." Every revolution needs its Rosa Parks. This point has often been overlooked by some Marxists and other sociologists who seem to think that all answers are found in scientific analysis. Mao Tse-tung responded to such an attitude with this comment: "There are people who think that Marxism is a kind of magic truth with which one can cure any disease. We should tell them that dogmas are more useless than cow dung. Dung can be used as fertilizer."

But these comments do not disprove the truth of the Marxists' social analysis which focuses on economics and class and is intended as empowerment for the oppressed to radically change human social arrangements. Such an analysis will help us not only to understand the relation between economics and oppression in North America but also throughout the world. Liberation is not a process limited to Black-White relations in the United States; it is also a process to be applied to the relations between the rich and poor nations of the Third World.

If Jesus Christ is more than a religious expression of our economic and sexist interests, then there is no reason to resist the truth of the Marxist and feminist analyses.

I contend that Black theology is not afraid of truth from any quarter. We simply reject the attempt of others to tell us what truth is without our participation in its definition. That is why dogmatic Marxists seldom succeed in the Black community, especially when the dogma is filtered through a brand of white racism not unlike that of the capitalists. If our long history of struggle has taught us anything, it is that if we are to be free, we Black people will have to do it. Freedom is not a gift but is a risk that must be taken. No one can tell us what liberation is and how we ought to struggle for it, as if liberation can be found in words.

Liberation is a process to be located and understood only in an oppressed community struggling for freedom. If there are people in and outside our community who want to talk to us about this liberation process in global terms and from Marxist and other perspectives, we should be ready to talk. But *only* if they are prepared to listen to us and we to them will genuine dialogue take place. For I will not listen to anybody who refuses to take racism seriously, especially

when they themselves have not been victims of it. And they should listen to us *only* if we are prepared to listen to them in terms of the particularity of oppression in their historical context.

Therefore, I reject dogmatic Marxism that reduces every contradiction to class analysis and thus ignores racism as a legitimate point of departure in the process of liberation. There are racist Marxists as there are racist capitalists, and we must struggle against both. But we must be careful not to reject the message of the Marxist's social analysis simply because we do not like the vessels that the message comes in. If we do that, then it is hard to explain how we can remain Christians in view of the White vessels in which the Gospel was first introduced to Black people.

The world is small. Politically and economically our freedom is connected with the struggles of oppressed peoples throughout the world.

The global perspective in Black theology enlarges our vision regarding the process of liberation. What does Black theology have to say about the fact that two-thirds of humanity is poor and that this poverty arises from the exploitation of the poor nations by rich nations? The people of the United States comprise 6% of the world's population, but we consume 40% of the world's resources. What then is the implication of the Black demand for justice in the United States when related to justice for all the world's victims?

The dependent status we experience in relation to White people, Third World countries experience in relation to the United States. Thus in our attempt to liberate ourselves from White America, it is important to be sensitive to the complexity of the world situation and the oppressive role the United States plays in it. African, Latin American, and Asian theologians, as well as sociologists and political scientists, can aid us in the analysis of this complexity. In this analysis, our starting point in terms of racism is not negated but enhanced when connected with imperialism and sexism.

We must create a global vision of human liberation and include in it the distinctive contribution of the black experience. We have been struggling for nearly 400 years! What has that experience taught us that would be useful in the creation of a new historical future for all oppressed peoples? And what can others teach us from their historical experience in the struggle for justice? This is the issue that Black theology needs to address. I hope that we will not back off from this important task but will face it with courage, knowing that the future of humanity is in the hands of oppressed peoples, because God has said: *"Those that hope in me shall not be put to shame"* (Is. 49:23). ■

BLACK THEOLOGY

Review to Renew

by Howard Dodson

I have been asked to present an analysis of the crisis facing Blacks and American society and a strategy for a new Black agenda. Generally, when people hear a phrase like "strategy for a new Black agenda," they assume that such a strategy and agenda is designed to contribute to the ultimate liberation of Black people. What I propose to present is much more modest than that.

I do not come with a strategy for our liberation. That would presume the existence, in my judgment, of a theory of revolutionary transformation that is fitted to the unique conditions of American society. For, it is only through the revolutionary transformation of American society that Black liberation will in fact be achieved. To the best of my knowledge, no such theory has been elaborated.

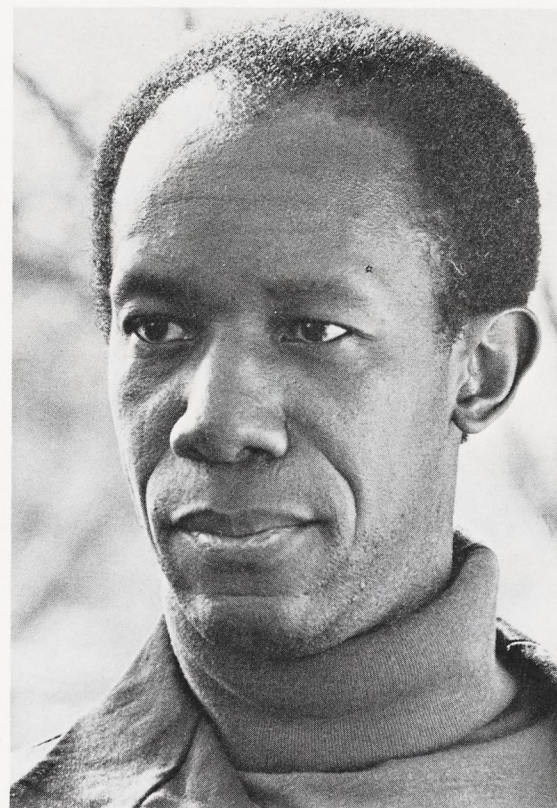
While the mounting contradictions with Black and American society clearly indicate that we do not have 100 or 200 years to wait before these contradictions are resolved, at the same time it is clear that, given the complexity of these problems, they're not going to be solved in the next year, or decade, or indeed generation. We must begin with the realization that it will, in all probability, take longer than we would like. A sense of *revolutionary patience*, then is required for this stage of struggle.

With that preface, I will now try to review and critique some of the most recent strategies and tactics of the Black movement, analyze some of the most critical contradictions both within American society and within Black America, and suggest some of the first steps that must be taken in preparing ourselves to participate in the process of creating new theories and agendas.

Whether we have realized it or not, the world as we have known it — especially since the end of World War II — is a thing of the past. The period of American hegemony, the "great American dream era" which began in 1945, has ended.

Howard Dodson is director of the Institute of the Black World in Atlanta, Ga.

"Creating the new society will require that Blacks be willing to struggle, first, against the enemy within ourselves; our own individualism and our own political irresponsibility, our own victim mentality and our own reluctance to live up to our fullest potential as human beings — allowing us willingly to accept rather than to avoid the challenge and the historic necessity to transform American society for the mutual benefit of everyone."



Howard Dodson

The American economy which once provided its people with the highest standard of living in the world is in a shambles. The American political system that preaches democracy in name, while it practices subversion and repression in deed is bankrupt and exposed.

