

KEYSVILLE :

UNDERDEVELOPMENT,

BLACK POLITICAL POWER,

and

LABOR

DONATION: ¢50

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Keysville: Underdevelopment, Black Political Power and Labor!

Throughout the history of this country, the South, particularly the rural Black Belt South, has played a special role in the development of the U.S. economy. It has been the main source for cheap labor and raw materials.

The thinking of the whole country has been shaped to expect the South to always have a lower paid working class than the rest of the U.S. We hear all kinds of false and confused reasoning trying to justify low wages to Southern workers: "the cost of living in the South is lower", "Southern workers are less educated and largely unskilled", or "Southern Black workers are undependable and dishonest".

The big land and company owners and the banks, have fostered this way of thinking about the economic, social and political value of the South, throughout the major institutions of this country, such as, the media, schools and universities, employment sectors, housing and even the government. Central to this image of the South, is the deep and long standing oppression of Black people, concentrated under conditions different than those of the general Southern working class and population. The very laws of the South (jim crow), forcibly segregated Black people away from the resources, institutions and rights to growth and expression as a people. And despite the basic foundation and institutions established during the Reconstruction Period, that began to advance the development of the Black Belt South, benefiting all who lived there, the system of exploitation, used its legal and illegal powers to destroy, forcibly restrict or control further development and to prevent the consolidation of Black political power over those institutions and governmental bodies in the Black Belt territory. Thus, we see the deactivation of the Keysville Government in the 1930s and the eventual closing of Boggs Academy.

Yes, through the Civil rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s, Black people have won basic changes in the laws to end legal segregation. However, if we look at keysville and other predominately Black small towns and communities within Burke County and other rural areas throughout the South, we see that for the majority of Black and poor people, there has not been development and progress inspite of the changed laws.

It is important for us to have a clear understanding why many big Northern and foreign based corporations are moving their plants into the South, in order to organize a proper strategy that benefits Black majority communities and working people .

The increase of major companies in the South, reflects a crisis in the U.S. economy at the international level. Following the Korean War, U.S. corporations built manufacturing plants in many foreign countries with a workforce of more than 7 million workers. One might think that when the U.S. companies built plants there, that those countries began to develop, the people got better housing, schools and water and sewer systems. But this is not what happened. The workers in those countries were paid very low wages and no benefits, and the companies had unlimited access to cheap raw materials and land and paid very few taxes. The poor countries often paid for the construction of the plants and the roads, railroads, airports and seaports needed to transport the products.

The U.S. banks and corporation owning the overseas plants and the U.S. government, financed and supported the most oppressive government regimes in those countries, who denied the workers basic civil and human rights. Thus, these oppressive governments aided the U.S. corporations in forcing the workers to work for low wages.

There were other corporations from European countries that set up companies in those countries, which are mainly in Asia, Africa and Latin America, those of the non white peoples. These corporations (including from Japan) compete with U.S. corporations in those countries for the cheap labor, raw materials and government concessions. The conditions became so bad for the workers and citizens of those countries, that began to organize themselves, first around their immediate economic and basic rights, and later for control of the plants, resources and their governments, forcing many U.S. and other companies to leave or pay higher wages. This meant that the over all profits of those corporations world wide, were slightly reduced.

In an effort to maintain their profit margins at a certain level, U.S. corporations moved many of their plants into the South from the North Mid-West and East (mainly), to make up their international losses by the super profits they made from cheap wages and low capital investments in the South. In addition, the corporations restructured their major capital assets away from the strongest and most organized sectors of labor (industries and regions), and into the sectors where labor is the least organized, and where there exist great racial, social, religious and political divisions and national oppression amongst the working class population. They are coming to the South, because they don't have the same ability to exploit workers in those foreign countries and Northern cities as before, because of the trade unions and liberation movements and progressive governments in those cities and countries.

However, as we have been seeing on the news, the U.S. is trying to find a way to retake control over their foreign plants and the governments. They are using various types of pressure, such as, forcing countries to pay very high interests rates on U.S. bank and government loans, reducing U.S. foreign aid, closing the U.S. market to their products, and getting other countries to apply pressure.

