

**We have done so much
for so long
with so little
that we are now prepared
to do the impossible
with nothing at all**

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THE WITNESS

**Plant Closures • Richard W. Gillett
Sterilization Abuse • Helen Rodriguez
Racism & the Left • James Cone**



Letters

to the

Editor

'Gays Handicapped'

I made a mistake. I subscribed to THE WITNESS thinking that any publication of the Episcopal Church would be dedicated to helping people serve Christ and his mission on earth.

Louie Crew's article "On the Ordination of Gays" in the October issue left me convinced that anyone who confuses left-handers and gays is obviously unqualified to write for a religious journal. Had I not spent 40 years in public education at the secondary, collegiate and university levels I might have "bought" some of his unusual thinking. I witnessed too many instances of permanent damage to young lives by gay teachers at all educational levels to ever agree that gays should ever be permitted to work with our youth in educational settings and the church constitutes an educational setting — *I hope*. I've also observed the activities of gay bishops, rectors and church musicians. Generally these were learned people and probably would have been well qualified had they not been handicapped in the sexual sense.

Gays deserve all the rights of any citizen to the point that their gayness does not infringe upon the rights of others — especially the young. Society owes its young protection against all harm insofar as it is able to provide such protection.

Robert L. Hitch, Ed.D.
Kerrville, Texas

God's Word Distorted

I'm sorry I must cancel my subscription. The name of your magazine threw me. I thought the witness you were talking about was Christ but upon reading the first issue I'm pretty much convinced the

witness your magazine presents is false. It seems humanism has crept up on you people and distorted your perception of *God's Word*. I'm not a right wing ultrafundamentalist person but the distortions of God's word in that article by Mr. Crew really made me ill. I'm sorry Satan, I hope you still believe he exists, has blinded his eyes to the truth of what the scriptures say about the example of a minister. I think he should also check out what Paul's got to say about homosexuality in Romans.

Sorry guys — the article on the immoral society was good but I see nobody on your staff wrote it. The rest of the magazine was pure trash.

Randall S. Brunt
Folsom, Pa.

Gays in Neon Lights

It is indeed unfortunate that Mr. Crew "On the Ordination of Gays" believes that God's testimony is so weak. One wonders what his basis for faith is. The Bible speaks to the issue of homosexuality with the same clarity as it does of the Resurrection or Incarnation. There is no need to "dredge up" biblical testimony concerning sexual "orientation." It is there in neon lights.

No exegetical acrobatics are required as in Mr. Crew's left-handed analogy.

In order to demonstrate that I am not in favor of clubbing gays or baby seals, I

have decided to suggest several categories of individuals who should not be ordained: those who oppress the poor, those who lie, steal, or defraud, those who practice witchcraft. I have offered this partial list so that gay and left-handed activists will no longer feel uniquely persecuted. Any Christian actively affirming and practicing any of these activities should not be ordained.

I agree with Mr. Crew on one thing — that ordination of homosexuals should not be an issue — the church has more important business (I Cor. 3:1-3).

Joe Stoutenburgh
Hopkins, Minn.

Crew Responds

With tongue bulging in my cheek, I intended the elaborate embellishment of the analogy between left-handedness and homosexual orientation as a high camp way of supplying to an otherwise grim subject the "blessed joy," even "spiritual humor" which Christ pronounces in the Beatitudes upon all of us who are persecuted for the faith. Joe Stoutenburgh's interpretation of the analogy as an example of "exegetical acrobatics" and Dr. Hitch's more ominous citation of the analogy as evidence of my professional incompetence reveal the same humorlessness I discovered when I first used it, before an audience at Virginia Theological Seminary. Stoutenburgh and Hitch apparently refuse to acknowledge my disclaimer: "Of course the analogy of homosexuality to left-handedness is imperfect, as are all analogies . . . My humor may be risky." Indeed.

Nevertheless, since my preparation of the essay, scientific studies have

Cover Quote

The quote on the cover of this month's WITNESS was spotted in a Baltimore storefront by one of our readers. Post-election implications, plus the continuing plight of deprived people in this country and around the world, made it seem apt as a faithful watchword for the new year.

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THE WITNESS

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Episcopal Urban Caucus

A Promising 1-Year-Old

by Robert L. DeWitt

When a group of Episcopal bishops formed an Urban Coalition in Minneapolis in 1976 they held a press conference to explain their action. In the question period, one of the reporters said, "This all sounds like rhetoric. Are you bishops going to *do* anything?"

The same question was in the mind of many church people who noted the formation of the Episcopal Urban Caucus four years later, brought into being jointly by the Urban Bishops' Coalition and the Church and City Conference. The community of faith has, over the centuries, learned not to assume too easily that faith will issue in good works. Too often they have seen the Word reduced to words.

It is now nearly a year since the organizing Assembly of the Episcopal Urban Caucus. In February 1979, some 500 people from across the country gathered at Indianapolis, brought together by their common concern over both the plight of our cities, and the church's response. Their deliberations produced a veritable smorgasbord of resolutions and proposals, enough to gladden the heart of any socially concerned person. Further, they projected their efforts into the future by the creation of five task forces, enough to raise the spirits of any social activist. But resolutions and proposals and the creation of committees — such products are the stock-in-trade of the church. Every diocesan council, every diocesan convention produces a fine display of that line, even if not always of such socially-concerned quality.

However, a recent survey conducted for the Caucus by Hugh White of Church and Society, Inc. indicates that a cynical appraisal may be premature. Letters were sent to Caucus members across the country asking how the actions at Indianapolis had stimulated concern, support and leadership for urban mission in their area, and what were they doing about it. Thirty dioceses and 14 special-interest groups responded. It appears that there is indeed a great deal happening at the grassroots — in parishes and neighborhoods, in dioceses and cities. Replies came from lay persons, parish clergy and bishops, from Alabama to San Francisco, from Massachusetts to Rio Grande. Leadership training courses with the Hispanic community in Boston, urban initiatives by the Bishop of Alabama, a new urban missionary in Newark, an effort in San Diego to impact the power structure of multinationals south-of-the-border, raising consciousness over the relationship of urban poverty to a burgeoning Pentagon budget in Black, low-income neighborhoods in Washington, D.C. — and on, and on. Clearly, things are happening. It is not a crusade. Not yet even a movement. But it is unquestionably showing signs of vitality.

The Achilles heel of the enterprise may prove to be its serious underestimation of the vehemence and the virulence of the forces of reaction such as the New Right, the Klan, the Moral Majority. And even more, an

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Plant Closures: Major New Issue

by Richard W. Gillett

"We are mainly concerned with our members and their families. What are they to do when the plant closes? The average worker has not completed high school, is 33 years old, has a wife and three children, is purchasing a house and a car, has 10 or more years seniority and no skills other than to run a tire machine. Where will he find employment? Many will have to relocate. That means selling a house when there is no market for houses. Zero houses have been sold in this city in the last few weeks."

The above quotation is not from an unemployed Youngstown, Ohio worker or one in a large industrial city elsewhere in the East or Midwest. It is from a rubber worker and union leader in the town of Salinas, Cal., (population

78,800), near the fabulous Big Sur coast, where the Firestone Company announced last spring that it is permanently shutting down its 1,600-worker tire plant. The shutdown is part of an accelerating wave of industrial plant closures across the country which may be due more to the changing behavior of large corporations in recent years than to economic recession, foreign imports, or poor management. These closures are constituting a threat of major proportions to the lives and well-being of millions of workers and their families, and to the communities where they live.

The severe community impact of U.S. Steel's & Lykes' destructive plant closures in Youngstown is well known to many in the religious community, thanks to the courageous and persistent efforts of the ecumenical coalition that formed over three years ago to protest those closings and to suggest alternatives to them. The experience of this on-going engagement has led to

new understandings of corporate behavior and is a take-off point for discovering insights about plant closures nationwide.