The once arrogant, boastful, "superior" American people for whom this period has been one of growing prosperity and rising expectations now find themselves threatened and demoralized by military defeats and rampant inflation; perennial recessions and unemployment; soaring crime rates and drug epidemics; emotional and spiritual depression; and an economic, political and social system that has proven itself totally incapable of identify-

ing, much less addressing the problems posed by this new era. Yes, Black blues poet, B.B. King was hitting the right note when he sang, "The thrill is gone, the thrill is gone away for good."

Black people are not immune to this confusion, demoralization and collapse. Rooted as we are at the bottom, if not completely outside of American society, we have been among the first to feel the effects of the prevailing crisis. And as it has mushroomed throughout the land, we have been among its chief victims.

Our unemployment rates are double and sometimes triple that of the national average. Crime rates in our communities continue to soar. The exploitation of Blacks by Blacks has increased. The

prisons and the courts continue to mete out everything but equal justice before the law. Reform and rehabilitation are a cruel joke. Hundreds of thousands of Black youth have been sentenced to the ranks of the *permanently* unemployed. The Black family is in crisis. The schools — Black as well as White — are failing to educate our children for the new roles they are being called upon to play.

The Black Church is losing its hold on our community and the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the past two decades which served as such invigorating forces for the social and moral redevelopment of America are now in complete disarray. Our cities, the spoils of victory we thought we were winning less than a decade ago, have turned out to be nothing more than the cancerous appendages on the carcass of a dying civilization. The sense of hopelessness and despair that infect America has crept into our lives as well.

It is important to note that the crises in America are *national* phenomena, not just Black people's crises. They will require, therefore, *national* solutions. Black people cannot solve the problems of Black people in America, without in the final analysis resolving the problems of America — all of America.

Electoral Politics Option

Against this background, I would like to review some of our most recent politics. Black political behavior in the 1976 election was the continuation of a trend that dates back to at least 1968. It is likely that this trend has characterized our total history in the electoral political arena. But it is clear that since 1968, the votes cast by Blacks have been more often than not a reflection of what we were *against* than what we were *for*. By 1968, the shift away from other forms of social and political struggle toward electoral politics was based, at least in part, on the assumption that Blacks were more likely to represent Black interests than Whites. Our votes for Black elected officials, our struggles to get Blacks appointed to positions of authority and responsibility, and our efforts to get Blacks into jobs that we had been excluded from in the past were votes and struggles *against* White domination of the economic and political system. Rarely if ever did we ask the question, which Blacks should hold these offices or occupy these

positions — and toward what specific ends?

In the presidential contests since 1968, it can be said that the Black vote has been essentially a reflection of Black opposition to Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. And in 1976, both during the primaries and the actual election, the Black vote was clearly a negative one.

It will be recalled that Black support for Jimmy Carter in the primaries was largely an effort on the part of Blacks to prevent George Wallace from becoming the Democratic candidate for the presidency. Black votes for Carter in the primaries, then, were essentially votes against Wallace. The same holds true for the presidential race. Ford made it clear that he had no intention of addressing any of the interests and needs of the Black community. It was of utmost importance, therefore, that he and his administration be removed. In retrospect, we should conclude that for Blacks, the results of the 1976 election were more an important defeat than a major victory. Carter's election was and is in no way an expression of what Black people are *for*. We have yet to clarify for *ourselves* what we are *for*.

It is important that we understand this not only in terms of what it tells us about the kind of role that we have played, but more importantly for what it tells us about the limitations inherent in continuing to play such a role. Until we are clear about what we are struggling *for*, it is impossible to unify and educate for action. That is one of the major problems facing the Black movement at this stage.

Even more significant is the need to realize that the problem facing the American political system is not a problem of personalities. Even assuming that Carter has the best of intentions, the fact is that the American economic and political structures under White or Black control cannot produce the changes in the material and moral life that Black people and American society in general now require. Racism, sexism, classism and other forms of social and economic oppression are endemic to the system. Only a radical (root) transformation of the system itself will resolve these contradictions. Contrary to Ma Bell and others, the system is *not* the solution. The system is the problem as far as Black Americans are concerned.

When Gerald Ford took office in August 1974 the national inflation rate was 12% and 4.86 million people were unemployed. There were 86.3 million people in the labor force and the unemployment rate was 5.3%. When Gerald Ford left office, in January of 1977, the labor force had increased by two million; the number of unemployed people had increased by three million to 7.86 million, and the rate of unemployment which had been 5.3% was now 8%.