We can also see how the U.S. government is financing military efforts to overthrow those governments, such as money to the Contras, for the Vietnam War and to Isreal to attack the Palestinians. U.S. government money helped get Marcos out of the Philippines, Baby Doc out of Haiti General Ky out of Vietnam and the Shaw out of Iran. They were aided in the hopes that they can be brought back to power to serve the U.S. This strongly indicates, that those industries moving in the South within the last 20 years, may not be here for very long periods, maybe 15 years maximum. Yet, we see that the South's major strategy for economic and social development is based on investing the majority of its resources into recruiting Northern based companies.

The local, county and state costs to recruit those companies has severely retarded the growth of towns like Keysville and Burke County, sacrificing the needs like water and sewer, low income housing, education and training programs, health care and other needs. Representatives from the South in the Congress and Senate, usually vote against welfare increases and

reforms, out of fear that an increase would compete with the South's low wages, which are used to attract industries.

The employment hiring system in the South, places and locks the majority of Black workers in the unskilled, most dangerous and lowest paying jobs, and requiring the longest distances of travel. Industrial development in the South, as we can see, has not necessarily meant community and social development, particularly in the Black Belt. The statistics of Burke County makes this point clear:

1. Burke County has a population as of 1986 of 21,200, with about a 54 percent Black majority.
2. 70.2 percent of the county is rural.
3. Only 48 percent of the population have access to water by way of public systems and private community systems. Of the 52 percent, those who have water use small wells which are usually contaminated.
4. Of the 6,787 housing units in the county, 1,013 lack complete plumbing, 649 of these have no plumbing facilities at all as of 1986. (There are approximately 1 million families without running water live in the rural South.)
5. 10 active doctors, 1 hospital with 57 beds.
6. Life expectancy for Blacks is 10 years less than for whites.
7. 43 percent of all Black people live below the povert level, while only 13 percent of the whites are in poverty.
8. 21.1 percent of the work force works outside of the county.
9. The public school system has the lowest spending per student in the state of Georgia.
10. 570 heads of household are female.
11. 11.1 percent of all households have more than one person to a room and bed.
12. 2,437 white home owners; 1,524 Black home owners.
13. 798 whites are renting; 1,444 Blacks are renting.

The recruit industries from the outside at all cost strategy of the South, disregards important issues like worker and environmental health and safety, . For example, the Plant Vogtle Nuclear Facility was a dangerous choice for so-called economic progress in Burke County, and it will not guarantee more income into the Black majority areas of the county. Less than 150 of the 1,000 people working at the plant live in Burke County. Yet, a serious crisis at the plant would affect the whole county and surrounding counties, which are not equipped to handle a nuclear dissaster. Majority Black rural counties are being asked to build their economic growth on the most hazardous industries, such as radioactive waste dumps and nuclear plants..

With the crisis in the economy causing bank closings, plant closings; along with the increasing debt of local, state and federal governments, we see major cost cutting by companies in health and safety equipment, and by government agencies in health and safety inspections and enforcement, thereby, making many industries a greater threat to the workers and their communities in the long term.

There have been some important efforts made here in Burke County by the 3 Black Commissioners, to address the problems faced by the Black majority and poor areas. Their majority leadership will continue to be an asset toward social progress. However, the pace and degree of progress needed to address the problems of the county's underdevelopment, will also require the direct organization and mobilization of the people in every aspect of the economy, government and community to actively work and struggle for the needed development.

The communities and the workers organized in the various industries and workplaces throughout the county themselves, must begin to set their own community and economic development priorities. The various community and workplace organizations must meet with each other on a county-wide basis and develop their priorities for the county, and then mobilize all of the people's organizations to present these to the county and state governments and the corporate bodies involved. In this way, the county's development plan will be held accountable to and shaped by people's democracy and Black political power--based in 3 economic principles:

1. economic democracy--the right of workers to have input into the decisions affecting their economic life and health and safety in the places where they work.
2. economic development--returning some of the profits made by the companies to help develop the communities' capacity to provide essential public service and other social needs to the people.
3. economic justice--the right of every work and their communities to be treated fairly and have laws protecting them from and granting them adequate compensation for any hardships caused them by plant closings, community dislocation, and disasters such as radiation and chemical leaks.

The rural Black majority counties and communities must begin to identify their own existing and potential resources as the main basis for their development. A program for people's control of those resources and the policies governing their development, becomes the foundation of a program for self-determination. Black political power being essential for self-determination, must help created the conditions for organizing workers and trade unions in the area workplaces. This will futher alter the balance of power in favor of self-determination.

