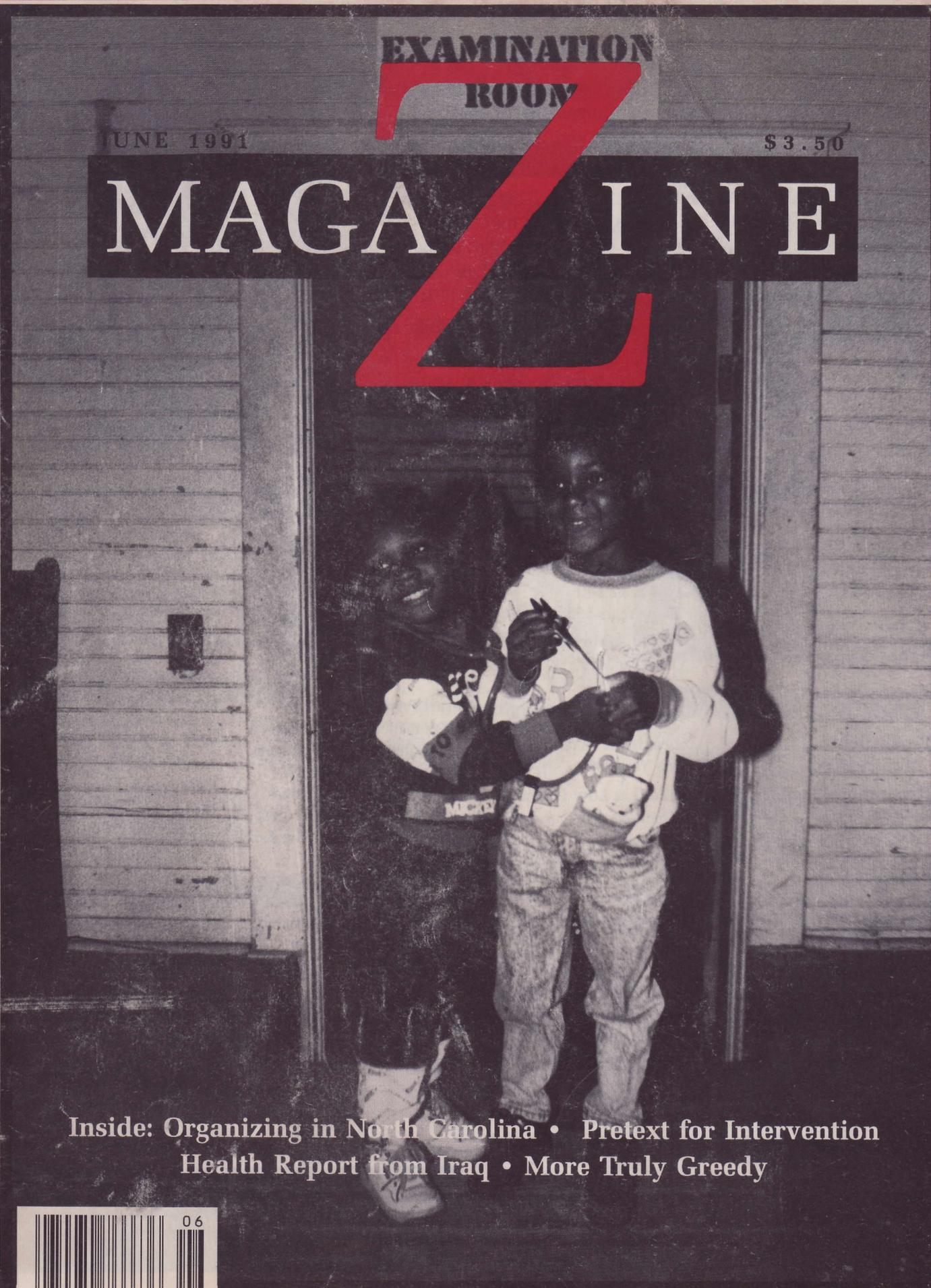
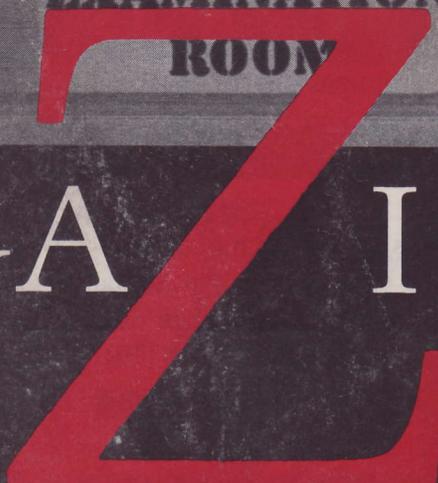


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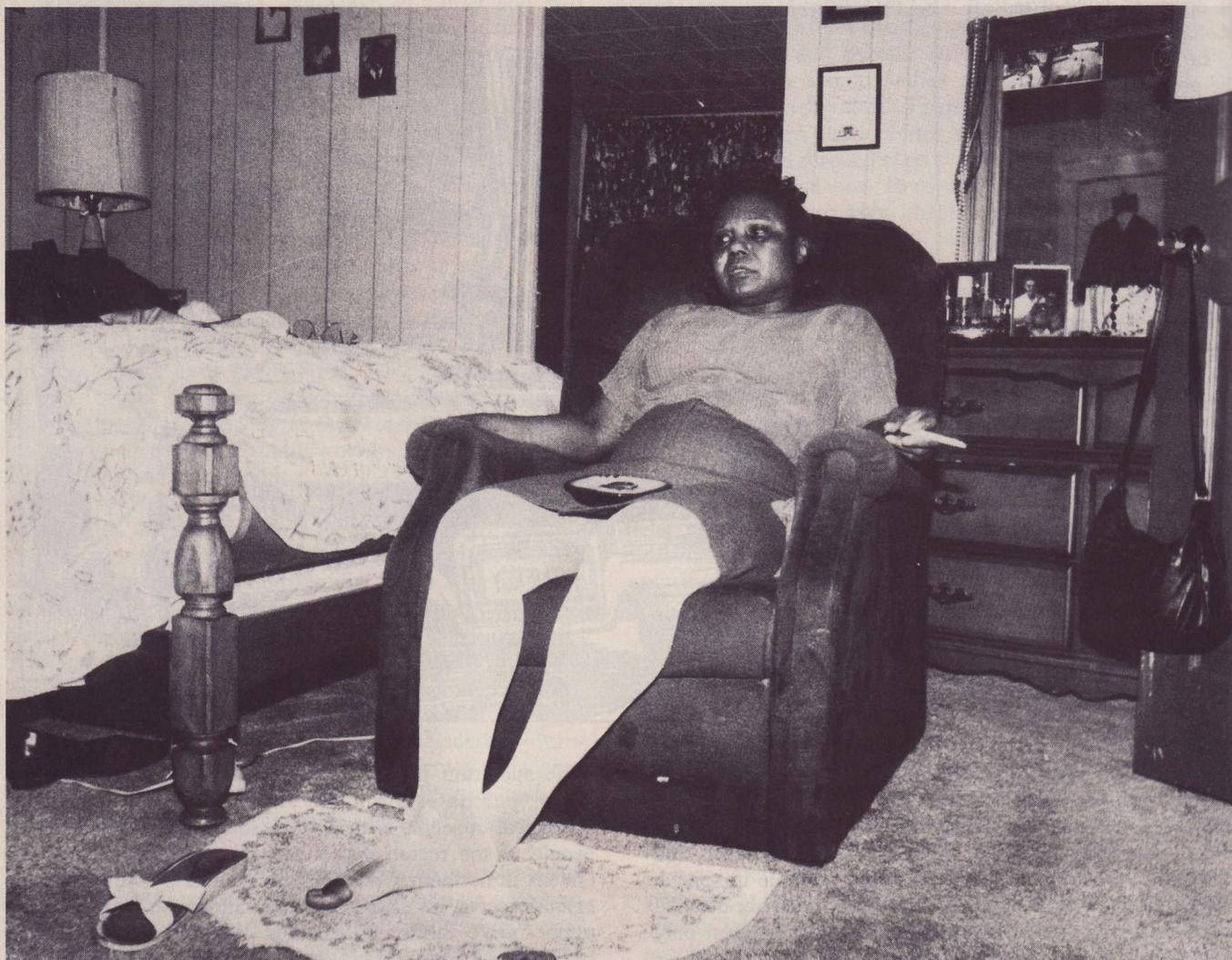
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MAGAZINE