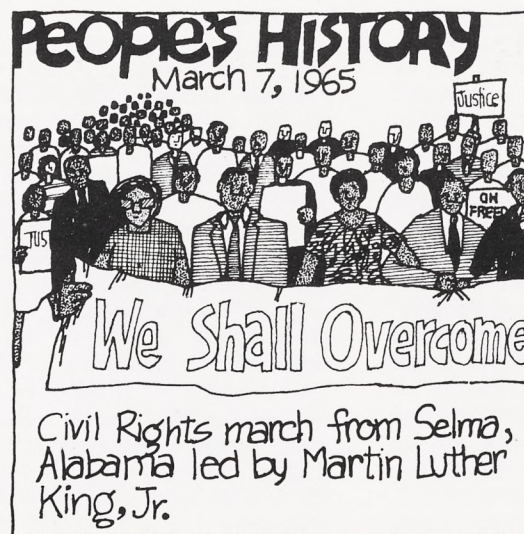
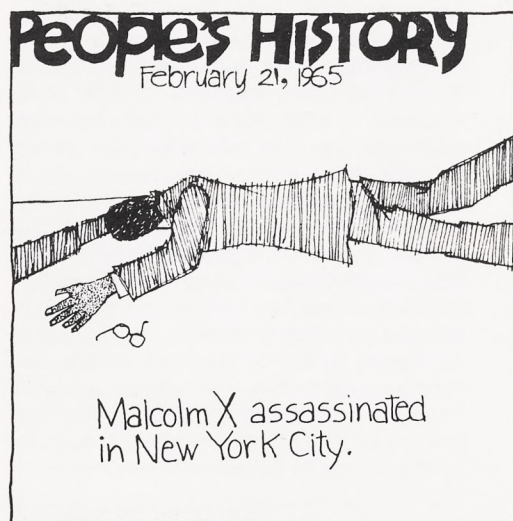
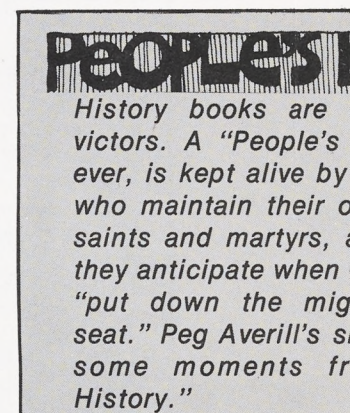
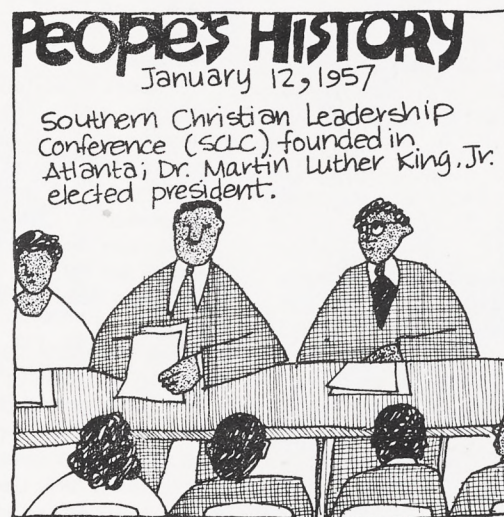
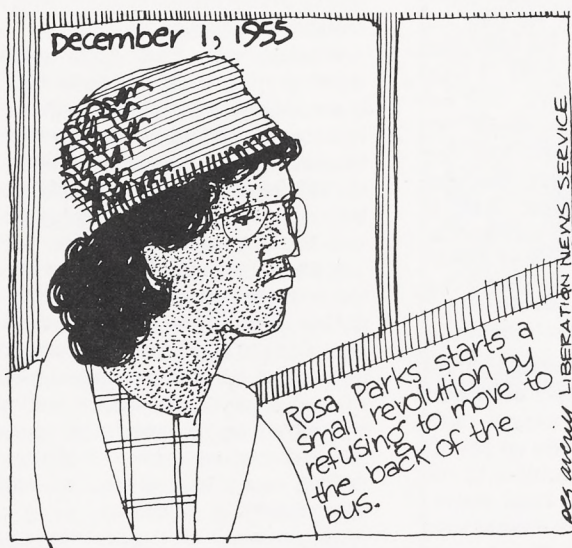
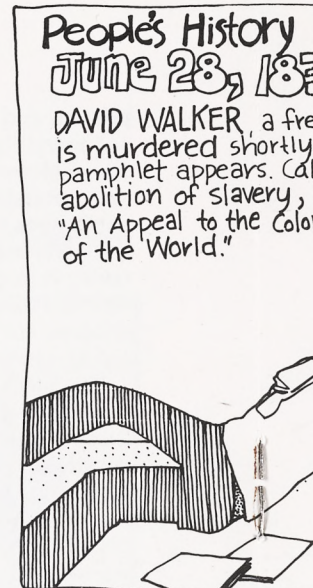
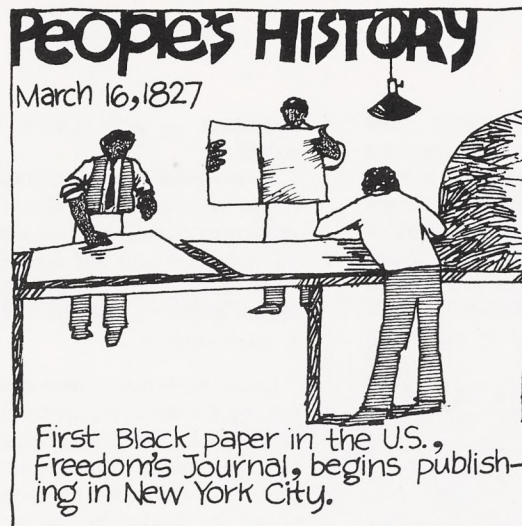
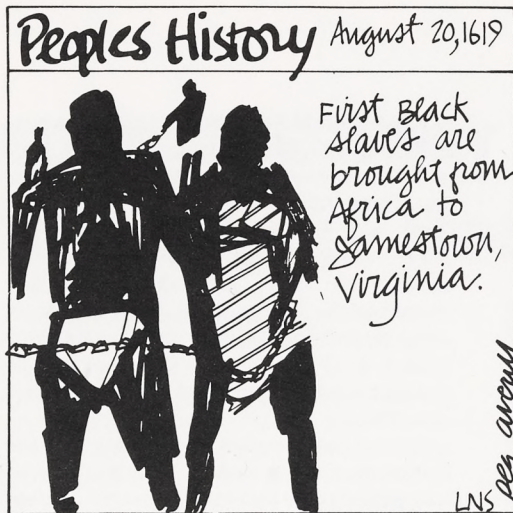
What it really meant was simply that the ability to cut the rate of inflation in half was achieved by increasing unemployment by almost 100% — doubling the rate of White unemployment and quadrupling the rate of Black unemployment. And this was praised as "recovery."

What's more, Ford accomplished this reduced inflation rate by building up one of the most massive deficits in the history of the country. When he took over the White House, the deficit was 11.7 billion dollars; in 1975 he raised the budget deficit to 71.2 billion dollars; by 1976 the budget deficit was back "down" to 60 billion dollars.

It should also be noted for instance, that the increase (some 44 billion dollars) in the deficit between the fourth quarters of 1974 and 1975 coincidentally corresponds to the amount of corporate surplus declared for the same period. The rate of profit declared by American corporations during that same month was some 48 billion dollars. So the idea that this kind of intervention creates jobs is ridiculous.

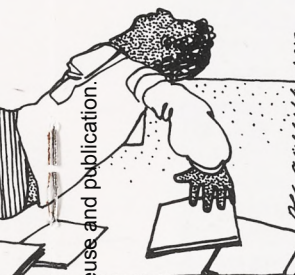
At the center of the problem is the fact that at least three-fourths of the federal budget is already committed to fixed expenses. That is, President Carter today or any other President has only some 25% of the budget to play around with, and if he is to use the so-called "power and authority" of the State to deal with the problems of the economy, he must increase that 25%. That is, he must increase the deficit. Thus, Carter already has a budget with a deficit 11 billion dollars greater than that of Gerald Ford. The country cannot continue to live on credit for long. And balancing the budget remains a highly remote and costly enterprise. For, it is impossible for American capitalism at this stage to have a balanced budget, unless, as Bill Strickland warns us, "You get rid of a sizeable portion of the American population."

Continued on page 12



History 3, 1830

ER, a free black man, and shortly after his peers. Calling for the slavery, it was titled to the Colored Citizens d."

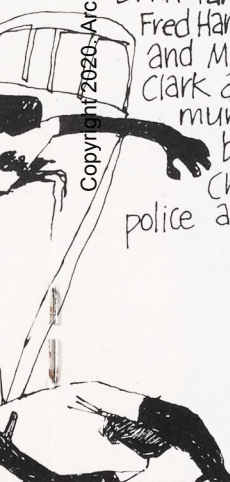


History

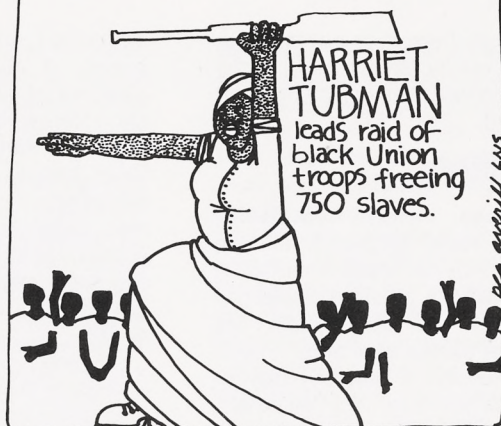
ks are written by the People's History," how-alive by the oppressed, in their own calendar of martyrs against the day te when God will indeed the mighty from their verill's sketches capture ents from "People's

History

Black Panthers Fred Hampton and Mark Clark are murdered by the Chicago police and the FBI.



People's History June 2, 1863



Peoples History July 6, 1919

30,000 white workers organized by the Chicago Stockyards Labor Council march to demand withdrawal of troops from black neighborhoods.