But Youngstown is only the most prominent example of a new corporate disdain for workers and communities that is now reaching deeply into all parts of the nation. Because plant closures are directly affecting so many lives and communities — and therefore churches — it is important that the churches become aware of what is happening. And, if they wish to be at all effective in addressing this increasing problem and working towards solutions, they must understand and begin to address the deeper roots of this new phenomenon.

Plant Shutdowns Extensive

Plant closures, once principally confined to the older cities of the Northeast, are now occurring everywhere. The familiar pattern of North-South industrial flight has widened, so that even the South is now

experiencing overseas out-migration of textiles, apparel, leather goods and other non-durables. The sheer magnitude of closures is stunning: For the very largest and oldest manufacturing plants, a recent study showed that between 1969 and 1976, the odds of closing down ranged from one in six to one in three, depending on the industry. The two economics professors who authored the study, Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, estimate that in those years at least 15 million jobs were destroyed in the United States as a result of shutdowns, an average of 2.5 million jobs a year.

Thus, not only in Dayton and Akron, Ohio — traditionally “tire towns” — but also in Los Angeles, four big name

tire companies (Firestone, Goodyear, Goodrich and Uniroyal) all shut down their plants. In Los Angeles alone, 4,500 jobs have been lost from those companies, not including the newer 1,600-worker Salinas plant. In Atlanta in 1978, Southern Airways announced plans to fire 14% of its work force so it could afford \$65 million worth of new airplanes (its public relations manager was quoted by the *Wall Street Journal* as saying, “One of the quickest ways to reduce expenses is to reduce people.”) In Tacoma, Wash., the Weyerhaeuser Company warned in 1978 that it might have to trim 1,000 salaried employees from its 11,000 member work force, even though the corporation’s after-tax net income in 1977 was \$42 million

higher than its nearest competition, with a targeted growth rate of 15% a year for the corporation.

In more traditional manufacturing regions such as New England, the extent of factory closings has been awesome. Over a six year period ending in 1976, 95,000 closings in that region idled slightly over 1 million workers, according to Bluestone and Harrison. U.S. Steel closed 16 of its plants across the country in late 1979 in one of the most sweeping retrenchments in the industry’s history. The closure put 15,000 workers on the streets while U.S. Steel benefitted by a record-shattering \$900 million tax write-off, with the result that the corporation’s net income for the year exceeded its gross income.

In California — reputed to be one of the most prosperous states in the union — more than 37,800 workers have been laid off just since August 1979 in large scale plant closures or cutbacks, according to recent testimony at a legislative hearing in that state.

Personal, Community Results

No amount of unemployment or welfare statistics can convey the sense of personal calamity that descends upon workers, who long accustomed to steady, skilled work and a pride of accomplishment, suddenly find themselves jobless. Many, having resorted to denial mechanisms during the months preceding a shutdown when closure rumors circulated, experience sudden shock when the reality hits. Abruptly, they find themselves supplicants at welfare offices, treated as the system has long treated others who are jobless: with benign paternalism or (more often) bureaucratic contempt, but in any case as if they were social pariahs, instead of tragic casualties of a system that places profit above all other considerations. Studies confirm that unemployed workers experience suicides, alcoholism, family break-ups, mental illness and other adverse



“ Taiwan bids thirty cents an hour...Do I hear twenty-five from Hong Kong? ”

consequences of their changed status at markedly higher rates. Harry Maurer puts it graphically in *Not Working*, an oral history of the unemployed:

"(Jobless people have) a common feeling . . . that a crime has been committed. (They) have been robbed of something, and they know it. The bewilderment they often express is like that of the homeowner who returns to find rooms ransacked, valuable and beloved objects missing. The sense of violence and invasion, the feelings of fear and loss and helplessness descend with the same stunning force when a worker is deprived of work."

Of the workers who, because of plant closures suffer this devastating experience, minorities and women are hardest hit: Being lower on the economic ladder, they are more dependent on hourly wages. In addition, many are in the last-hired, first-fired category, and their accumulated benefits, if any, protect them even less than white workers. As a result, plant closures are a special area in which the hard-won gains from the Civil Rights struggles of the 1960s are steadily being nullified by the cold efficiency of large corporations seeking maximum return on investments.

To the communities affected, plant shutdowns frequently represent a social cost of devastating proportions. Particularly vulnerable are those cities or towns long dependent upon a particular industry for employment. Tax revenue decreases, ancillary businesses close down and welfare rolls increase along with crime. For example, when the Campbell Steel works closed in Youngstown, townspeople were forced to increase property taxes from \$39.8 to \$51 million in one year. In Hopedale, Mass., Draper Looms was purchased by Rockwell International in the late 1960s. In 1978, Rockwell closed it down, laying off some 3,000 workers.

Draper paid 30% of the town's property taxes. So far, no new economic activity has replaced this loss.

Shutdown Causes Complex

The causes of plant shutdowns are complex, involving such factors as changing markets, emerging new competition, new technology, the need for capital, union and non-union labor, and others. But a major new cause appears to be "the accelerating and often heedless speed of capital in today's economy," say Bluestone and Harrison. Capital mobility per se is not the enemy, they say. Rather, "this accelerating movement of capital is increasingly frenetic and abrupt . . . the real social

and economic consequences of its mobility hardly ever enter into the decisions of its corporate managers."

Thus, large corporations, finding it much more lucrative, have increased many-fold their investments and operations overseas in the last 15 years, expanding within the same manufacturing line, or diversifying, or both. Dollars thus invested abroad are unavailable for economic development at home. Other major industrial shifts have occurred from "union" to "non-union" regions of the U.S., particularly to states in the South and Southwest.

Along with these moves, a dramatic transformation in communications, transportation and computer



technology has occurred, together with an increasing technological ability to subdivide the manufacturing process itself. Corporate managers, now commanding a far-flung network, can shift locations of various stages of the production process according to the latest global marketing and labor conditions, and transfer huge amounts of capital from one country to another, with the speed of the teletype.

For example, Ford and General Motors, while closing plants and laying off workers in New Jersey, Detroit and Los Angeles this past year, were opening up four new auto-related plants in Mexico (G.M.); and building a plastics plant in Berlin while investing \$1 billion in Latin America over the next five years (Ford). Or, a New York-based chemical firm closes its textile machinery division in Worcester, Mass., and transfers it to North Carolina, a state not noted for strong unions. In Southern California, 1,000 G.E. plant workers who make clothing irons in the town of Ontario find cause for nervousness at the news that G.E. will soon open a new plant manufacturing irons in Brazil, where labor is very cheap and unions emasculated.

What lessons are to be gleaned from all this? Many, but surely a major conclusion is this, and it is not new: The rights of large corporations to do what they wish with their assets — especially in the employment of corporate capital — must become subordinate to the well-being of the workers, and of the communities where those workers reside. Work should be engaged in primarily for the benefit of those who do that work, and indirectly for the benefit of the community in which those workers live; not for the few so that the capital thus acquired may be reinvested to make ever more money for the same few. In the plant closure phenomenon, we may begin to understand the wisdom of Marx's insight: Workers must be the

owners of their productive means and participate fully in decisions regarding the use and disposition of that production.

What we are seeing instead in the recent conduct of corporations and conglomerates is the building of global production networks of unparalleled financial and technological power, and the resultant disdain for worker and community welfare.

Church Role Growing

Some scattered signs reveal that the churches are beginning to take on plant shutdowns as a concern. For example, the annual meeting of U.S. Steel Corporation in San Francisco last May brought together a combination of religious groups from Pittsburgh, Youngstown, and Northern and Southern California. In a joint strategy, four Roman Catholic religious orders filed shareholder resolutions against U.S. Steel inside the meeting, while outside a strong line of pickets marched, organized by the churches. A well-orchestrated press conference resulted in exposure not only of U.S. Steel's Youngstown closures, but of plant closures in general in California. The shareholder resolutions, drawing an unexpectedly large number of votes, will be filed again in 1981.