Inside: Organizing in North Carolina • Pretext for Intervention
Health Report from Iraq • More Truly Greedy





IDA BODDIE, ROCKY MOUNT, N.C. GARMENT WORKER—DAN HUGHES

FIGHTING FOR THE BLACK BELT... and MORE...

B Y M O E S E A G E R

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LOOK AT these 'drawers'—they sell for \$12 a piece. I've been making them for 24 years and I can't afford to buy the clothes I make. And I can't afford to retire." Ida Boddie is a seamstress for Rocky Mount Undergarment, owned and operated by a family interest from New

York City. In 1968, Ida earned \$1.80 an hour doing piece work. Today she earns \$4.80 an hour if she fills her quota. "We're not allowed to talk to each other at work, she says, so I walk around during the breaks wearing my T-shirts and buttons that say 'An injury to one is an injury to all,' 'United We Bargain-Divided We Beg,' and 'Organize The South.' No union has ever come here to organize. The

unions I've talked to seemed to be afraid to organize the South. What kind of mess is this? It's slavery and I refuse to be a slave. It's a poor thing—everybody lives off of us. Our greatest problem is fear. Fear is the toughest thing I've fought against in my life. My daddy, my minister, and my boss all tell me to keep quiet. I won't keep quiet. You know what? It's the same all over the South."

This sharecroppers daughter turned blue collar laborer speaks point blank of conditions endured by millions of workers in the "new" South, especially for African Americans who toil under the bulwark of the "old" South. Deep in the heart of Dixie lies a nation within a nation. It's called the Black Belt and it extends across 225 counties in 11 states from Virginia to east Texas. It is home to 55 percent of America's black population, estimated (in the South) at 17 million. It is from the Black Belt—from slavery to the present—that a lion's share of the South's productivity and prosperity is generated. A decade after the collapse of northern industry runaway shops remain in full gallop to the South and Third World. North Carolina has successfully enticed over 1,400 new and expanding businesses, and nine of the nation's chief banking institutions. Paving the way, the State has voraciously gutted its already relaxed regulatory laws, many counties following suit. In net worth, North Carolina reports a decade growth exceeding \$20 billion in business investments spawning 400,000 new jobs. In the four Black Belt counties surrounding Rocky Mount over 27 corporations have set up shop, increasing employment by 52 percent in Edgecombe County with similar increases in the other three counties. With the huge influx of capital, North Carolina headlines itself the "hub" of the Sunbelt. For the multinationals and venture capitalists, North Carolina and the South has become highly profitable pay dirt. For a large section of the southern working class, especially Black workers, the re-alignment has actually contributed to further marginalization and destitution.

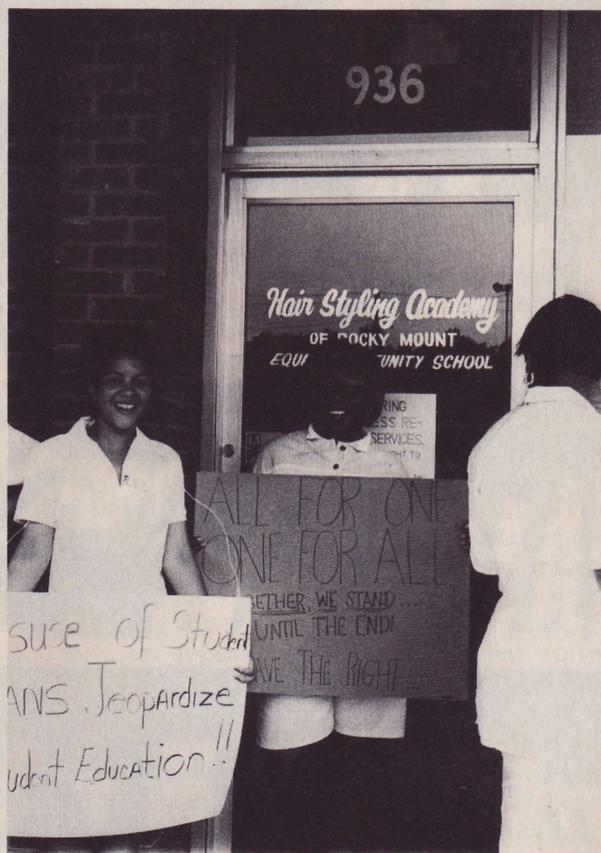
Gerrymandering Black To White

THE ADJOINING COUNTIES of Edgecombe and Nash meet at the railroad tracks running through the center of Rocky Mount, literally dividing the town into two jurisdictions. Gerrymandered after Re-construction, resources and revenues in the two-county town fall to the predominantly white Nash side, as the Black Edgecombe side is deprived of infrastructure maintenance and municipal support services. Constituting a majority in Rocky Mount and Edgecombe County, Black residents have been misrepresented by their white congressperson and white dominated county commissioners (3-2), schoolboard (4-2), and city council. Representing them in the Senate, Jesse Helms continues his ideological crusade for antiunionism and white backlash. The last Black congressperson of North Carolina was gerrymandered out of office in 1900. The ongoing apportionment of gerrymandered resources has crippled police and fire protection, public education, and health care for Rocky Mount's and Edgecombe's 60,000 mostly Black residents. Additionally, toxic wastes generated from new industries are being dumped throughout Rocky Mount and the surrounding Black communities, several of which remain without emergency services and hospitals to accom-

modate impending catastrophes. Nevertheless, Edgecombe property owners pay nearly 50 percent higher tax rates than their co-city dwellers across the tracks in Nash county.