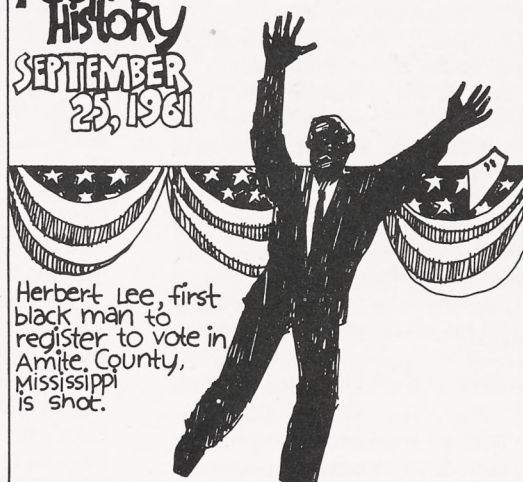
People's History

February 1, 1960
Civil Rights sit-ins begin at a Segregated Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina.



People's History SEPTEMBER 23, 1961

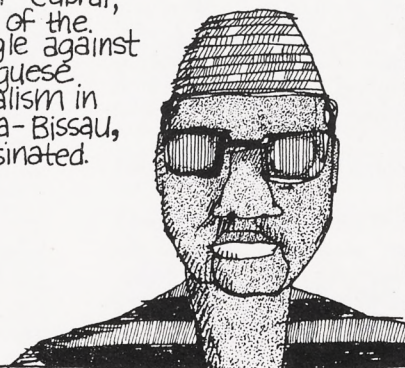
Herbert Lee, first black man to register to vote in Amite County, Mississippi is shot.



People's History

January 20, 1973

Amilcar Cabral, leader of the struggle against Portuguese colonialism in Guinea-Bissau, assassinated.



People's History

March 14, 1977

IT'S IN YOUR HANDS

Fannie Lou Hamer, civil rights leader, dies of cancer in Mississippi.



Continued from page 9

The capitalist option, then, is not a realistic alternative. The capitalist system simply cannot provide for the needs of the masses of people. And the Black capitalist option is no more viable than the White capitalist option. For capitalism, be it black, green, yellow or white is about exploitation. Black capitalists, in order to be successful capitalists have to exploit somebody. It is likely that they will be other Blacks, either here in the United States, or in Africa or the Caribbean.

Black Nationalist Option

Black involvement in the electoral political arena is in many ways an extension of the nationalist stage of our movement — a stage that was characterized by its emphasis on affirming our identity as Blacks. Black is beautiful! There is no doubt about that. And it is important that we affirm that fact. But it is not sufficient. It is a repudiation of the notion that Blacks are inferior, but not a projection of the goals and aspirations of our struggle.

The one-to-five Black Nationalist state option, which was another expressed political goal of this tendency, was based on the assumption that it was possible to make peace with America as it is — to rip off a corner of it, organize that corner to serve the needs of Blacks and live happily ever after. Well, that is not possible. America is both a nation and an empire. Its tentacles currently stretch around the world. Blacks in Africa are not even safe as long as America, as it is currently organized, remains intact. How could we even hope that America would leave us alone here on these shores?

The Pan-Africanist option is a further expression and affirmation of our Black identity, but projected on a world scale. It is also an expression of the cynicism and despair about the prospects for the future of Blacks in America and indeed the future of America itself. It is a capitulation of the belief that it is impossible for Black people to wage a successful struggle for freedom and human dignity here in America.

Pan-Africanism projects the notion that the key to Black freedom in America is the liberation of Africa. In actual fact, the reverse is true. For it is America, not Africa, that has the world's people in its grips. Creating a new America, waging a successful struggle here in America, not

trying to get away from it or substituting someone else's reality for our own, is the key to Black liberation both in America and around the world.

Marxist Option

In recent times, various neo-Marxist formulas have been projected as the revolutionary option for Black Americans. What has received the greatest airing has been steeped in the dogma and the realities of other places and other times. Marxism is a theory, a methodology of analysis, and an ideology. All too often, however, the neo-Marxists have latched on to the ideological dimension and tried to impose it on unique American conditions. Marxist theory and methodology hold a lot of possibilities if we apply them critically to the understanding of our particular situation. The experiences of Mao Tse Tung, Ho Chin Minh and Amilcar Cabral are just a few examples of the ways in which the application of Marxist theory, methodology and praxis can be successful.

Rather than learn from their experiences and begin with the study of the unique contradictions of this society, however, the neo-Marxists seem to be content to quote these brothers' words (in vain) or mistake the conclusions they reached about their own societies as universal truths. Even worse, many revert to quoting Marx's own 19th century analyses of the contradictions of pre-imperialist, European-based capitalism as though they reflected the 20th and indeed, 21st century realities of America today.

America needs to be understood if we are to change it. Superimposing other people's realities, be they 20th century African realities or 19th and 20th century European ones will only lead to further obfuscation and confusion.

Now, the moral of all of this history and analysis is that whether we will to or not, we cannot escape the awesome responsibility of struggling here in America to transform American society and build a new America.

How did we come to be vested with this responsibility?

James Boggs explains that: *"Ten years ago, the Black movement raised the question of power which the labor movement did not do in the 1930's. But those who were in the leadership of the movement did not realize that when an*

oppressed layer raises the question of power, it must also face the responsibilities of power — that is, it must face the political responsibility of reorganizing the entire nation, from top to bottom and from bottom to top, for the benefit of everybody in the nation, regardless of race, color, sex, creed or national origin. If it does not do this then the movement will inevitably degenerate into opportunism or escapism — as the Black movement has done.

"It was no crime that we did not recognize the awesome responsibilities of raising the concept of power ten years ago. Looking back, it was clear that those who were most active in the movement had little idea of the profound questions which had been raised about American society by the Black movement and the Vietnam War. In the heat of the struggles to redress the grievances of the past, we did not realize that Blacks were also raising the most profound questions of the future; that the American way of life had become as outmoded as feudalism had become several hundred years ago; and that the whole of humankind is on the threshold of a new era, a new time.

"Therefore we did not realize that we were faced with the responsibility for creating a new philosophy and practice of politics — as the continuing commitment to the responsibilities of governing this entire country — on the basis of which we could then grapple with the complex questions of creating a new society in the United States."

New Goals for New Times

The task of creating the new society we seek to build in America will require that Blacks be willing to struggle, first, against the enemy within ourselves, our own individualism and our own political irresponsibility, our own victim mentality and our own reluctance to live up to our fullest potential as human beings — allowing us willingly to accept rather than avoid the challenge and the historic necessity to transform American society for the mutual benefit of everyone.

For many of us, this is too awesome a task. We prefer deliberately to remain on level of perception or reaction, of complaints and protests, because we sense that if we once begin to think with more depth about the nature of capitalism and how it has been destroying our relation-

ships with each other and the entire world community, we will also have to accept responsibility, as citizens, for the politics of this society and not just blame everything on the politicians.