In addition, church-labor coalitions have formed in several areas, such as Boston, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles. The Calumet Community Religious Conference (South Chicago-Gary, Ind.) is a notable new group of labor unions, Protestants and Roman Catholics, already with part-time staff, focusing on the closure of steel plants and their pension fund and credit union status with the workers.

But a prior need for many in the churches is simply to overcome a serious and unfounded bias against people in the labor movement, and to see life from where the millions of hourly-rated working men and women

are. That process initiated, we can begin to look at specific strategies:

- Immediate aid to workers and families newly out of work in the form of advocacy with corporations and welfare offices for the benefits they are entitled to;

- Assessment of communities in which plants may in future shut down, to determine combined impact on workers, the community, and municipal revenues; building community-labor-church coalitions to awaken public opinion and to suggest alternatives;

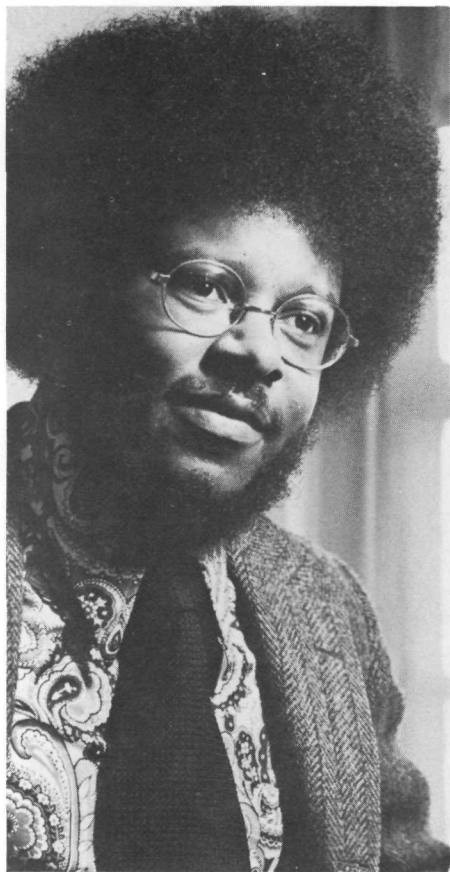
- Initiation of further stockholder actions against corporations which, without justification and notice, close or partially close plants;

- Advocacy of state and federal legislation designed to address the plant closure issue (some 13 states have bills pending, in addition to a federal bill, H.R. 5040, authored by Congressman Augustus Hawkins);

- Sponsorship of major educational programs and seminars on plant closures, jointly with labor.

In a new right-wing Republican administration, such approaches — especially the legislative route — may not meet with early success! But the impact that this new and devastating behavior of corporations has upon so many workers, and upon entire communities, is the potential Achilles heel of this issue which the churches — a vital part of those communities — can begin to expose and interpret to a wider public. Further, the mass of skilled workers, conditioned to job security and good salaries over the last 25 years, may begin to recover from the shock so many of them are now in as they find themselves on the sidewalk without job, pension, or medical plan. When they do, they may well see with real clarity (many for the first time) what the corporate juggernaut has done to them.

When they do, it would be well for the churches to be there, alongside them, to move on to a more just social order. ■



The Rev. James H. Cone is Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary, New York City. This article is excerpted from his address before the Theology in the Americas II Conference in Detroit.

'Left Strategies Must Deal With Racism'

by James H. Cone

Capitalism is one of the most inhumane economic systems ever imagined by human beings, and there is no way to understand the nature and the extent of its effect upon the quality of human life without analyzing it in its international operations. As long as the maximization of profit remains the chief regulative ideal, the gap between the rich and the poor will continue to increase. And people who are forced to bear the heaviest burden of this maldistribution of wealth are found in the Third World — that is, in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The poorest 30% of humanity have only 3% of the world's income. Any analysis of human oppression and our struggle against it that does not have a critical international perspective will remain hopelessly inadequate.

The importance of this international perspective in my theological and political consciousness has been especially defined by my travels to Third World countries and by my dialogue with Third World peoples in Africa, Asia and Latin America under the sponsorship of the Korean Christian Church in Japan, Korean Christians in South Korea, the Black Theology Project of TIA, and the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. It has also been my Third World experience that has made me realize that democratic socialism must be considered as an alternative to capitalism. On the African continent, Tanzania, Angola, Mozambique,

Zimbabwe and other African states are considering seriously the socialist alternative. The same is true for states in Asia and Latin America. Socialism is not simply a theme for conferences and university discussions, but for many people, it is an historical alternative to capitalism.

While I am not sure how we will accomplish a socialist alternative in the United States, I do believe that dialogue with our Third World sisters and brothers is indispensable. For this dialogue, a critical analysis of the origin and the growth of imperialism is important. However, if we are going to make any revolutionary changes in the international structures of oppression, poor people in the First World must make a coalition with each other and with the poor in the Third World. It is not difficult for people in the minority communities of the United States to recognize this truth, but it is difficult for us to implement it. It seems that we cannot even build the right structures for dialogue among ourselves, except through church structures controlled by white America. How, then, is it possible for us to build structures for dialogue with our brothers and sisters in Asia, Africa and Latin America?

We do not know how to make that coalition. How do we build mutual structures of support for our various struggles of liberation? If we could answer that question, we will have made a giant step toward our collective freedom. It is unfortunate that

oppressed U.S. minorities do not seem able to talk to each other or the Third World peoples except through structures controlled and financed by whites in the United States.

What does this tell us about our liberation struggle? As we know, liberal and radical whites in church, university and seminary contexts are calling for a coalition on many fronts. I have no objections to that, and I believe that we must consider seriously their proposals for struggling together. But the history of the white left, in relation to other minorities, must not be overlooked if we are to build solid, meaningful

coalitions. My difficulty with the white left in church and university, in the past and in the present, is that they know a lot of theory but almost nothing about the material conditions of oppression about which they speak. Theoretically, they are Marxist socialists, but practically they seem to treat black people no differently than do white capitalists. They almost never recognize their own racism, except verbally, for they live their personal lives as do white capitalists. Why does it not occur to them that their own racism may in fact distort radically their analysis? Instead, they act as if racism is not important, or

at least will automatically be eliminated when socialism is established. Because they have more leisure time for reflection, they have created very impressive social theories of change, but most blacks fail to see the practical difference that their theories make for their everyday existence.

My intention for pointing to these difficulties is not for the purpose of destroying any possibility of our working together in the struggle for freedom. I merely want to help clear the air so that superficial conversation in conferences will not be mistaken for genuine coalition.

Now, the question is, where do we go from here? I want to make a few suggestions:

1. The international context must be recognized and combined with any nationalist analysis of oppression.

2. Because of the complexity of the task, in both analysis and in action, we must do it as a team, sharing our work with each other. We must try to create structures for dialogue among oppressed minorities in this country, and also dialogue of U.S. minorities with Third World peoples in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

4. People in dominant cultures must become self-critical in terms of their own racism, sexism, and classism. On the other side, the victims of these isms must also become self-critical, so that we will not be locked in our own particularity.

5. In all our struggles together, and in our separate contexts, let us not forget the One who is able "to make the crooked straight and the rough places plain." I am speaking here of the God who can "make a way out of no way." In my community God is called a "heart-fixer," and a "mind-regulator." Through this empowerment of faith is derived the courage to believe that we can keep on struggling for freedom, even though the odds might be against us. ■

Storm Troopers for New Right

The seriousness of our present task simply cannot be overstated. A united extreme right is rising in America . . . This is a critical time because the same forces that hung my great grandfather in South Carolina are on the move again; the same forces that shot down Viola Liuzzo on a lonely Alabama road are on the march again; the same forces that sapped the life, but thank God never the pride and fight of Fannie Lou Hamer, are feeling a new sense of strength in America; the same forces that killed Emmett Till, that bombed four little Black girls in an Alabama church, and the same forces that got thrown out of the Lumbee reservation have seen fit to march in some other communities and they're on the move again; the same forces that killed five Communist Workers Party comrades, that beat up Ken Chastain, that murdered Dr. Martin Luther King are on the march again.