Thanks To K-Mart

CONVINCED THAT ORGANIZING the Black Belt is essential to national Black empowerment, long-time union organizer/journalist Abner Berry moved to Rocky Mount in 1981. He and other veteran activists began organizing around workplace and community issues. Later that year, the firing of three Black women from a local K-Mart store ignited the group's support. Rocky Mount native, Saladin Muhammed, a former union organizer, rallied fellow janitors and other area workers, forming the adhoc K-Mart Black Workers For Justice. Coined by the fired women, BWFJ set out to prove racial discrimination against the store where 76 percent of the business was Black and 87 percent of the workforce was white. K-Mart's intransigence against group pressure forced the workers to turn to various constituencies for help. Within a few months of the firings they sparked a boycott, rallying up to 500 people at a time. The campaign galvanized thousands of area residents, church and civic leaders, and the local motorcycle club, The Golden Eagles, who escorted marchers along demonstration routes. Many retired activists from earlier decades re-dedicated themselves. Recruiting volunteers, picket line captains, and collecting 3,500 petition signatures, K-Mart BWFJ issued its first formal literature, a one

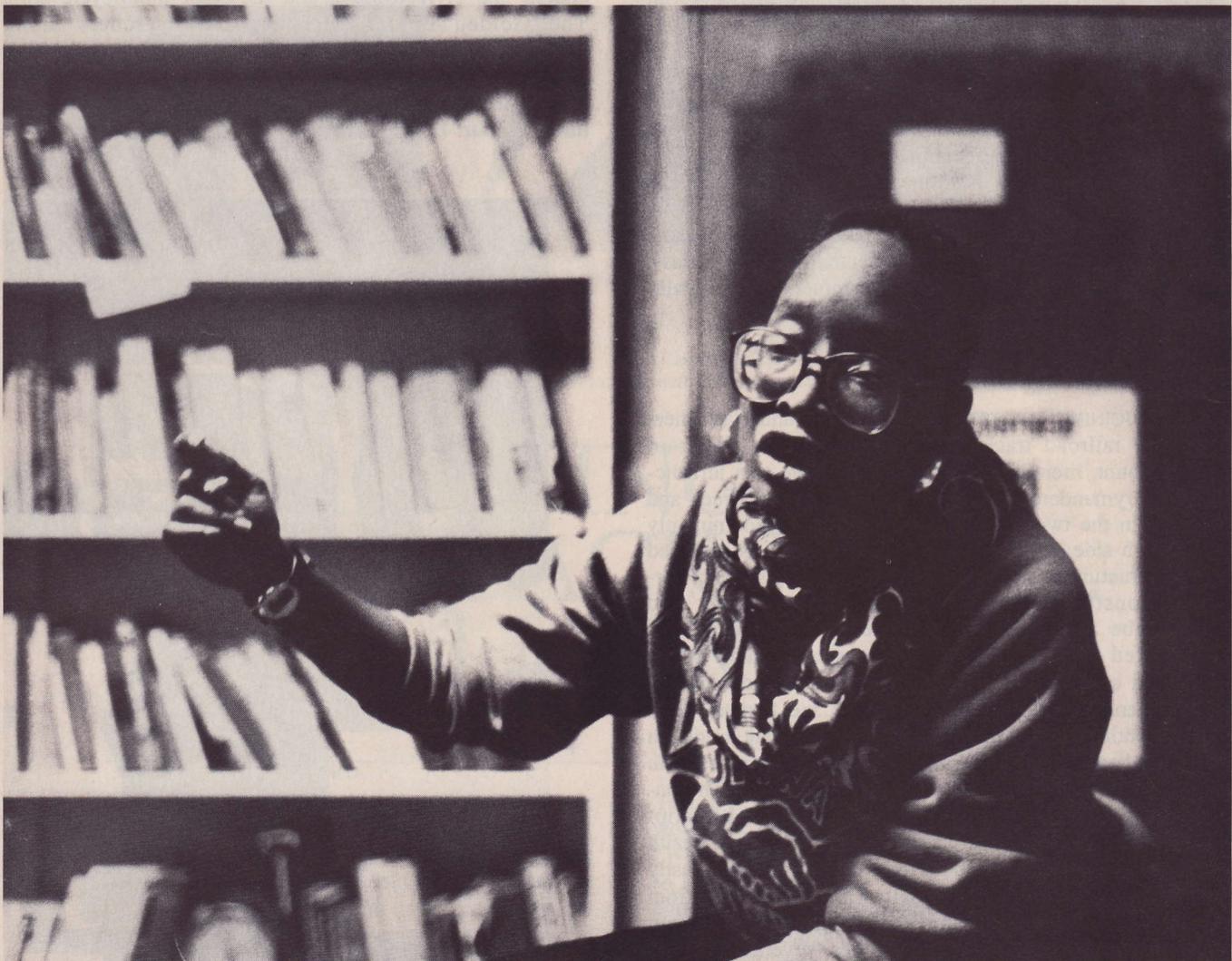


PICKETING OVER MISUSE OF FUNDS—JERRY SAVAGE

page information sheet, "Justice Speaks." Several local in-plant solidarity committees formed, net-working across industry lines, establishing public speakouts. Leaflets appeared in K-Marts in Raleigh, Goldsboro, Atlanta, Newark, and Philadelphia.