Boggs emphasizes that, *"we are not just victims of the system or of our exploiters. Living in the richest country in the world, where even those on welfare live better than the middle classes in most other countries, and where every school child is constantly exposed to information about the evils of racism and capitalism we can and must transcend the limitations and the slave mentality which have been natural to us in a racist, sexist, class society. As human beings we have a choice. We can continue on our present, individualistic and materialistic course — just struggling for more things which we must then stay home, behind barred windows and doors, to guard, because we are afraid they will be stolen by our equally individualistic and materialistic neighbors. Or we can commit ourselves to struggle, thoughtfully, resolutely and systematically, in association with our thoughtful and resolute comrades, for another way to live, a way of life which will mean putting a ceiling on our greeds in order to satisfy our deeper human needs to live in harmony with one another and to control our own destiny."*

Those who decide to commit themselves to such struggle must then begin raising the question, "What kind of human society do we want here in America?" We must take certain terms that I have used like racism, capitalism and imperialism and try to understand for ourselves what they have actually meant in the development of the structures of American society, and how they have impacted the lives of the people who live in America and around the world. Then, we must begin the process of determining what the alternatives should be.

Racism, for instance is a system whereby one race of people exploits the labor, talents, strengths, gifts, and lives of another race of people. What kind of society do we envision as an alternative to a racist society? What kind of real society do we envision with a mix of White people, Black people, Chicano people, Native American people, Asian people? What are the social relationships that should govern these people? What is the nature of the relationship of their respective heritages to this kind of society?

Moreover, on an internal level, we must

struggle within ourselves and ask, how can we — who have been made to believe that we are nothing but victims by this racist society — break out of that and begin to take responsibility in new ways for our lives, for our future, and indeed for the whole society?

We define capitalism as a system that by nature exploits the labor of the majority of the people, for the advantage, the profits and the advancement of a small sector of the people. It is a system that is built in such a way that the decisions in the society are made basically on the level of what produces the most profits for the corporations, and that small group of individuals who control the major corporations of the society. It is not enough simply to condemn it, by name. The question is, what do we project for a society that moves beyond the capitalist way of economic and social organization? What alternatives do we see for human development? How shall we decide the use of natural resources? We must give those questions a content that is indigenous to the American situation.

And what about us? What do we do about our own internalization of the capitalist way of thinking? Of its temptations and its willingness to exploit other people for our own good. How shall we face the fact that for many of us, what is really wrong with capitalism is that we are not the capitalists? How shall we deal with the transformation that is necessary to go to the next stage?

We speak of imperialism as a world wide system whereby capitalism moves its tentacles out to exploit the labor and the resources of peoples beyond its own borders for purpose of its own economic advancement. Are we prepared to deal with what it will mean to live in America but no longer live off of the rest of the non-White world? What kind of society will we have that will no longer exploit Jamaica and Trinidad and Guyana and all the parts of Africa? What kinds of impacts will these changes mean for our own style of life? All the things that we ride in, all the things that we wear, all the things that we currently aspire to, depend so often on the exploitation of other peoples in other parts of the world.

We must begin to project, externally, and internally, the ways in which we believe women and men must live that take us against and beyond racism, capitalism, imperialism, after they have become to us

more than slogans, after they have become realities that we really understand.

Boggs has concluded, I think correctly, that the fundamental contradiction facing American society at this stage is the contradiction between its material and technological overdevelopment and its social and political underdevelopment. This being the case, it is imperative that we commit ourselves to the task of developing people for that higher level of struggle which must be waged if we are to begin the process of transforming American society.

Continuing to struggle against manifestations of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of social oppression and capitalist/imperialist exploitation is necessary, but not sufficient. Developing theories, strategies and tactics for eradicating one or the other of these forms of oppression and exploitation is necessary, but not sufficient.

An analysis of the contradictions that are peculiar to American society is required. A theory of social transformation that is adequate to the task of dealing with *all* of these contradictions is necessary. A commitment on the part of people like yourselves to prepare yourselves and our people for this next stage of protracted struggle is needed if we are to assume to responsibilities of creating the new American society that history has thrust upon our shoulders. ■

Continued from page 2

May I assure you that I am working with the leadership to bring about change. As a sociologist, however, I must remind you that change seldom comes from the top down. The General Convention in Minnesota probably would not have authorized the ordination of women as priests if the irregular ordinations had not occurred in 1974. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was not passed until after the March on Washington in 1963. The action at the top of a system—be it the Church or the government—usually is in reaction to initiatives that were taken by those who were oppressed. While cooperation is a valid social process, so is conflict or competition. Your letter indicates that you would prefer a cooperative approach; it is all right to prefer that approach—but on whose terms—those of the *leadership* or those of the *communicant members*? When there is not consensus, then conflict is inevitable.

Charles V. Willie
Harvard Graduate School

Suffering: Disproportionately Black

by William A. Yon

Birmingham was selected as the site of the third public hearing sponsored by the Urban Bishops' Coalition to explore "the Church's mission in the urban crisis." The word we got was that Atlanta wanted the hearing. Maybe Birmingham looked more typical of the urban South. Maybe it was because we intimated that we might come up with \$1 million dollars over the next few years to do something new. Anyway, it had been a long time since Birmingham got something that Atlanta wanted, so that got things off to a good start.

I was impressed by the rationality and fairness of the choice. The young Black legislator, a member of our panel, figured it was political. He turned out to be right.

Find some people who are willing to spend a day listening and asking questions on behalf of the church's servanthood.

BIRMINGHAM HEARINGS PANEL

John Walker, Bishop of Washington, D.C. and chairman of the Urban Bishops Coalition, convened the Birmingham panel. Also serving with him were Morris Arnold, Bishop of Massachusetts; Frank Bromberg, businessman and diocesan treasurer; Tony Harrison, state legislator; John Krumm, Bishop of Southern Ohio; Ted McEachern of Nashville and Odessa Woolfolk of Birmingham, urban specialists; and the Rev. Martin Tilson, rector of St. Luke's, Birmingham.

It was a good panel: bishops from Washington, Cincinnati, Massachusetts, a local urbanologist, the young legislator, an out-of-town urban mission consultant, a suburban rector, and the diocesan treasurer. Get them together to orient them to this city and this diocese and their function in this hearing, and the action starts right there.

Right away the Alabama bishop and the local committee members begin to learn some things about *their* city, its origins as an industrial center, satellite of Pittsburgh, and its future as an educational center; about the subtle Black-White coalitions that are forming and shaping Birmingham's political future; about the political and economic strangulation of the core city by its 32 peripheral

The Rev. William A. Yon served on the staff of the Diocese of Alabama from 1963 until 1973. He is currently rector of a Birmingham parish, engaged in private practice as an organization consultant, and serves as chairperson of the diocese's Department of Church and Society.

municipalities. Local church leaders meeting for the first time and learning from local experts.

Put out the word that you've got some money and you want to spend a day hearing some ideas about how to spend it, and it's not hard to find 20 people who will put some energy into preparing testimony. All day long the plaint went on:

— Some 11,000 families with incomes under \$2,000, living in sub-standard, privately rented dwellings.

— The "walking wounded," not sick enough to be institutionalized, not well enough to live independently in society.

— A criminal justice system, alleged to be as criminal as it is just and systematic, victimizing the poor especially, and the Black poor, more especially. "Every Black person knows someone in prison."

— Infant mortality (that means babies dying) more frequently in the United States than in most other developed countries, more frequently in Birmingham than in most of the rest of the country, more frequently among Blacks than Whites.

— Christian gays, suffering the condemnation of silence of the church.