These are the same forces that have colonized Puerto Rico, that overthrew the democratically elected Allende government, and that front loans to South Africa. We have to make the connections between all that, because this society is not going to make the connections for us.

— The Rev. Lucius Walker
Interreligious Foundation
for Community Organization (IFCO)

Coalitions Can End Sterilization Abuse

by Helen Rodriguez-Trias

Sterilization is a time-honored procedure in the United States. The first of the laws empowering the state to sterilize unwilling and unwitting people was passed in 1907 by the Indiana Legislature. The Act was intended to prevent procreation of "confirmed criminals, idiots, rapists, and imbeciles" who were confined to state institutions. The law was clear in its tenet that heredity plays an important part in the transmission of crime, idiocy, and imbecility.

After World War I, a model federal law was proposed by Dr. Harry Hamilton Laughlin, Superintendent of the Eugenics Record Office, and copies were widely distributed in large quantities to governors, legislators, newspaper and magazine editors, clergy, and teachers. According to the model law, the following 10 groups were labeled "socially inadequate" and were therefore subject to sterilization: (1) feeble-minded; (2) insane (including the psychopathic); (3) criminalistic (including the delinquent and wayward); (4) epileptic; (5) inebriate (including drug habitues); (6) diseased (including the tuberculous, the syphilitic, the leprosy, and others with chronic, infectious, and legally segregable diseases); (7) blind (including those with seriously impaired vision); (8) deaf (including those with

seriously impaired hearing); (9) deformed (including the crippled); and (10) dependent (including orphans, "ne'er do-wells," the homeless, tramps, and paupers). Laws such as this, known as the eugenics laws, were passed in 30 states and as of 1972 were still on the books in 16.

Between 1907 and 1964, more than 63,000 people were sterilized under these eugenics laws in the United States and one of its colonies, Puerto Rico. Practices sanctioned inside institutions often become commonly accepted practices in the larger community. It is therefore important to keep in mind this long history of legally sanctioned forced sterilization as a framework for understanding current hospital practices.

We must examine closely the labeling of people mentally retarded, insane, criminal, or indigent. This sort of labeling is a peril in itself, but when it is used as grounds for sterilization, it is doubly dangerous. The groups considered undesirable may change, but they always include people who work for wages or are unemployed; they are inevitably the most exploited, and, therefore, poor. In the United States, the labeling process has additional racial overtones, because most third-world people are in the least remunerated strata of the working class and are definitely poor. It is a cruel irony that people with preventable diseases due almost solely to poverty are included in groups seen fit for sterilization.

Under the eugenics laws, many black

women had been sterilized without challenge. The challenge came only when in 1924 Carrie Buck, a poor, white 18-year-old woman institutionalized for mental retardation, was threatened. Although judged retarded, Buck had completed six grades of school in five years. She had defied the norms by bearing an illegitimate child and was about to be sterilized, when members of a religious group in Virginia challenged the law all the way to the Supreme Court. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes handed down his well-known *Buck vs. Bell* opinion in favor of her sterilization in which he stated: "the principle that sustains compulsory vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the fallopian tubes." He concluded that "three generations of imbeciles are enough."

Implicit in Justice Holmes's opinion was the belief that Carrie Buck's alleged mental retardation was hereditary. Today mental retardation is often determined on such questionable evidence as inability to cope with the school system, the discredited I.Q. tests, or even evidence of cultural differences.

Perhaps an even greater impact of these infamous laws was the social legislation they inspired. At least 10 states have proposed compulsory sterilization of people on welfare. No state has passed such legislation, but the very existence of such proposals should make us question the prevailing social climate. In a country plagued by chronic unemployment, such proposals reveal virulent feelings toward women who cannot earn a living because they

Dr. Helen Rodriguez-Trias is director of the Department of Pediatrics at Lincoln Hospital, South Bronx. She updated this article for THE WITNESS from a paper she delivered as Reid lecturer at the Women's Center, Barnard College, New York, in 1976.

must care for children, the elderly, or others.

Physicians play an important role in implementing the view that poor people have no right to decide on the number of their children. A survey of obstetricians showed that although only 6% favored sterilization for their private patients, 14% favored it for their welfare patients.

For welfare mothers who had borne illegitimate children, 97% of the physicians favored sterilization. Similarly, a number of polls of the public at large show that the idea of sterilization of welfare recipients is very much accepted. In a 1965 Gallup poll, about 20% of the people surveyed favored compulsory sterilization for women on welfare.

We are witnessing a resurgence of the Malthusian ideas which proclaimed the poor unfit to receive the knowledge and hygienic measures which might decrease their mortality. The more sophisticated modern version calls for a decrease in the social, medical, educational, and other resources allotted to poor people and for an offer of sterilization instead. In lieu of social changes to provide a decent living for every American, the population planners choose to curtail population. In the words of Dr. Curtis Wood, past president of the Association for Voluntary Sterilization,

People pollute, and too many people crowded too close together may cause many of our social and economic problems. As physicians, we have obligations to the society of which we are a part. The welfare mess, as it has been called, cries out for solutions; one of these is fertility control.

The use of the phrase "fertility control" is itself deceptive. In reality, it means only one thing, permanent control — that is, sterilization. A 1973 survey revealed that 43% of women sterilized in federally financed family programs were black.

Hysterectomy, now the most frequent major operation, done four times as frequently in the United States as in Sweden, is an indication of still another way of sterilizing women without their consent. Black women on welfare suffer the most abuse. According to the *New York Times*:

Medicare, Medicaid, and other health plans for both the poor and the

affluent will reimburse a surgeon up to 90 percent for the costs of any sterilization procedure, and sometimes will allow nothing for abortion. As a consequence, "hysterilizations" — so common among some groups of indigent blacks that they are referred to as "Mississippi appendectomies" — are increasingly popular among surgeons despite the risks.

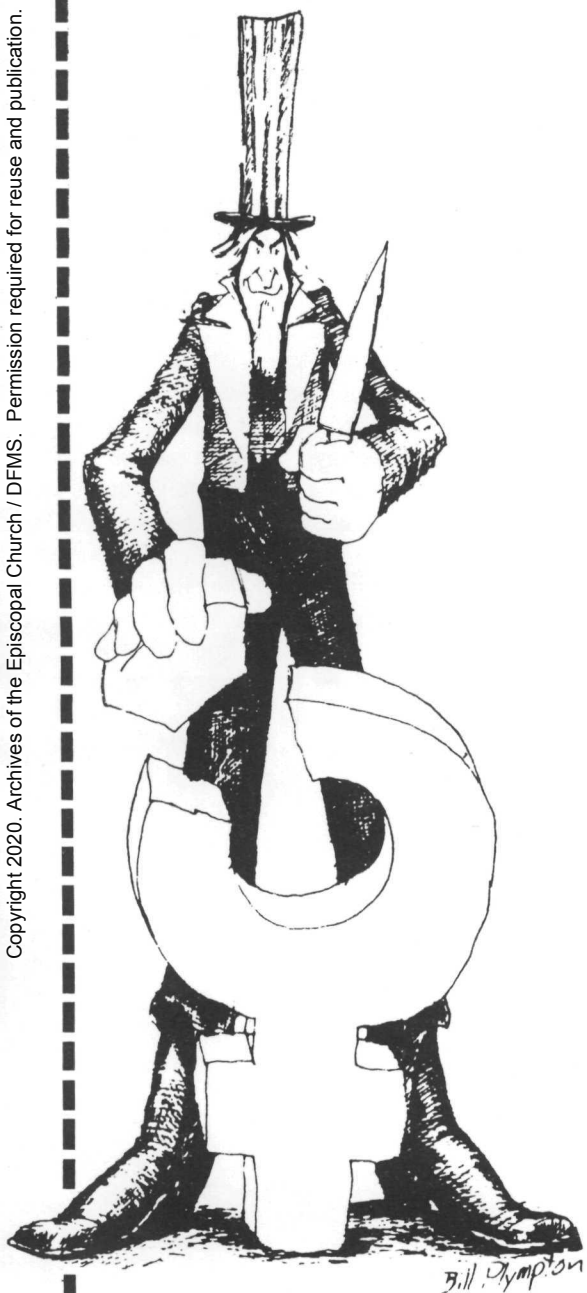
Several lawsuits since 1973 provide evidence of both the widespread nature of abuse as well as of the rising redress on the part of people.