Six months after it all began K-Mart was forced to issue unemployment compensation to the three women workers, transferring its local manager. The success of the ad-hoc campaign served to agitate rank and file support from several local industries. A decision was made to continue collective actions. In-plant committees from textile, tobacco, poultry, packing house, and municipal worksites began meetings of the Workers Unity Council. The workers formally adopted the name, Black Workers for Justice, designing a logo depicting two black fists breaking free of shackles. BWFJ set up headquarters in a small two-story house on the Edgecombe side of Rocky Mount. Three months later BWFJ was invited to neighboring Wayne county to act as liaison for an organizing drive between the Carpenters and Joiners Union and 55 sawmill workers. By year's end BWFJ had attracted 100 rank and file workers from 8 counties to a "Know Your Rights" conference. The network then spread to several locales in Eastern North Carolina, two in

the western part of the state, Raleigh and Keyesville, Georgia. Entering its 11th year, BWFJ continues with a formula of workplace-based community struggle. Saladin Muhammed explains, "We are working for a politically conscious Black working class with a platform developed by the masses themselves. A platform based on their needs and struggles for democratic rights, political power, and liberation. A movement, not centered around big personalities, not a cult, but around the leadership of organizations of committed everyday Black working class people. The strategy begins with the make-up and function of BWFJ itself. The steering committee is composed of veteran organizers and rank and file laborers, half of them women. Our aim is to follow the direction of workers themselves, assisting them to assume leadership and command of their own struggles. Our strategy requires a lot of time, involving small amounts of progress. Of course, when you talk about the working class of the South you're speaking about millions of Black workers. And within this population we must give special attention to the role and added hardships of Black women. Our desired end is the liberation of all workers, but we understand the special, largely unaddressed needs of the Black working class within the



SHAFEA M'BALIA, BWFS STAFF—DAN HUGHES



SALADIN MOHAMMAD, CO FOUNDER BWFJ—DAN HUGHES

national and international context.” Pursuant to the goals of grass roots empowerment, BWFJ fosters an egalitarian non-hierarchical division of labor. From its numerous committees, commissions, forums, and departments come rank and file members encouraged to assume leadership positions. Furthermore, BWFJ initiates and assists in many struggles beyond the shop floor, lending itself to environmental, electoral, and health struggles, among others. In 1985, the group conducted a successful campaign changing Rocky mount city council electoral laws from at-large to by-district, ensuring Black representation. BWFJ has also played instrumental roles in progressive candidates’ election to school board and county commission.

Corporate Criminal

ALL TOO FREQUENTLY, several issues converged in one place. Schlage Lock Company operated a plant in Rocky Mount between 1972 and 1988, employing 800 workers at its peak, of which 80 percent were Black and 80 percent were women. A subsidiary of multi-national Ingersoll-Rand, Schlage expanded its local operation in 1981 through a \$5.5 million county sponsored industrial revenue

bond. In 1987 a company wide restructuring plan required the Rocky Mount plant be shut-down and relocated to Tecate, Mexico. Both parent and subsidiary enjoyed substantial profits of \$161 million that year, door lock sales up 15 percent. Through the same period hourly wages ranged from \$3.25 to \$7.23 with Black men and women at the lower end of the scale. Schlage wage earners were denied severance pay, and given one month health coverage after layoff while management received severance pay, six month extended health care, life insurance, and bonuses to those who stayed through the phase down period. A cost analysis conducted by the Midwest Center for Labor Research revealed the cost of the shut-down to the county (who gave \$5.5 million to the company) in unemployment compensation and lost tax revenues at \$10.5 million, or \$15,400 for every displaced worker. Assembly line worker Joan Sharpe and another worker approached BWFJ, and shortly after formed, The Committee Against Schlage Plant Closing. “Even though the plant was closed,” said Sharpe, “we decided to fight for back pay and benefits.” Sharpe and 115 co-workers met at the BWFJ Workers Center to develop a fight-back plan, meeting once a week to hash out tactics adopted in a one person-one vote process. The

Schlage workers involved BWFJ and several state and federal agencies in the campaign. They uncovered much more than originally anticipated.

They discovered that 17 workers had died in a 4 year period, while scores of others suffered from chronic respiratory, liver, kidney, and skin diseases linked to the use of lead, nickel, chrome, and tetrachoroethene used in the production process. Emergency screenings were conducted at the BWFJ Center by the North Carolina Rural Student Health Coalition. State officials found significant levels of carcinogens in the ground water surrounding the plant. EPA investigators discovered hundreds of drums with chromium electroplating sludge inside the plant. Results were published in the local media, exposing the community-wide danger left behind by the company. Armed with the information, Schlage workers appeared before government bodies at the local, county, and state levels, finally leafleting the White House with the help of Washington, DC area unionists. Ingersoll-Rand denied and dismissed the damage even when a Schlage worker delegation presented evidence at the

company's annual stockholders meeting in Morristown, New Jersey.

Back in Rocky Mount, the Schlage workers organized a May Day march and rally drawing 300, titled "Area-wide Mobilization for Economic Justice and Workers Rights." Because of effective agitation, all the way to federal levels, Ingersoll-Rand/Schlage held a press conference in July 1988, caving in to several demands: severance pay to 500 workers employed at the time of shutdown, early release of pensions, health screenings at company expense for all workers suspecting job-related illness, and a major clean-up and monitoring of chemical contamination. On the heels of this victory, Schlage workers called for a plant-closing contract, which the company refuses to discuss. Since 1988 former Schlage workers established a Workers Association to assist the formation of similar work in other area industries. "Most of us came right out of high school to work for Schlage," said Joan Sharpe. "This was our first experience ever at educating ourselves about workers rights. BWFJ showed me that even in a non-union workplace people can fight." Since loosing her job at Schlage, Sharpe now works



INA MAE BEST—DAN HUGHES



BLOOMER HILL, NORTH CAROLINA—DAN HUGHES

as a programmer for BWFJ. In this capacity she has coordinated visiting guest speakers from all over the U. S. and from the Philippines, Central America, the Caribbean and South Africa. Though isolated from many mainstream labor institutions, local workers have made connections between themselves and labor struggles in different regions and countries. Explaining the scope of the 12-page newspaper monthly *Justice Speaks*, Sharpe said “we print everything from local workplace campaigns to updates on international affairs. It all has a meaning to our work.”

A central focus and key component to BWFJ is sexual equality. About gender struggle, the organization states: “BWFJ believes in the equality, rights, and leadership of women workers. In North Carolina, for instance, slightly more than half of all Black workers aged 16 and over are women workers. To particularly address the problems of women workers and to help challenge the ever present conditions of sexism and male chauvinism within the workplace and within society at large the BWFJ formed a Women’s Commission in 1985. Women also comprise half the BWFJ steering committee. The commission has been actively involved in raising the organization and consciousness of women through publications, ‘Women Workers Speak Outs,’ forums, and programs on International Working Women’s Day, and through direct support for organizing campaigns among women workers.”

Who’s Side Are You On?

THE CRIPPLING EFFECTS of the government industry siege on organized labor in the latter part of the 1970s, led the AFL-CIO to announce an “Organize the South” campaign in 1980. Several unions then waged intense, exhaus-

tive drives in the newly established manufacturing sectors of the South, reaping meager returns. But since then, faced with Right To Work laws and the expense of organizing among the region’s numerous small and medium sized work sites, many unions have thrown in the towel. Organizing efforts are further strained by chauvinist and racist attitudes on the part of the white, northern labor bosses and their memberships. Instead of seeing the South as a vast untapped pool of trade unionism, many leaders and members fear competition for jobs from low paid Black, Latino, and Asian laborers. Thus, many northern trade unions, when judging the unorganized South, blame the victims. In the north a myth is propagated: southern workers are anti-union. A historical examination of the record indicates a different scenario, especially for Black workers.