— The deaf and otherwise physically impaired, without housing or educational opportunities adequately designed to their needs.

— Hunger in an area among the nation's leaders in non-utilization of federal food programs.

— Young people, bombarded by more options for self-destruction, finding fewer options for self-fulfillment, and confronted by a moralistic church which turns them off.

— An economic system whose capital increasingly flows to where its owners live: outside the corporate limits of the core city.

— Women, struggling for equality without adequate constitutional protection.

The Bishop of Alabama finally confessed that it was enough to make him "weep over Jerusalem."

Tony Harrison, aforementioned legislator, young and Black, became the panel's gadfly-in-residence. All day long he asked witness after witness: "Just who are these poor . . . these hungry . . . these slum-dwellers . . . these prisoners?" Sometimes he had to tease out the response with a more

explicit question: "Does this group of which you speak have any particular racial composition?" All day long the answer came back: "Well, yes, a disproportionate number of them are . . . BLACK."

And so it was that as we opened our eyes to the human misery in our midst in all its forms we were to discover what we already knew; that well over a hundred years after the War of Black Emancipation and 14 years after this city became known to much of the world as Bombingham — and in spite of the many social transformations brought about by those tragic events — human misery in this society is inextricably related to RACISM. The Bishop of Alabama called it sin. It promises to be as enduring.

Strangely, the day was not a downer. Perhaps because of the way Bill Stough spoke at the end, giving good evidence that he had been listening — all day — with both his head and his heart, making some explicit commitments in response and somehow striking a note of Gospel hope; perhaps because Johnny Walker, who was presiding, and John Krumm, and Ben Arnold, and Tony Harrison let that seduce them out of their listener roles into making their own testimonies of dismay over the enormity of the issues, but affirming their resoluteness to carry on — whatever, some of us milling around at the end acknowledged to each other that it had been a spiritual experience. Hope had been quickened. Some indefinable New Life seemed to be stirring.

The hearing was on Dec. 16. The good feelings persisted for 11 more days. On Dec. 27 the executive committee of the Diocese of Alabama agreed to propose a budget for 1978 which would include a 10% salary increase for all diocesan employees. Funds for responding to the needs of the world's poor and hungry and homeless were slashed in order to make this possible.

The battle has not yet been won. It hasn't been lost either. It merely continues. And doubtless will for a while.

Now, BE a Witness!

When you read THE WITNESS do you sometimes feel you'd like to talk with others to see how you could gain further understanding about the issues presented? And join others in some constructive action?

The Church and Society Network will take you there. You've recently received its brochure in the mail, inviting you to enroll as a supporting member and we urge you to do so.

THE WITNESS and the Network operate independently of each other but have parallel concerns. In the Church and Society Network, through local and regional programs, ideas become alive.

Continued from page 3

anguish, which shrouds Black communities and impels the resurgence of activist Black theology.

That frustration and anguish is nowhere more viscerally brought home to us than in the continued victimization of the Rev. Benjamin Chavis and the Wilmington 10. Chavis, who was honorary chairman of BTP's Black Church and Black Community Conference in August 1977, remains incarcerated in North Carolina on preposterous and disproven charges, graphically described by Robert Maurer of Amnesty International in a 1976 article in THE WITNESS.

Ben Chavis languishes in jail simply because (1) it is politically expedient for North Carolina Governor James Hunt to suppress this living symbol of liberation-oriented Black Christianity; and (2) it is politically inexpedient for President Jimmy Carter to pardon the Wilmington 10, thus setting a domestic precedent for the human rights cause Mr. Carter has so loudly articulated relative to other nations.

But Ben Chavis does not simply "languish in jail." Rather — like Paul and Silas, the Wilmington 10 have transformed their incarceration into an active witness for a caring Lord who is ever on the side of the oppressed. Ben Chavis insists that his supporters not only lobby with the White House for the freedom of the Wilmington 10, but that we also intensify our efforts on behalf of political prisoners, all the victims of racism, all those who are oppressed by political and economic distortions inherent in the American social system.

Ben Chavis's indomitable faith, amidst intense personal hardship, is a charge to Black Theology and to the whole body of the Church to persevere and even celebrate, confident in the promise that "the acceptable year of the Lord" is yet at hand. ■

RESOURCE: BLACK THEOLOGY

An hour-long cassette, "The Black Church: A New Theology for Liberation," is available from the Black Theology Project, Room 439, 475 Riverside Drive, New York City 10027. It features interviews with participants in the BTP Conference, interspersed with speech, sermon and song to capture the spirited atmosphere of the gathering, as well as its analytic theological concerns. Price is \$10.

'Christians on the Edge'

by Phyllis M. Jones

The Episcopal Bishops' distressing retreat from support for the ordination of women this Fall marked clearly some current dilemmas of the Community for Christian Faith and Action in Oberlin. We were alternately outraged with the church yet relieved to be rid of it, desirous of initiating political action, yet powerless to affect an institution we had chosen to leave.

Such quandaries spelled out a main theme for many of us, certainly for me: How are we to be Christians in society when we are a small group firmly placed on its edge? How are we to witness to this troubled world beyond providing worship and support for each other? But such issues speak to the present and anticipate the future, and it is the history of our community that concerns me now.

The Community for Christian Faith and Action has many beginnings, but the following paragraph from a news release of January, 1976, marks its structural origin:

"Recognizing that the political determinations of the parish meeting of Monday, Jan. 12, indicate that a majority in Christ Church, Oberlin, wish to dissociate themselves from the course we have taken, we feel that the only creative moral and spiritual action for us is to establish a separate worshipping community . . ."

Much pain, anger, recrimination, and guilt preceded this formal acknowledgment of a split that had been experientially evident for many months. The majority of those remaining at Christ Church had all along favored the principle of women's ordination but thought that its enactment should occur at General Convention. Those of us supporting Peter Beebe, Alison Cheek, and Carter Heyward believed in a different means of effecting women's ordination. We argued that Carter and Alison and their sister priests ordained in Philadelphia in July of 1974 were valid priests deserving our affirmation.

But to argue unanimity of mind or rationale among all remaining in or leaving Christ Church in January of 1976 would

misrepresent the record. For me, the act involved long hours of guilt and doubt as to whether I, a fairly new member of the parish, had the "right" to disrupt an existent congregation. Had I an "obligation" to remain and try to resolve difficulties? Or, had I an "obligation," to rephrase the issue, to follow another interpretation of "good behavior?" I had come to feel that for me there was a spiritual and moral imperative to continue to affirm persons I judged were valid priests. I was unshaken in my beliefs that general Christian dictates and an accurate interpretation of Episcopalian rubrics argued for our position.

I think some left specifically to support Peter Beebe and others to signify their anger over diocesan intervention in parish affairs. I went less for those reasons than to seek out the priests and community that ideologically and experientially provided Christian worship and self-definition for me. I was joined by many in recognizing that the long fight to support the issue of women's ordination since the first celebration by Carter and Alison in December of 1974 in Christ Church had changed me radically: I no longer was nourished by the conventional forms of enacting liturgy and worship in the parish. Many of us felt a need to find space to express liturgically what we had been living in the struggle: joy, grief, self-actualization.