Most notorious is the case of the two sisters, Mary Alice, then 14, and Minnie Lee Relf, who was 12 at the time of their sterilizations in Montgomery, Ala. in 1973. As described in court by their mother, two representatives of the federally financed Montgomery Community Action Agency called on her requesting consent to give the children some birth control shots. Believing that the agency had the best interests of her daughters' health in mind, she consented by putting an X on paper.

Judge Gerhard Gesell, who heard the case, declared:

Although Congress has been insistent that all family planning programs function purely on a voluntary basis there is uncontroverted evidence in the record that minors and other incompetents have been sterilized with federal funds and that an indefinite number of poor people have been improperly coerced into accepting a sterilization operation under the threat that various federally supported welfare benefits would be withdrawn unless they submitted to irreversible sterilization.

Norma Jean Serena, a native American mother of three children, will be the first to raise sterilization abuse as a civil rights issue. She charges that in 1970 health and welfare officials in Armstrong County, Pennsylvania, conspired to have her sterilized when



her youngest child was delivered.

Ten Mexican-American women are currently suing the Los Angeles County Hospital for obtaining consent in English when they spoke only Spanish. Some were in labor at the time, others even under anesthesia. A few reported being told such things as "Sign here if you don't want to feel these pains anymore" while a piece of paper was waved before their eyes.

Largely as a result of the pressure mounted when the Relf case came to light, the Department of Health Education and Welfare (HEW) decided to write guidelines on sterilization procedures during 1974. In effect, these established a moratorium on sterilizations of people under 21, and on those who for other reasons could not legally consent. In addition, the guidelines stipulated that there must be a 72-hour waiting period between the granting of consent and the carrying out of the sterilization. They also required an informed consent process including a written statement to the effect that people would not lose welfare benefits if they refused to be sterilized, and they included the right to refuse sterilization later, even after granting initial consent.

Although HEW promulgated the guidelines early in 1974, a study conducted in 1975 by the Health Research Groups, a Washington-based organization, and later corroborated by Elissa Krauss of the American Civil Liberties Union, showed that only about 6% of the teaching hospitals were in compliance with these guidelines. Many of the hospitals provided only the broadest of consent forms without proper explanations. A still more recent study by the Center for Disease Control, an HEW agency, revealed that widespread noncompliance continued to be the rule. The study attributed the fact to ignorance of the guidelines.

Early in 1975 those of us who were concerned about the issue of abuse formed a committee which we called

The Committee to End Sterilization Abuse (CESA). We were faced with some hard realities: First, HEW can only regulate for federally funded procedures, and although it is true that the primary targets of sterilization abuse have been women on welfare, there are still many other vulnerable groups who are not welfare recipients, including the recently unemployed, undocumented workers, and workers whose earnings are just barely above the poverty line. Second, it seemed obvious that without a national monitoring system, it is impossible to determine what is happening to whom or whether guidelines are being followed. Third, those who control information often manipulate people's behavior. For example, the inclusion of hysterectomy as one form of sterilization in an HEW

"It is a cruel irony that people with preventable diseases due almost solely to poverty are included in groups seen fit for sterilization."

pamphlet tends to grant legitimacy to that mutilating operation in the eyes of the reader. Finally, the need for strong enforcement mechanisms became clear. There is no way that well-established actions and practices can be uprooted without the use of some measure of enforcement, particularly when the practices are profitable and socially sanctioned.

These facts, coupled with the rise in number of sterilizations observed in the New York City hospital system, particularly in those hospitals serving black and Puerto Rican communities, prompted a number of concerned people from the Health and Hospitals Corporation, the New York agency responsible for the municipal hospitals, and from citizens' groups to form an ad hoc Advisory Committee on

Sterilization Guidelines early in 1975. The Committee to End Sterilization Abuse, Healthright, Health Policy Advisory Center, the Center for Constitutional Rights, the community boards of the hospitals, and many other organizations and individuals were represented on this new committee. Most of the members were women involved in patient advocacy and at the same time represented New York's various ethnic communities.

Our goal was to write new guidelines for the municipal hospitals. We met initially to ascertain the facts and to analyze the processes by which abuse takes place. Then we compiled the information. We identified existing weaknesses in the HEW regulations by using women's experiences as the touchstone for the drafting of stronger guidelines.

Many consents are obtained around the time of abortion or childbirth. The philosophy behind this practice is exemplified in the words of one doctor who said, "Unless we get those tubes tied before they go home, some of them will change their minds by the time they come back to the clinic." The waiting period of only 72 hours after consent had been obtained at a time of great stress, allowed no opportunity for the woman to discuss the matter with friends, family, or neighbors to assure herself that she really wanted a sterilization. The time of abortion was particularly hazardous, because many teaching hospitals offer abortions as a "package deal" together with sterilization. What kind of information was given to women was also key since both the vocabulary and the amount of information can clarify or confound. This reflects another weakness inherent in both the structure of the health system and the doctor-patient relationship: the coercive nature of medical advice given as it is in a patriarchal setting.

Our coalition of concerned groups

drafted guidelines to remedy these weaknesses. They called for a 30-day waiting period; an interdiction of consent at time of delivery, abortion, or of hospitalization for any major illness or procedure; the requirement that full counseling on birth control be available so that alternatives are offered; the stipulation that the idea for sterilization should not originate with the doctor; and the provision that informational materials must be in the language best understood by the woman.

The guidelines also stated that if she wished, the woman could bring a patient advocate of her choosing to participate at any stage of the process. She could also have a witness of her choice sign the consent form. Perhaps the most important point we made was that a woman should express in her own words, in writing on the consent form, her understanding of what the sterilization entailed, particularly its permanence.

We were unprepared for the ferocity of the opposition to our guidelines. Our files, replete with angry letters from obstetricians, organizations involved in family planning and population control, and other groups, attest to the length and difficulty of our struggle. Our response was to continue to bring testimony of how abuse takes place and to negotiate on the provisions of the guidelines until they were acceptable to our committee, its constituency, and to the obstetricians and other staff. It was a massive outreach effort that gained the support of community groups, boards of hospitals, health organizations, and legal groups. And it was this broad-based support, backed by several thousand letters and petitions, three or four demonstrations, hundreds of speeches and dozens of meetings that finally overcame the still strong opposition in medical circles.

New York City's Health and Hospital Corporation had once more been responsive to public wishes, illustrating

that even imperfect institutions can respond, provided consumers find the channels through which they can fight for change.

The guidelines became effective November 1, 1975. Barely three months later, six professors of obstetrics and gynecology representing six major medical schools filed suit opposing the guidelines issued by HEW, New York State, and the New York City Municipal Hospital System.

We began to see that there were some critical problems to be solved. First, how could we implement and enforce the new regulations? Second, how could we establish a monitoring system to know about sterilizations on an ongoing basis? Third, how could we apply the guidelines to private hospitals, not just the municipal

"Physicians play an important role in implementing the view that poor people have no right to decide on the number of their children."

hospitals? At present, the medical schools contract with the municipal system to deliver medical services. Doctors work at both public and private hospitals and can carry out their programs at either place. Often doctors prefer the private setting as long as the fees for the services are forthcoming. We realized that guidelines could be circumvented simply by admitting Medicaid recipients or other insured patients to their private hospitals.

A fourth concern was the definition of "elective" in any surgical procedure. By specifying that the guidelines applied only to "elective" procedures, large loopholes were left for the "medically indicated." Doctors define "medical indications" on the basis of their experience or preference. Entrenched in their positions of power, doctors often

resent any questioning. Attempts by patients to enter the sacrosanct areas of "medical indications" are invariably vigorously repelled.