Four years after the Civil War, conventions of Black workers were held in Washington DC, Kentucky, Maryland, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and New York including delegates representing virtually every trade in which Black workers were employed. These Black labor organizations openly called for cooperation with white working class organizations. Received as second class allies by the National Labor Union (NLU), Black workers formed the Colored National Labor Union (CNLU) in 1869. In 1870, at its 4th annual convention in Cincinnati, the NLU refused the CNLU speaking rights and other recognitions, unwilling to recognize the special problems faced by Black laborers, particularly their need for leadership positions within the national trade union movement. Maintaining a principle of unity even after rejection, the CNLU went on to organize Black and white workers, waging strikes and winning contracts. By 1886, Black workers made up more than 50 percent of all unionized Southern workers. During this period

the northern based, integrated Knights of Labor went south to organize. Blacks joined locals of longshoremen, miners, ironworkers, steelworkers, and farmers. After the lifting of a ban on women's membership in 1881, Black women formed their own locals of domestics, chambermaids, housekeepers, laundresses, and agricultural workers. While making important contributions to organized labor in the South, the Knights of Labor failed/refused to challenge the divisive issues of racism and national oppression central to the region. Before its demise in 1895, the Knights' proposed solution to the Black "problem" was to raise funds to send "all Black people back to Africa." Next came the American Federation of Labor, formed in 1881. It organized separate Black and white locals, Blacks recruited in those locals representing the poorest jobs. With the vacancy of northern jobs caused by World War I and the war of the Klan on Black landowners in the South, millions of Black Belt workers went north, joining unions. With the return of servicemen seeking their former jobs after the war, the AFL stood idle as tens of thousands of unionized Black workers were demoted and fired. During the 1930s, two groups linked the struggle of unionization to the larger quest for Black national self determination, connecting work conditions and land rights. The Southern Sharecroppers Union and The Southern Tenant Farmers Union organized and led strikes on behalf of Black and white workers condemned to wage-slave labor in a 20th century plantation system. Their campaigns addressed the Jim Crow system, causing a halt to lynching in several areas where they organized. The momentum generated by these two unions laid the groundwork for solidarity, North and South,

of Black and white workers. In 1941, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters leader A. Philip Randolph led a call for a national March On Washington, demanding Black workers be allowed to work in the defense industry. The move forced white labor leaders to either openly side with Black workers, or align with the bosses. The strategy succeeded in gaining minimal support from white labor and lifting the defense industry ban by President Roosevelt. In 1955 it was predominantly low wage Black laborers who sustained the famous Montgomery bus boycott, the opening volley of the national movement for Black power. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Black workers continue joined industrial unions and re-struck initiatives to organize the old semi-rural work sites of the South.

Land Rape

TODAY, BLACK COMMUNITIES throughout the South are being up-rooted by the designs of incoming industries. As a consequence, the social fabric of towns and rural areas is being ripped apart. Community leaders identify land loss as a major reason. In 1920, Black farmers owned approximately 15 million acres of land according to the U. S. Census of Agriculture. By 1987, the figure shrank to 3.2 million acres. Currently Black landowners are losing land at a rate of 9,000 acres per week. If this trend continues there will be no Black-owned land by the year 2000.

Gary Grant, director of Concerned Citizens of Tillery, North Carolina, and founder of the Land Loss Fund, works with fellow community residents to stop land rape in Tillery and throughout the Black Belt South. Grant's research has

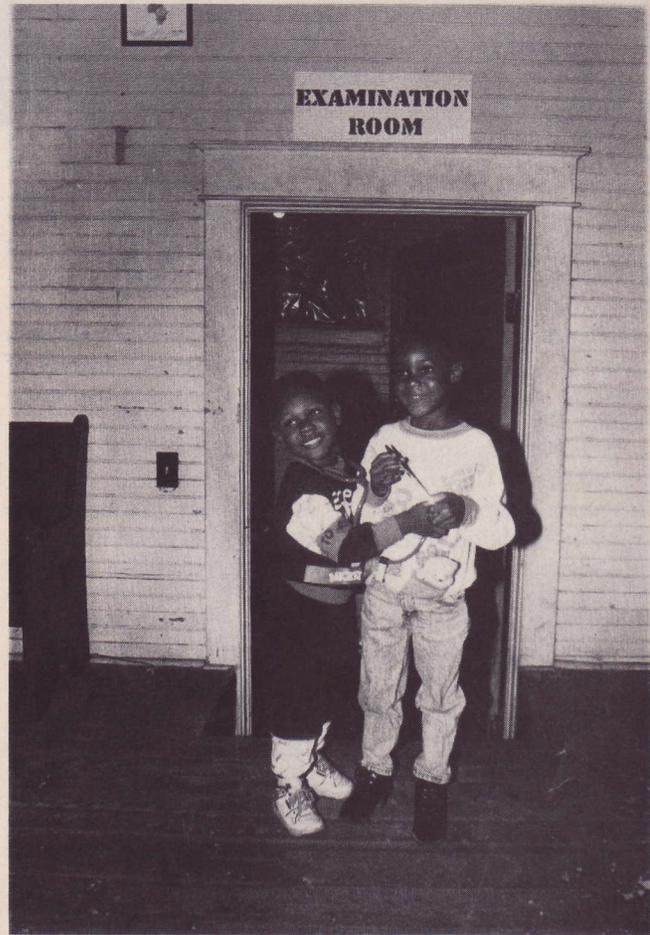


BWFJ CLINIC, BLOOMER HILL, NORTH CAROLINA—DAN HUGHES

uncovered a conspiracy of gigantic proportions. In "Black Land Loss in the South" he writes: "Many so-called experts have argued that the losses of Black farmers are just part of the well publicized farm crisis....But this does not explain why Black farmers are losing their land at a rate of 2.5 times faster than whites..." In 1982 the U. S. Civil Rights Commission reported that, "the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) may be involved in the very kind of racial discrimination that it should be seeking to correct." In 1982 over 85 percent of the Black Farmers in eastern North Carolina were threatened with foreclosure and bankruptcy, but curiously the North Carolina FmHA returned 57 percent of its allocated Limited Resource Loans monies back to the federal government. A 1986 congressional study of FmHA practices in Mississippi found the agency spending four weeks longer to process Black farmers loans than applications of white farmers. FmHA rejected more than twice as many Black applicants than whites. Compounding the crisis, more Black-owned farmland is owned by Black absentee heirs living in Chicago than by Blacks living in Mississippi.