Although it would appear that the Community for Christian Faith and Action evolved principally by practical adaptation to momentary need, a brief look at events in the first 12 months of our existence displays much conscious theoretical and theological planning: Coffee hours to discuss our relationship to the Episcopal Church . . . a summer experiment in worship services with lay celebrants . . . adaptation for the fall of 1976 of a system

of rotation of priestly leadership among Peter, Alison, and Carter . . . the hiring in September of Nona Thompson, as our half-time co-ordinator . . . a retreat day to learn a new form of Bible study from Carter . . . a crucial retreat in November 1976, to deal with the leave-taking of our three priests from us and to decide whether we could or should continue and, if so, in what form . . . the formalization of our status as a chapter of Church and Society.

For me a pattern of three principal concerns — with identity, with leadership, and with celebration of the sacraments — dominated, often without our full awareness, these activities of our first months of independent existence when we flourished and floundered as a worshipping community.

When we left Christ Church, none of us had any idea what our denominational identity or what our period of survival would or should be. Were we really an Episcopal parish in exile? A protest group that would rejoin the local parish when and if the national church approved women's ordination? Or something else altogether? From its first to most recent meeting, however, the Community has always provided for its members Sunday worship. Furthermore, there has been no question that we have felt strongly our Anglican roots, particularly the emphasis on the Lord's Supper.

From our parish we brought with us as resources two strong traditions — practice with experimental liturgy and family education. Our first business was to plan Sunday worship since we had no resident priests. Not only could we rely on previous efforts in executing services but we also could direct our all ages Sunday school forum to plan services to result from its primary purposes of Bible study and fellowship.

From January through November of 1976 many of us felt we didn't want to infringe upon the rights of anyone else by assuming that person's permanent alliance with us. We wanted each person to feel free to return to Christ Church if she or he wanted. In fact, our numbers, initially close to 100, have decreased by about one half, not so much by attrition to other churches but rather by a leave-taking from

Phyllis M. Jones is assistant professor of English at Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio.

any structured worshipping community at all.

If puzzlement over our relationship to the Episcopal Church pushed us to discussion groups on that issue, the passage at Convention of women's ordination in September of 1976 threw us into total confusion. Had we been so successful that we no longer had a reason for a separate existence? Fortunately we had previously scheduled a November retreat to help us clarify our purposes.

For some of us, certainly for me, it seemed unwise and undesirable to try to be a church/church substitute by continuing to meet on Sunday mornings. How could we meet all the traditional "church" needs from Sunday School to choirs? Weren't we, after all, an activist group, a political and social force, that should claim that identity and not compete with "the church?" The answers were complicated by the force among us of two strong stances: feminism and distrust of the institutional church. We were very wary of many of the activities and duties incurred by a traditional congregation, fearful that they often mean volunteer busy work for women — or highly useful activities that nonetheless are only staffed by the women this society has expected to serve for no pay.

Similarly, most of us distrusted enormously the church from our challenging of it. It seemed that, once institutionalized, Christianity frequently reacted with self-preservation rather than creative moral response. Some in the Community felt betrayed by a denomination that seemed to promise a liberal doctrine and in practice labeled as heretical those who felt they were acting within its bounds.

Hence, many of us went to the November retreat thinking that we should meet on a week-day night and define

ourselves as a task force working for social betterment. We hoped thereby to keep everyone with us, enabling anyone to rejoin Christ Church or another congregation and not be forced to choose. Yet somehow in the long hours of struggling with the issue I and others were called to examine our political activist roots and strength: the Gospel and its prayerful study and explication. Somehow out of chaos I found the need to acknowledge my own churchly needs and all of us found the courage to take on ourselves the responsibility for our own worship. We acknowledged we had to be regularly in worship and let social needs penetrate that forum rather than trying to solve problems without steady guidance from the Gospel.

If I had been confused over group identity, I only realized months later how perplexing my attitudes toward the ministry must have seemed to anyone expecting logic. Here was I, a supporter of ordination for women, coming to distrust the theory of leadership by the ordained. Peter, Alison, and Carter, who continued from January to November to be with us for Sunday worship on a rotating basis, sensed such confusion, probably before we did.

For example, Alison in early summer said it was always her joy to return to us but she had begun to wonder whether she shouldn't pay her own way to return as a friend for she felt we really weren't certain what we wanted her to do for us. The reasons for such doubt were easily traced for me. As I witnessed what I thought many loyal to the Episcopal Church wanted Peter Beebe to do and be for them, as I followed his trial and its appeal, it seemed to me that the role of priest was both insufferably limited and unbearably weighted with responsibility. I came to think many of us in the church had too often wanted our ministers to relieve us of responsibility both for our own lives and for Christian witness to the world.

I also knew that the risking and consequent agony Peter, Alison, and Carter underwent caused them to question and examine every aspect of the role of priest. For over two years we had as a group and one to one supported, hassled, and counseled them on the single ques-

tion: What is it to be a priest? I gradually came to believe that if there were external illogic to my desire to proceed as a worshipping community without a minister that there also was an experiential logic to it. All three at various times had stated that a good priest writes her or himself out of a job, that a true priest "spiritually enables" individuals to claim their own power to lead themselves and others to a full release of their potential and influence in the world.

Enablers and facilitators, Peter, Alison, and Carter in November of 1976 deemed that they had to leave us to free their own powers in other callings or tasks. Our fear of going on in November of 1976 probably mostly reflected our grief over losing their leadership. I cannot say whether I will always choose to worship without a minister. I think I cannot know that because of the miracle for me of the ministry of these three remarkable priests in my life. They gave me such an unspeakable model of leadership — at the same time freeing me to realize my own potential — that it will be a very long time before anyone can replace them. And that ministry they fulfilled by being "un-priestly" enough to need me — in such specific ways as comfort and in such all-embracing ways as giving me the power to lay my hands upon them and call them "priest" when very few others would.

No one characteristic distinguishes our worshipping life together more fully than our lay celebration of the Lord's Supper, at once our most Episcopalian and non-Episcopalian mark. From our weekly celebration of this sacrament in our times within an Episcopal parish to our need of this ritual when we had gathered as a small band of protestors within the system, none of us could conceive of worship without

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Maria and Raisa: Free at Last

by Mary Lou Suhor

"There has been no showing or indication in any of the papers presented to me that these women (Maria Cueto and Raisa Nemikin) are other than what they appear to be — persons legitimately engaged in the work of their church. There has been no showing that they are themselves involved in criminal activities or engaged in crime. There has been no indication that they belong to FALN, or condone or espouse its terrorists' views . . . It does not appear to me that coercive incarceration beyond six months' duration is justified in situations of this kind."

—Judge Robert L. Carter,
Jan. 23, 1978

With the above words, Judge Robert L. Carter, a liberal Black judge with a background in NAACP struggles, ended a 24-page decision and freed Maria Cueto and Raisa Nemikin, former director and secretary, respectively, of the Episcopal Church's National Commission on Hispanic Affairs. The women had spent more than 10 months in prison in New York's Metropolitan Correction Center for refusing to testify before a Grand Jury investigating FALN bombings.

When the two women received word that they were to be released, they did not believe it. Their hopes had been dashed many times as legal efforts to free them had failed. Maria said, "Even as we headed downstairs, I told Raisa, don't get your hopes up — they're only taking us to another prison." (The fate, incidentally, of four other of their colleagues who had been jailed for refusing to testify before a Grand Jury).