A fifth and extremely important problem, mentioned previously, was the control of information. It is possible to sell a procedure by giving distorted accounts of its benefits and downplaying the risks. We strongly maintained that the mental, physical, and social hazards of sterilization should be discussed in informational materials. We felt these should be different from those of HEW, whose off-hand information can easily mislead.

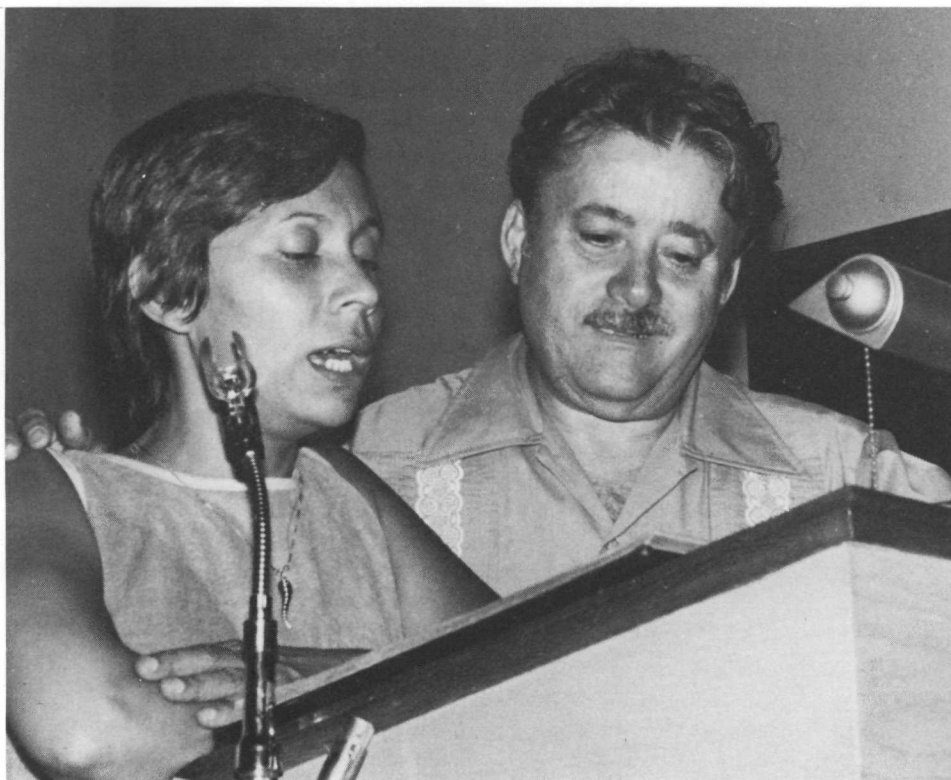
Finally, the concern over the abuse of hysterectomy was still paramount. Since excessive hysterectomies are performed not only for reasons of money, custom, poor medical practice, and hostility to women, but also as an occult manner of sterilizing women without their informed consent, we recognized the need for guidelines on hysterectomies also.

These problems are as yet unresolved. Our approaches have been to continue to organize coalitions of people from within and without the hospitals in order to monitor what is happening and to continue to press in whatever ways are possible to have some impact upon these practices.

The lessons from these battles have been invaluable. We have learned that we *can* organize coalitions of community groups and health workers, and that these coalitions can be effective in sharing information as well as applying pressure.

More important to me have been the experiences shared with women and community groups. We managed to identify some of the ways in which racist ideology keeps us from acknowledging our common oppression as women. Within the women's movement we sometimes found a denial of the

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Alejandrina and Jose Torres check the biblical readings for the following Sunday's service at the First Congregational Church, Chicago.

On the Redemption of Puerto Rico

by Mary Lou Suhor

The setting: A recent airing of the popular TV show, Hollywood Squares. The host asks one of the comedian panelists, "How did the United States acquire Puerto Rico?"

His answer: "S&H Green Stamps." The audience roars.

It is this kind of "humor" and other images of Puerto Rico as an Island vacationland or ideal place for U.S. investments as projected by the mass media that prompted THE WITNESS to spend several days in Chicago with the parents of Carlos Alberto Torres. Torres, 28, who once served on the National Commission for Hispanic Affairs of the Episcopal Church, was

captured with nine others suspected as being the core members of the FALN, a militant Puerto Rican independence group. His wife, Haydee, is under a life sentence in California and nine others are in prisons serving sentences varying from eight years to life.

The Rev. Jose Torres, Carlos' father, is pastor of the First Congregational Church in Chicago, which has a long history of involvement in justice issues, dating from the days of the underground railroad for escaped slaves. More recently, the church played a key role in the Chicago Community Renewal Society, and Torres has a citation for outstanding pastoral service in the United Church of Christ. Carlos' stepmother, Alejandrina, is on the

Women's Resource Team of the UCC Illinois Conference. She is an active member of the First Congregational Church. Carlos, himself, once served on its council. Alejandrina was speaking on the Seven Last Words at a Lenten service when the FALN arrests were made.

The jailed Puerto Ricans have declared themselves prisoners of war, and have refused to recognize the jurisdiction of U.S. courts. But whose soldiers are these?

"At first," says Jose Torres, whom everyone calls *El Viejo*, "people were shocked when I said I was proud of my son. The media had called them terrorists. But let me say it this way: We

live in Oak Park. It is famous for its historical connection with Ernest Hemingway and Edgar Rice Burroughs, creator of Tarzan, and Frank Lloyd Wright. Oak Park was declared the All-American village during the bicentennial. But one day, Oak Park will also be known as the place where the Puerto Rican Nationalist prisoners slept their first night out of jail, and at the home of Carlos Alberto Torres.

"When the Puerto Rican nationalists — Lolita Lebron, Oscar Collazo, Rafael Cancel Miranda and Irvin Flores — were released from prison, unconditionally, after 25 years, our church scheduled a reception for them. But, 3,000 people showed up and we had to have it outside. And that night when we hosted the nationalists at our home, who was sleeping in the front room to protect them? Angel Rodriguez Cristobal, the Puerto Rican freedom fighter who was later killed in his jail cell in Tallahassee. The United States called it a suicide, you know."

"So who would not be proud of Carlos, when he follows in footsteps such as these?"

We are in the Torres living room, and Alejandrina and her two daughters Liza, 13, and Cata, 8, are bringing in *arroz con pollo* for members of the Ecumenical Civic Committee which was formed to see that the Puerto Ricans would be guaranteed their rights, and that members of the community would not be illegally harrassed by government officials. Alejandrina learned that the group would be meeting through the dinner hour and somehow in the way Latins excel, stretched the *arroz con pollo* so that there was enough for five more people. A sign in the Torres kitchen reads, "Let all guests be received as Christ." Alejandrina says grace, and the committee members move back and forth between business and social talk.

Liza remembers that she received a

birthday card from her brother, Carlos, from prison which she would like to share with the committee. Decorated with a hand-sketched Puerto Rican flag and flowers, it reads in part, "Every birthday of yours I remember you, no matter where I am. My wish is that you have a happy life and that you might link your intelligence and energy to our liberation movement because I am sure that it is only by working and struggling for the welfare of our people that one can find real happiness. Always keep the perspective that we are in relationship to something higher than ourselves — the Puerto Rican people. Many kisses and hugs."

Not to be outdone, Cata describes how she has been excused from reciting the pledge of allegiance at school. "That's not my flag," I told my teacher. "My flag is Puerto Rican." So I stand, but I don't say the words."

Glimpses such as these revealed that the Torres family is maintaining a long tradition of supporting nationalism and independence for Puerto Rico. In so doing they have opted, as have many committed Christians in Latin America and the United States, to choose sides as agents of social change.