Figures released by North Carolina state agencies unmask equally grim indices. Within the 21 counties of north-eastern North Carolina there were 2,570 fulltime Black farmers working 116,888 acres of land in 1954. By 1979 there were only 529 fulltime Black farmers working 26,876 acres—a drop of 79 percent. Of nearly 6 million acres of rural state lands 3.5 million acres are owned by out of state interests. A proliferation of "superfarms" owned by agribusinesses has swallowed up large tracts of family farms. Close to a million acres is owned by the federal government, much of it used for military bases. (North Carolina sent the largest number of military personnel to the Persian Gulf war.) Agribusiness giants have sunk a billion dollars into land acquisitions and production facilities in the last 25 years. Perdue Farms and other competitors have made the state's poultry industry the largest in the world. Prices paid to client farmers are below production costs, another factor causing foreclosures. Agribusiness monopolies succeeded in raising consumer prices 30 percent over the last 8 years. Meanwhile, taxpayers and consumers shell out an average \$26 billion a year in subsidies to agribusiness monopolies.

The Texas Department of Agriculture issued a report in 1989, declaring the costs of this arrangement "adding to our national trade deficit and threatening to increase the (national) interest rates by 2 or 3 percent." In 1989, agricultural work accounted for 23 million jobs, Blacks making up a majority of the southern workforce, and a significant percentage nationwide. "These 23 million workers represent a powerful group," Grant writes, "if united to fight the exploitation of all the 'have nots' in the agricultural industry: the small farmer, the working class in agriculturally related industry, and the migrant workers and the day laborers. Blacks make up a significant portion of these groups, and must be in the vanguard of this coalition. We must oppose racist policies and practices of the FmHA and private lending institutions. We must oppose agribusiness monopolies that offer landless people only one choice: an underpaid job, usually with the added benefits of unhealthy working conditions. A landless people is a helpless people."



CHILDREN OUTSIDE BWFJ HEALTH CLINIC—DAN HUGHES

Empowerment

TEN MILES FROM Tillary, lies the small community of Shiloh. With a population of 350, Shiloh was founded by freed slaves and for 125 years it's been governed by home rule charter. One of hundreds of unincorporated communities in the South—without jurisdiction to levy taxes—Shiloh lacks many of the most basic services. For years Shiloh folks had been waiting on water lines promised by government and industry developers, to enable them to graduate from local well sources. Surrounded by a hi-tech area called Research Triangle Park, developers drew up plans a few years ago to build office complexes and industrial sites in the center of Shiloh. State engineers proposed highway construction to go right through the community. With the aid of Black Workers For Justice, residents established the Shiloh Coalition For Community Control and Improvement, in 1988. The coalition discovered massive soil, groundwater, and well contamination caused by the neighboring Beazer Company wood treatment plant. Next, they discovered that developers had dug water lines to the north, running underneath Shiloh, by-passing it. The coalition held community hearings, bringing in the EPA, warning construction workers about the hazards of digging into contaminated soil. Beazer—formerly the Koppers Company—was forced to issue bottled water to all affected residents, de-contaminate water and soil, and pay for construction of water lines. To date, de-contamination efforts

have proved inadequate at many sites, prolonging the coalition's battle with the company.

Though the coalition is historically composed of Blacks, it has expanded outreach to affected whites. This unity strategy has become increasingly popular with disenfranchised whites living in the Black Belt, who are benefitting from Black-led worker/community struggles. Racially unified campaigns like the one in Shiloh deny business and government their old trump card—racial polarization. Summing up the victories of the Shiloh Coalition, chairperson Nathanette Mayo said, "it's about empowerment and community control." The Shiloh Coalition's victories are a clean break in an otherwise dirty history of industry and government pollution of non-white communities.

A 1987 study conducted by the Commission For Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ, reported: The EPA inventoried approximately 20,000 un-controlled hazardous waste sites nation wide and "race proved to be most significant among variables" in the location of the sites. In Bloomer Hill, residents are forced to travel 15 miles to Rocky Mount to visit a Black doctor. People from more distant communities travel up to 50 and 100 miles to receive Black health care. The largely impoverished populace avoids all doctors and hospitals until illness or injury become life threatening. Over the last five years BWFJ and the North Carolina Student Rural Health Coalition have established three community health clinics in conjunction with local residents.

Ethel Jones, Coordinator of the Peoples' Clinic of Bloomer Hill is a self-taught administrator. "In this area, said Jones, most Black and poor people don't have money for health care and are intimidated and fed up with racist treatment from white professionals. In Bloomer Hill we serve poverty struck people from a 30 mile region. They are Black and white people who would have to spend their entire incomes on medical services and medicines somewhere else. They average incomes of less than \$10,000 a year." Secretary for the Bloomer Hill Community and Water Association, and BWFJ member, Jones studies medicine and environmental science, applying both to community organizing. "Me and another women conducted health care studies, discovering the costs of services and insurance rates. Then we structured staff and services." Set up in a former church, a clapboard building built in the 1930s, the clinic is heated by space heaters. It serves 20 to 30 people during its once a month Saturday session. The clinic is staffed by community volunteers and a team of 15 University of North Carolina medical students who intake, screen, diagnose, and refer patients, under the supervision of UNC Medical School faculty. Services are provided free or at cost. First year med-student Tamara Howard volunteers because "I, as an aspiring Black physician have a responsibility to my community. Black people are dying in disproportionate numbers of very treatable diseases—hypertension, infant mortalities, heart disease... People die for lack of money or simply waiting to be seen by doctors. Here at Bloomer Hill we educate people to take an active role in their own health maintenance."

Ethel Jones is very articulate about the larger issues. She speaks about community control of health care at low cost

and no cost to the poor. She said the next phase of community health consciousness for Bloomer Hill and similar areas involves preparing youth for careers in medicine. "We need to get more young children excited about med-school. We need more Black doctors." North Carolina officially lists 8,000 physicians and 159 hospitals with 27,000 beds. Duke University and three other medical schools graduate thousands of health field students annually. Surrounded by several of the nations leading health centers, Bloomer Hill residents must rely on volunteer efforts for nominal care. Charlotte, the state's second largest city, experienced an \$800 million downtown construction boom a few years ago and the people of Shiloh waited 50 years for water lines. Pinehurst is home to world renowned golf courses and the Golf World Hall of Fame and North Carolina Black farmers are losing land at an average of 9,000 acres per week.

Third World South

BLACK WORKERS FOR JUSTICE points to conditions like these to substantiate long held positions of many political analysts: (1) The Black Belt and the African American population as a whole constitutes a nation within a nation. (2) The changing contours of the regional economies of the South and Southeast constitute an internal version of the Third World.