But as they stepped out of the elevator, their attorney, Elizabeth Fink, was waiting to announce that they were free.

In a press release shortly after, Maria and Raisa said: "Our release represents a significant victory for the people. It is a blow against the Grand Jury system and its abusive tactics which are utilized to destroy movements for self-determination. The concerted efforts by the National Council of Churches, various supporters within the Episcopal Church and the

community at large were instrumental in bringing about our release."

While the NCC received praise for its efforts, the women and their supporters have viewed with grave concern the way in which Presiding Bishop John Allin and Bishop Milton Wood handled the FBI investigation, allowing agents into the Episcopal Church Center after hours, and turning over information at will (see list of items released in June, 1977 WITNESS). Bishop Francisco Reus-Froylan of Puerto Rico commented at the time that "our church officials were too eager to help in turning over what amounted to free access to the records of the Hispanic and other ministries. It makes me wonder if they have been reading the same papers I have been reading the last 25 years."

The two women hold the administration responsible for the subsequent jailing of nine persons, all somehow connected to

the National Commission on Hispanic Affairs, and the chilling effect these arrests have had on the ministry to Hispanics.

Maria and Raisa said that since the ministry suffered the "taint" connected with the investigation, funding is harder to come by. Moreover, with key personnel in jail, their associates in programs across the country are spread thin in their own operations as they are burdened to form "defense committees" and raise money for legal fees.

Item: The Miranda School in Chicago, partially funded by NCHA, and a target of the FBI investigation, lost its accreditation and it is unlikely that it will survive. The school had taken high school dropouts — about 70% in the Puerto Rican community — and offered them sufficient incentive to finish their education. Graduation achieve-



Maria Cueto relaxing with her parents, Josefina and Leopoldo Cueto, at the family home in Phoenix, Ariz., following her release from 10 months in prison.

ment by students was in the 90 percentile ratio.

Item: The complex of family, health and legal services offered to the Chicano community in Tierra Amarilla, New Mexico under a program called *La Cooperacion del Pueblo* is crippled from the jailing of one of its administrators, Pedro Archuleta, being held since June 30. Pedro was fundraiser and ambulance driver for the clinic, whose maternity wing was partially funded by the NCHA.

Item: Media reporting, or lack thereof, was most damaging to those in jail and to the Hispanic ministry. As the FBI tried continually to forge a link between the NCHA and the FALN bombings, front page stories leaked to the *New York Times* and other papers hinted at the connection. Such leaks were criticized by Federal Judge Morris E. Lasker, who ordered Attorney General Griffin Bell to conduct a national investigation into possible violations of Grand Jury secrecy and Department of Justice guidelines. Results of this investigation have never been released.

Other than government-slanted press releases, information about those in jail was hard to find. Curiously, THE WITNESS, the only Episcopal journal which carried monthly accounts of the event, was visited by the FBI and the managing editor, Mary Lou Suhor, singled out for questioning. Bishop Robert L. DeWitt as editor of the magazine, asserted a legal stance of non-cooperation with the investigation and Ms. Suhor refused to be interviewed by the FBI.

The complete toll in human suffering caused by this Grand Jury investigation is yet to be reckoned. Four persons remain in jail in New York, and may stay there until May 8 when the life of the Grand Jury expires. They are Archuleta, a Chicano, and three brothers — Andres, Luis and Julio Rosado, all Puerto Ricans. Archuleta had been subpoenaed to two Grand Juries — to Chicago as well as New York, and recently won a motion which freed him from the Chicago jail. He was immediately taken to New York and imprisoned there. Three other persons jailed in Chicago were released — Ricardo Romero of Alamosa, Colo., on a "Grumbles motion," and Jose Lopez and Roberto Caldero when the life of the Grand Jury expired at the end of January. Before the latter three were freed, they had been moved from the Metropolitan Correction Center in Chicago to inferior county jails which fail to meet

minimum standards for prisoners, apparently a punitive measure and the last lash of the whip.

The release of Maria Cueto and Raisa Nemikin signals one bright spot in a long catalog of harassment and human suffering. A few others should be noted:

— Increased consciousness raising across country in church and community groups around Grand Jury abuse, although reform legislation introduced by Rep. Josh Eilberg of Pennsylvania still hangs in Congress, jeopardized now by an investigation around Eilberg himself.

— The dramatic intervention of the National Council of Churches on behalf of Maria and Raisa, and its efforts to set up guidelines so that none of its member denominations would suffer from the Episcopal precedent. The NCC guidelines on what to do when the FBI knocks is a document which well might be read — perhaps memorized — by anyone engaged in social action and work with ethnic groups. For a free copy, write to THE WITNESS.

What about the future for Maria Cueto and Raisa Nemikin?

Shortly after her release, Maria sent a memo to Bishop Quintin Primo of the Church and Society Division (at his request) outlining what she and Raisa would like from the Episcopal Church. Essentially, Maria's memo asked that she and Raisa be paid their salaries during the time they spent in jail (the women are officially "on leave of absence"); that their legal fees be paid, and that the NCHA be urged to take as one of its objectives the correction of Grand Jury abuse.

Supporters of the women were not taking bets that the outcome would be favorable. Bishops Allin and Wood made it known early on that they thought the women should testify and have consistently refused to support them in court. (Ironically that Bishop Allin, who would not honor a church subpoena in the *William Wendt* trial, should be so eager to push two of his employees into the lion's den of FBI and Grand Jury inquiries). Also, Bishops Allin and Wood have even hinted privately that the women may have had some connection with the FALN.

Their position was undergirded by Judge Chester Byrns, a member of the Executive Council, who was quoted in the *Virginia Churchman* as saying that he thought the women were confined "because they have knowledge of the bombings."

"The feeling I have is that the Presiding Bishop and others directly concerned at 815 have good and reasonable grounds to believe that the incarceration of the women is not church-related," Judge Byrns was quoted as saying.

"If it turns out that these ladies have been the greatest witness for the faith since Joan of Arc," he said, "then you can imagine the spot the top bishops will be in. I feel that they're just not going to do that stupid a thing."

Following Judge Carter's decision, Episcopalians now have to ask themselves whether the administration has, indeed, done "that stupid a thing." ■

CREDITS

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this utterly inexplicable symbol and effector of strength.

I suppose to have believed and fought for an equal access to celebration for women as well as for men logically forced us to examine the right of access for lay Christian as well as for professional Christian to this task. By need and theological study, by experiment and by reflection, always cautious and sensitive about whether we were "giving offense" to certain of our members, we went ahead with lay celebrations.

Where do we go from here? Do we need to become active and recruit members as other churches have? Have we needed to exist only to support the community and spiritual brotherhood and sisterhood that arose during our support of the priesthood of those ordained in Philadelphia and all women? If or when most in that original group find communal support and direction elsewhere will we or should we disband? I honestly don't know — and trust I am not being too self-deceptive to report I don't worry. In the present I am finding our worshipping life together needful and sustaining — and I know it is supportive to others as well. Our corporate life has alternated between trying to define what we are and responding to particular needs; in this process, we continue to evolve and work out our mission. That might continue only for a short time or for many years — it will be as the Spirit wills it. ■

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