The following day I tag along with Alejandrina to the Rafael Cancel Miranda High School where she works as bookkeeper and office manager. Enroute she tells me, "I was born in Puerto Rico and came to the United States when I was 9. I was raised in Hell's Kitchen in New York. The church has always been a central part of my life. I met *El Viejo* when I was a secretary in a church where he was assigned in New York. Now I'm working on women's issues too. I became radicalized in the church. You know how it is, repression breeds resistance."

She points from the car to a public school. "Some 70% of the students there are 'pushouts' or dropouts, and 90% of these are Puerto Rican. We try to work with these at the Miranda School."

At the Miranda School, Jose Lopez, the principal, takes me on tour and explains, "We have to help our students to realize that they are functional illiterates. The school establishes the atmosphere which allows them to admit it, as alcoholics or drug addicts must admit their problems. All students meet weekly with faculty and staff for criticism/self-criticism sessions."

"The school offers a high school and college program, the former affiliated with the Christian Action Ministry Academy and the latter with Truman College and Governors State University. We also offer social and legal services to students and their families. The school is based on the idea that education is liberation or it is not education. Our motto is '*Education Breaks Chains.*'"

Jose Lopez who also teaches at Northeastern in Chicago, was imprisoned during the Grand Jury investigation in which Maria Cueto and Raisa Nemikin refused to testify.

Alejandrina interrupts to invite me to



Carlos and Haydee Torres



Jose Lopez

visit the Westtown Community Law Office. Enroute I was curious as to what she was saying during the Lenten service when the FALN arrests were made.

"I was preaching on the Seven Last Words, calling for a commitment from the congregation to involve themselves in the community. Take for example the words, 'Woman behold thy son, son thy mother.' How are we responding to that? I pointed out that Christ's work had to be continued and it was our responsibility as co-creators to do that."

Alejandrina's words reminded me of Lolita Lebron's at the Theology in the Americas meeting in Detroit, when she told the audience, "Spiritually we must all become women, giving birth to new lives, a new society, a new church, to liberation. The dream of liberation in the United States has been cut at the roots. Jesus came to make us a dignified people, not to put money in the banks. We must turn over the tables in the temples. Everything of value is born in

pain, to which all women are witnesses."

Alejandrina had served as a legal worker for Lolita Lebron. Following briefings at the law office with Mara Siegel and Viola Salgado, on the status of the six men and five women in jail, we go by the school bookstore and then we're off to the First Congregational Church for a final visit with Jose.

El Viejo delights in recalling church history and describing the current program. Then he reflects on a bit of Puerto Rican history, how the United States acquired it as booty in the Spanish American War, "from Spain although it was not Spain's to give, since that country had granted autonomy to Puerto Rico in 1897. Puerto Rico had its own currency and had been accepted as a member of the international postal union."

Nationalists claim that transfer of Puerto Rico to the United States violated international law, since Puerto Rico could in no way be called property. The Autonomy Charter was a binding international covenant, and provided that it could be amended only upon the request and approval of the Puerto Rican Parliament, but the United States and Spain negotiated an agreement without Puerto Rican representation. Ever since the early '30s, Puerto Rico

has been in continuous struggle for independence, mainly under the nationalists.

"But Puerto Rico also has four or five clandestine groups that are soldiers of this movement for independence. The FALN is one of these. They operate in retaliation for the abuses of continued imperialism," *El Viejo* said.

Agitation and violent uprisings have been suppressed by the U.S. military which today maintains 11 bases on Puerto Rico and occupies some 13% of the land. Therefore, the groups are clandestine, and the soldiers without uniforms.

The recent Puerto Rican elections brought a glimmer of hope to nationalists, when they reflected that the people did not vote for statehood in spite of the intensive campaigning of incumbent Governor Romero Barcelo for the issue. President-elect Reagan also had made known his preference for statehood, and Vice-President elect George Bush had campaigned up and down the Island for statehood.

And so the struggle goes on.

How did the United States acquire Puerto Rico? The *Hollywood Squares* were wrong. It was not redeemed with Green Stamps. Redemption will come at a far greater price. ■

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experiences of others in statements such as "I had a hard time getting a sterilization five years ago. I can't see the need for a waiting period." And certainly it is true that in the not too distant past many middle-class women were denied sterilization by physicians. The issue became clear only when women understood that the same people who would deny a white middle-class woman her request were the ones who were sterilizing working-class Whites, Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, and Mexicans without ever bothering to obtain consent.

We examined social class attitudes of superiority which can lead to an acceptance of coercion of "others" such as welfare recipients, and we dealt with them in open discussion. We learned to identify our friends from the ranks of women, third-world people, health workers, and church groups. We likewise identified our opponents from the ranks of gynecologists, board members of the organizations dedicated to population control — which promulgate the "people-pollute" ideology — and of those who favor a coercive society which oppresses people.

We also learned that there are many organizations which mask their ideology of population control by providing needed services in the areas of health, education, and family planning. These organizations are often linked to the large corporations and to a small number of private foundations in the United States.

In the process of study we analyzed the case of Puerto Rico. There during the last 30 years the government with United States funding has sterilized over one-third of the women of childbearing age. This was achieved by providing sterilizations free at a time when women were joining the workforce in large numbers. The lack of family support services, of legal and safe

abortions, of alternative methods of contraception, and of full information about the permanency of sterilization have all combined to produce those startling numbers.

An analysis of the complex situation of Puerto Rican women showed us that there are many coercive factors in society which easily lead to sterilization abuse. Freedom of choice requires that there be real alternatives. We have deepened our understanding of the connections between the current denial of abortion rights to poor women, the dearth of child-care facilities, and the cuts in welfare and sterilization abuse.

We are now confident that we will halt sterilization abuse in New York City and that our example will serve as a model to groups of like-minded people who are springing up across the country to combat the same problem in their communities.

Epilogue

To comment on more recent history, many important developments have taken place. My optimism about the effectiveness of coalitions to win protective legislation was justified. As consciousness developed, a movement grew to support further legislation in New York City. Public Law #37 was passed by the City Council with a vote of 38 to 0 in April of 1977. The law embodies the principles of the guidelines on sterilization of the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation, applying them to all New York City health facilities, *both public and private*. The law also regulates sterilization of *both women and men*.

The success of this coalition effort forced the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to promulgate guidelines embodying the same provisions as the law, which were officially adopted in November 1978. Just as in the case of New York City, as on the national level there developed wide support of groups such as The

Committee for Human Rights, Community Boards of Methodist and St. Luke's Hospitals, Committee of the United Neighborhood Houses of New York, New York City Coalition for Community Health, Committee to End Sterilization Abuse, New York Civil Liberties Union, Physicians Forum, Women United for Action, National Black Feminists Organization, and New York National Organization for Women. Hundreds of organizations and individuals testified in 10 regional hearings.

Provisions of the New York City law and HEW guidelines are:

1. Informed consent in the language spoken or read by the person.
2. Extensive counseling to include information as to alternatives.
3. A prohibition on consent at times of delivery or at any other time of stress and of overt or veiled pressures on welfare patients.
4. The right to choose a patient advocate throughout the counseling or any other aspect of the process.
5. A 30-day waiting period between consent and procedure.
6. No sterilization of people under 21 years of age.

On the negative side, however, are some pervasive problems:

Passed each year since June, 1977, the Hyde Amendment and corresponding budgetary limitations in most states effectively cut off Medicaid funding for abortion in all cases except where pregnancy would endanger the life of the mother or is due to rape or incest. As a result Medicaid-funded abortions have been reduced 99%. These measures have imposed incalculable hardship on women on welfare, making them vulnerable to the risk of illegal abortion and opening the door to the sale of the "package deal" of abortion/sterilization since the federal government continues to pay 90% of the cost of a sterilization procedure. For institutions eager for these funds it becomes an

additional incentive to coerce women desperate for an abortion into consenting to sterilization.

In June 1980, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Hyde Amendment was constitutional. In its decision, the Court ignored all the facts showing the devastating impact that loss of funding for abortion services has on the lives and health of poor women and their families. Although Medicaid covers most medically necessary care, the Court ruled that abortion funding could be excluded because the procedure involves potential life. The ruling constitutes an imposition of the government's values over those women even to risking women's health and lives.