Recent figures issued by southern state agencies lend credence to these realities and mirror conditions thought to exist only abroad:

- The South has the nations highest poverty rates—with Mississippi at 24 percent, its Blacks suffering 45 percent.
- The highest rate of working poor—12.7 percent in Mississippi, 7.7 percent in North Carolina.
- Greene County, North Carolina records lower average labor costs in 1990 than the U. S. average for 1975.
- With the nations' 10th largest workforce, over 3.5 million—the largest in the southeast—North Carolina admits to 500,000 unemployed "available for recruitment at any given time."
- State unemployment insurance tax rates and workers compensation rates are among the lowest in the nation.
- Employee leave for illness/injury is way below the national average.
- Work stoppages due to labor disputes in the state is 0.01 percent.
- A "Right To Work" state (the law in 12 southern states), only 4.8 percent of North Carolina's non-agricultural workforce is unionized.
- A national comparison of manufacturing workers reveals that North Carolina's workers generate 22 cents more per dollar earned than the national average.

Add to these figures virtual give-away land and water rights to business and extremely low state corporate taxes and it's easy to see why business is flocking to North Carolina and the South generally. The climate is so ripe for



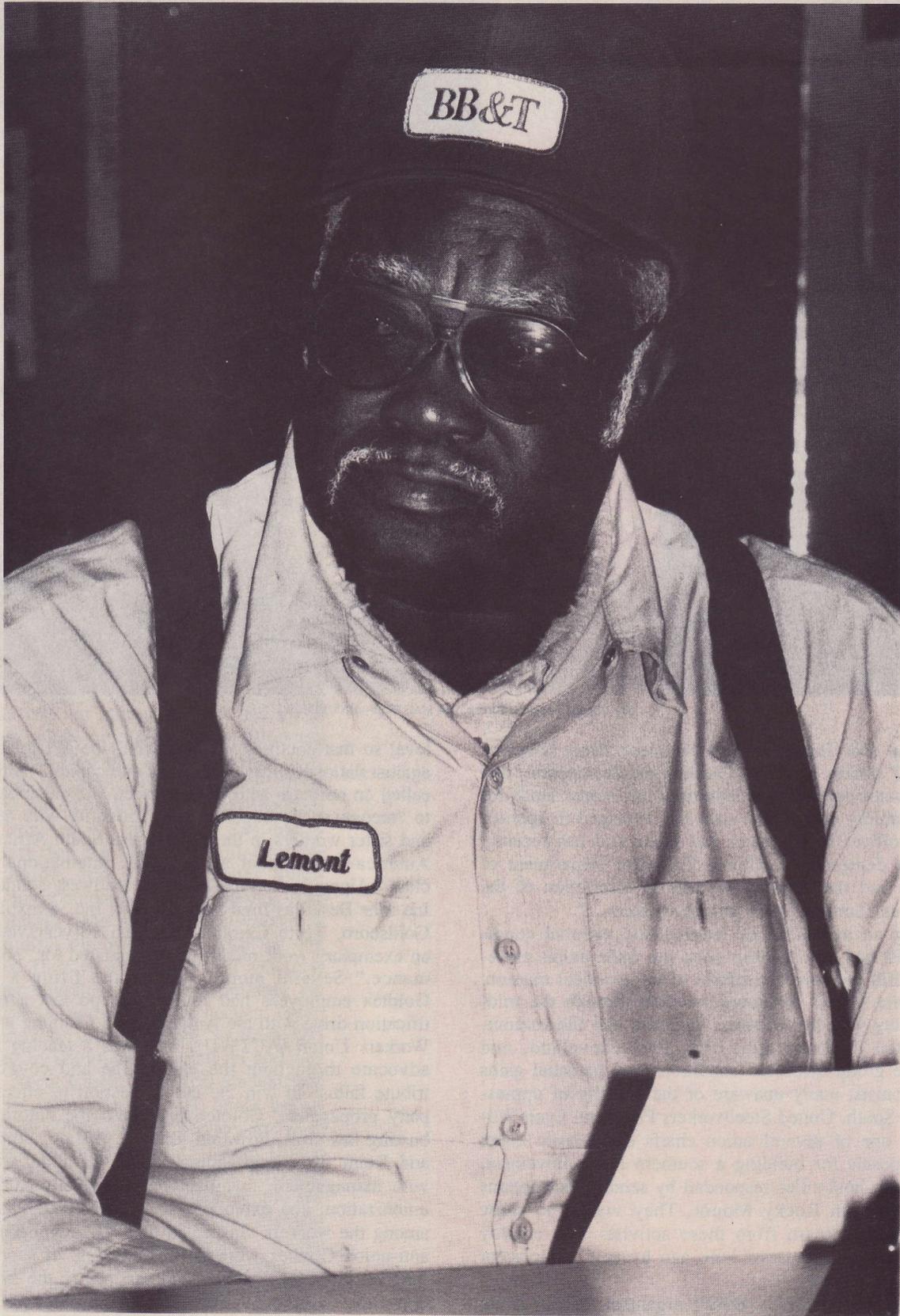
IDA BODDIE, ASHAKI BINTA, INA MAE BEST—DAN HUGHES

exploitation that European and Japanese firms have invested \$5.2 billion in North Carolina textile, apparel, and semi-conductor operations. Claiming it has scarce funds for worker disability claims, the state has managed to sponsor enterprise offices in Germany and Japan and has recently managed a delegation to China. The state Department of Commerce had the audacity to print a description of the workforce as "Smiling, even singing workers..."