Keysville's support for the unionization at the the local nursing home and the Sampson and Delili plants, must be viewed as a key aspect of Black political power's community development strategy. 80 percent of the income in rural Black communities, comes from their workers wages. All of the institutions within the majority Black communities in the South, depend on these wages. The tithes of the church, the small businesses, the funeral homes and Black farmers cannot grow without a stable

and economically strong Black working class and a politically united Black community.

Georgia is a "right to work" state, which means that it has laws aimed at weakening the efforts of workers to organize themselves into unions. The manufacturer's associations and the chambers of commerces, were the major forces pushing congress to establish anti labor Taft Hartley Act in 1947, giving the states further level to enact very restrictive anti labor laws. These laws were established during the period when Blacks were legally and systematically denied the right to vote. Therefore, one of the major objectives of Black political power, is to repeal the "right to work" laws.

Keysville government officials are being told that unions will prevent Burke County from developing, because it will scare away industries. Well we must ask the anti union people: why then hasn't Burke County and Keysville developed, since there haven't been any unions here for quite along time?

Studies have shown that unionized workers have better health insurance and therefore increase the chances of hospitals being built in their counties, because it insures a more stable income for the hospitals. The average room cost in the state of Georgia in 1985, was \$386.00 per day, and the average cost per patient staying in the hospital in 1985, was \$2,501.00. This has meant that rural Southern communities have either very small and poorly equipped hospitals or none at all.

By and large, the communities of Black and white workers in the South, are still racially divided. Thus, the organizing of workers associations and trade unions at the workplace, the only real way of building unity between Black and white workers. The issues in the workplace must be connected to community issues and vice versa, to expand the unity to wider arenas and issues of struggle. With a strong Black worker leadership and broad popular Black community support, the unions can be led to recognize and support the special problems faced by Black workers and their communities. This will further serve to build an alliance between workers organized and united in their unions and the Keysville government and Concerned Citizens of Keysville.

The recent union victories at the nursing home and the Sampson and Delili plants, were won against the forces opposing Black political power in Burke County. As we know, the intimidation of the Keysville Nursing Home workers was a real concern in the previous elections: will they be afraid to vote for the Black majority government? will they be allowed time off to vote? Thus, by openly challenging the issues faced by the nursing home workers--the press conference called by Representative Brooks in front of the nursing home, and his taking of an official government affidavit from the workers regarding the working conditions and intimidation in connection with the Keysville elections--the movement for Black political power, actually created the basis for the organizing of the workers. Now, that the workers are organized, they understand that their union must be politically active in the lives and communities of the workers. This is the type of unionism, that is needed in the South, and it will be a factor in shaping the outlook of the trade union movement throughout the country.

The recent Jesse Jackson Campaign and the struggle to elect Black candidates in general, shows that political organizing by Black and poor people must not be controlled by the structures and leaders of the Democratic or Republican Parties. That they must be organized and controlled by the community organizations united with the united around a people's program that they develop. Real progress and change cannot be made by simply threatening the democrats with delivering the Black vote to the republicans and vice versa. Black people must prepared to lead the rest of the country in building an independent people's political party, which is community and workplace based controlled. Such a political party would begin with a character similar to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party led by Sister Fanie Lou Hamer in the 1960, but it should develop throughout the South, and where possible locally, throughout the country. This will not happen over night, but it is a necessary course for Black and poor people toward winning real political and economic change in the South and throughout the country. What do we have to lose?

The Black political movement and government in Keysville has in a small way, made a big political statement for Black and poor people throughout the South and the country. It is in effect, calling for a new political reconstruction in the South, led by Black political power; and a new political alignment and organization of forces to define and struggle for the priorities and control of the resources for developing and changing the South and the country in the interest of majority of the people.

By openly supporting the right of workers to organize unions, you are saying, that the corporations will not be in control of the Keysville government. Being a government built on the foundation of a people's organization (Concerned Citizens of Keysville), it is accountable to the people. This clearly differs from the old understanding of Black political power, where Black candidates get elected and declare themselves as the sole basis of Black political power, and become government representatives to the people, instead of people's representatives to the government. Black political power will be a major factor in challenging and changing the destructive course of the American political and economic system. A course which is causing the death of millions from starvation, homelessness, industrial disasters, drugs, murder and suicide. Let's stay on this course Keysville and win others to as the correct path toward liberation and justice for all.