Another development is of great concern. In 1979, some women

employed by the American Cyanamid Corporation in West Virginia charged that the company had threatened to fire them from the lead pigments division of the plant unless they underwent sterilizations. Lead exposure is harmful to unborn children and the company feared potential pregnancies. They complied in order to keep their jobs, although lead exposure is also harmful to workers. As of October 1980, their suit in Federal Court on the grounds of sex discrimination is still pending, but knowledge of the case has reached many people who have become indignant.

This clear attack on workers' rights to a safe workplace and on their reproductive freedom has spurred trade unions to unite with women's organizations. A new exciting coalition is emerging.

Further, the increasing sterilization

of Native American women has been documented by Women of All Red Nations (WARN). Lee Brightman, United Native Americans President, estimates that of the Native population of 800,000 as many as 42% of the women of childbearing age and 10% of the men have already been sterilized. This together with the effort to deprive the Native Americans of their right to their land, particularly that which has uranium, has placed the Native American people at the head of a broad movement for ecology and a safer environment for us all.

All of this points up the challenge for today: a unification of the forces for a safe workplace, and environment, for women's rights, for Native Americans rights to their lands, for the rights of Third World people. May we meet the challenge with strength. ■

Continued from page 3

inadequate assessment of the spiritual and emotional factors in our national life which nourish those movements, factors which in a sense have made their appearance inevitable. For concerned persons today, to sound the same old trumpet is not enough. Spiritual discernment is of the essence in the cure of souls, which at root is what the Caucus is about. The national shift to the right was not quite as apparent when the Caucus was formed last February as it was in the November elections. Even had it been, perhaps the Caucus could not have planned more wisely. The Task Forces on the Arms Race, the Energy Crisis, Parish Revitalization, Economic Justice, Funding, Communications, and Policy and Evaluation, seem strategically designed to relate the Caucus to the cardinal, current national issues. The danger remains that the Governing Board will underestimate the stark urgency of two of those groups: effective communications, and strategic policy and evaluation. A strong tide is running in this country today. Can the Caucus give an effective answer to the cynical comment: "We tried all that before, and it didn't work"? Perhaps more importantly, can it make it clear that the bible, prayer, the family, patriotism, and Christian morality not only do not find their true defenders in the extremists of the Right, but indeed are corrupted by those groups? This is a tall order. As has been said, it is

like standing in front of a thundering herd of elephants, and trying to signal a turn.

So, again, is the Caucus another exercise in words? Will it prove to be just another Episcopal fad, merely providing the passing rhetoric for a transitional period to the next chapter of church life? Or is it for real? "We understand backward," said Kierkegaard, "but we live forward." And thus he brought under rebuke both optimists and pessimists — any who with facile assurance think they can extrapolate the past into the future, either for good or for ill. That bit of sober wisdom is a healthy reminder when contemplating any human enterprise. And this includes the Episcopal Urban Caucus.

The Christian life is not essentially a fabric of dogmas, cultic activities and traditions. More basically, it is the lived-out response of living people to the living God. Thus the question of the impact and the future of the Caucus can in no way be cleverly predicted. It will be lived out. It will be the result of the quality of insight and leadership provided by its Governing Board, and of the faithfulness and stubborn dedication of those at the local diocesan and parish level. It will be determined by their awareness of the signs of the times, by their human (and Godly) concern over the deprivation and suffering which constitute those signs, by their apostolic commitment to a seriously jeopardized human enterprise. ■

Continued from page 2

revealed that those of us left-handers who most conform to right-handers' public expectations — as in handshakes, table manners, and even in signing the cross — have a much higher incidence of heart attacks, ulcers, and other nervous disorders than do left-handers who perform all public and private functions left-handedly. How much more risky it must be for us lesbians and gays who too readily accommodate ourselves to heterosexuals' public manners.

Dr. Hitch's reduction of all lesbian/gay clergy and teachers to the criminal few whom he personally knew before retirement is a reflection of the limited and fiercely controlled visibility which the church and the academy have always required of lesbians and gays. Most folks simply have not been allowed to know about the responsible majority of the homosexuals, but only about our criminal element. Since we number between 15 to 25 million Americans, the surprise is that we have not had more criminals, especially since the society educates all of us that criminals we should be.

Nevertheless, Dr. Hitch should remember that the sapphic, platonic, and sometimes even monastic traditions which the more responsible majority of lesbian/gay professionals have given to the culture are basically non-genital traditions — teaching and ministry sparked by an honest eros redeemed by higher religious and academic commitments. By contrast, consider an important beam in the eye of the heterosexual academic community: *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in September 1979 reported that one in four (25%) of recent female Ph.Ds in psychology had had to put out to get out — with their heterosexual male professors. Interestingly, no heterosexuals have written to *The Chronicle* to decry this situation.

I suspect that Randy Brunt's illness will pass. Even if he takes us as the spiritually unclean, the St. Francis model of Christian ministry is to embrace the leper, not to vomit upon

him. I have reviewed what St Paul has to say about the pagan temple prostitutes condemned in Romans 1, but as neither a pagan nor a temple prostitute I am not directly instructed thereby as to God's response to the loving Christian commitment which my male spouse and I, like thousands of other same-gender couples, have made to each other. Nevertheless, I am very much instructed by the warning issued to Randy Brunt and to the rest of us in the same text: "You *therefore* have no defense — you who sit in judgment, *whoever you may be* — for in judging others you condemn yourself, since you, the judge, are equally guilty" (Romans 2:1).

We lesbians and gay males are frankly weary of the bibliolatry which ignores such full contexts to distort God's word. The Bible is not properly a bludgeon, but a book to be used in the Redeemer's affirmation of the prior worth of those whom God takes out of hock. Thank you, Joe Stoutenburgh, for asking: Christ, that Redeemer, is the basis for my faith. To a swishy, gentle lamb will belong the Last Judgment.

Louie Crew
Stevens Point, Wisc.

TMI and Mt. St. Helens

I would like to applaud you and Lockwood Hoehl for an excellent series of articles on the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island. As one who lives in the shadows of our country's largest nuclear reactor — the Trojan nuclear plant — I found your series to be sobering and timely.

Of particular interest to me was the striking parallel between the experience of those around Three Mile Island and those in our communities here near Mt. St. Helens. The eruption of the mountain on May 18 caused much the same reaction in our communities of Longview, Kelso and Castle Rock as did the accident at Three Mile Island, yet with one notable exception: the eruption of Mt. St. Helens was a phenomenon far beyond human control. We are victims of a natural disaster and the attitudes and response of our communities reflect

that reality. Hoehl's statement in his last article is true for us: "Typically, our image of a disaster-torn community is one of cooperation, neighbor helping neighbor, everyone pitching in for the survival of all."

That such a reaction did not occur at Three Mile Island is, to me, profound. It causes me to wonder whether or not the same cooperation that exists here now would exist in the event of a nuclear accident at Trojan. My hope and prayer is that it would, although my gut level response is one of skepticism.

As Mt. St. Helens was erupting, I had the opportunity to observe it from the deck of one of our parishioner's homes. A bright and sunny day afforded a spectacular look at that awesome event and from our location we had a panoramic view of the whole Columbia River valley. To the north we watched the mountain spew its ash several miles into the air while to the south we could see steam coming out of the cooling tower of Trojan. It was a stunning portrait of the forces at work in our world. To the north was the power and destruction of nature, the consequences of which were quite visible. To the south lay a work of human hands whose potential for power and destruction is no less real and the consequences in the event of an accident would surely be much more deadly.

The view of Mt. St. Helens and Trojan evoked in me a deep sense of humility and at the same time repentance. I trust that we human beings know enough to learn from history but the view from my friend's home causes me to wonder. Articles such as yours are extremely valuable in reminding us as individuals and as a nation of our responsibilities as stewards of God's creation.

The Rev. Stephen J. Gehrig
Longview, Wash.

Credits

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