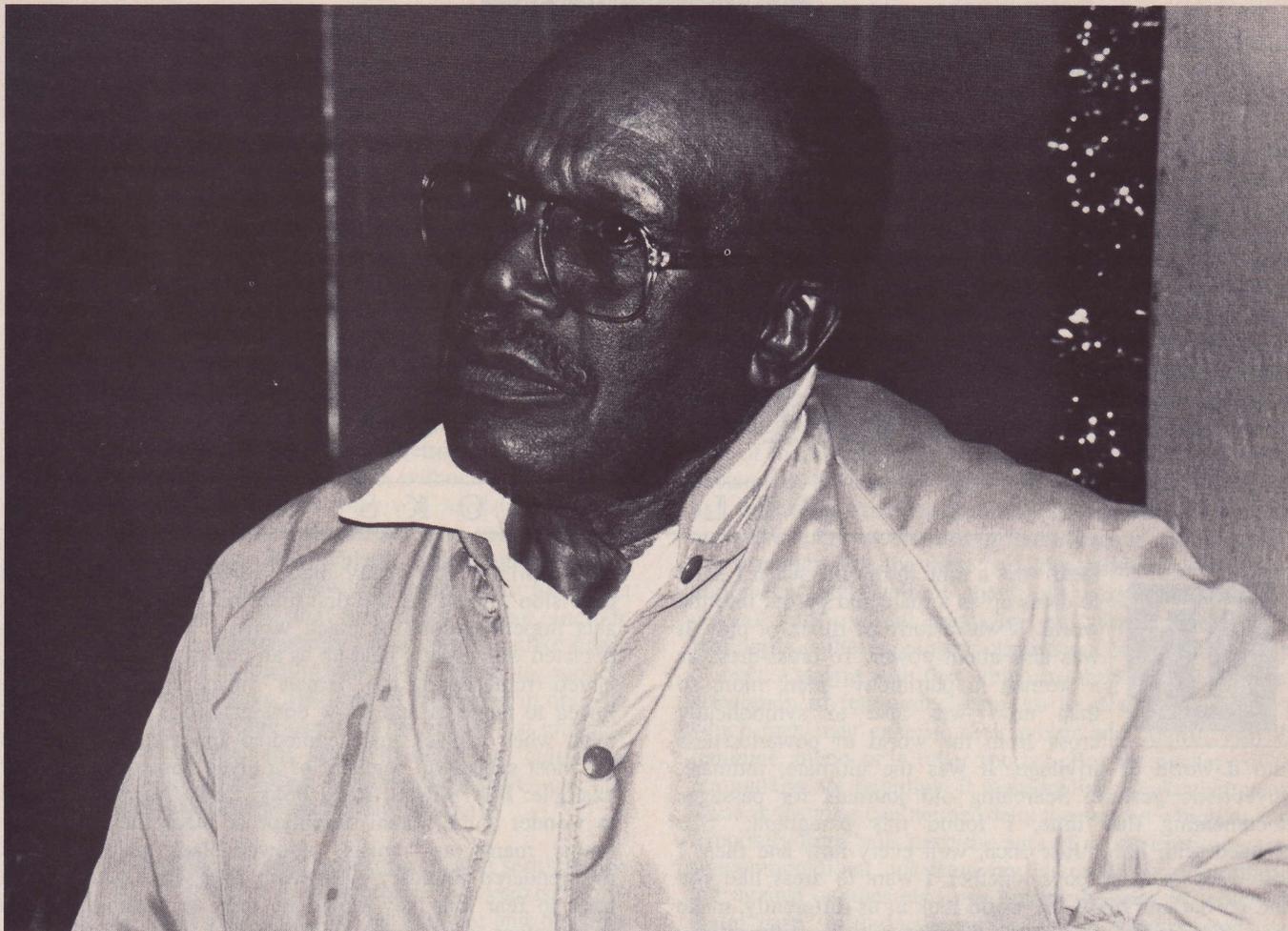
Fighting an avalanche of internal and external conditions, BWFJ has been calling upon the trade union movement to fulfill the southern sphere of its historical mission. Last summer BWFJ delegates travelled through the midwest, meeting with labor leaders and rank and file committees. Hosted in Pittsburgh, Erie, PA., Cleveland, and Detroit, the group discussed conditions and potential gains before unionists, many unaware of the severity of oppression in the South. United Steelworkers President, Lynn Williams was one of several union chiefs enthusiastic about BWFJ proposals for building a southern labor movement. Workers from host cities responded by sending delegations to BWFJ base in Rocky Mount. They visited to show solidarity and to learn from these activists who employ numerous tactics abandoned long ago by now complacent northern trade unions.

Speaking in Pittsburgh, BWFJ organizer Ashaki Binta pointed out the "critical and historical timing for workers, north and south, to begin coordinating efforts on the local

level so that southern workers won't be left to fight alone against national shifts of industry and capital." Binta further called on northern auto, rubber, steel, and electrical workers to "recognize the importance of solidarity with our brother and sister workers in the Philippines, South Africa, Central America—our global allies in the international working class." Upon her return from the midwest solidarity tour, Ina Mae Best was fired from Goldtex Inc., a textile plant in Goldsboro, North Carolina. Best, an 18-year veteran with an exemplary work record was terminated for "poor performance." Several months before the firing a group of Goldtex employees had fought for and lost a union certification drive with the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU). Best was a leading pro-union advocate throughout the effort. She and co-workers attribute failure to win the union election to effective company propaganda. Goldtex had hired the notorious union busting law firm, Edwards, Ballard, Bishop, Sturm, Clark, and Keim from Spartanburg, South Carolina, who, along with management, manufactured lies about ACTWU and unionization, and exploited pre-existing racial polarization among the workers. Suspected of KKK membership, many anti-union Goldtex workers make a point of sporting rebel flags on their work clothes and cars. Since the firing, a nation wide "Rehire Ina Best" campaign has been launched by unionists in Cleveland, New York, Raleigh, and elsewhere. For the past ten months Best has spoken to labor



LEMONT CARNEGIE, FREMONT, NORTH CAROLINA—DAN HUGHES



EZECHIAL JONES, PERDUE POULTRY WORKER—DAN HUGHES

groups throughout the country about her plight and the plight of fellow southern workers. "They treat us like working machines, she says. You do what you're told or you're out the door, no matter how much time you've given to these people. In my industry we're mostly Black women working for white men. We must have union representation down here if workers are ever going to overcome poverty and racial separation. I'm a 50-year-old Black mother of four—now where am I going to find work? I demand my job back from Goldtex. I deserve it and I'm going to fight till I win it back, till all of us win our dignity." Goldtex has successfully challenged Best's attempts to secure unemployment insurance. Her case is currently under appeal.

Organize the South

UNDERSCORING BWFJ'S CALL for an "Organize The South" campaign is some hard evidence for a regional workforce left in isolation. From 1980 thru 1987 there was one union election in Edgecombe County—it failed. In Nash County there were four elections, two victories. In the 5 county region surrounding Rocky Mount there was 47 union drives of which 12 succeeded, a victory margin of 19 percent. "Such a state of affairs would give the marching orders for a class conscious, militant labor movement" asserts BWFJ member Gordon Dillahunt, President of

American Postal Workers Union local in Raleigh. For the U. S. trade union movement, however, the emphasis has remained on the traditionally white male Midwestern industrial regions, and chauvinistic campaigns against foreign workers in the guise of saving U.S. jobs. After so many years of inaction, the slogans "Organize the South" and "Organize the Un-organized" are once again more than ceremonial pronouncements. Yet too often Southern union organizers and workers alike view Right To Work laws, a provision of the infamous Taft-Hartly Act, generally limited to the South, as separate phenomena from the overall social, economic, and political climate in which they live. At the center of this convergence of problems and institutions is the glaring need for an alliance of the trade union movement with the struggle for Black empowerment.

Speaking to the need for help from the outside, Black Workers For Justice welcomes individuals and groups willing to "study and work under the direction of Black workers. Not, however, as missionaries, saviors, or know-it-all revolutionaries." At the close of a Workers Unity Council meeting a poultry worker explained, "any talk about organizing down here usually means you'd better be ready for life and death struggle." Such is the reality of the Black Belt South.

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