

*Dispatch Number*

1

August 23, 2001

LOS ANGELES

## **On to Durban: Putting the Heat on the U.S.**

This Saturday, I leave for the United Nations World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) in Durban, South Africa, as part of a multiracial delegation initiated by the Applied Research Center. If this were 1955, at the historic conference of Non-Aligned Nations in Bandung, Indonesia, or 1965, after the passage of the Civil Rights and the Voting Rights Acts in the U.S., or in 1975, when the Vietnamese people defeated the U.S. invasion, the air would be filled with hope. Third World peoples inside and outside the U.S. would be pushing an international antiracist agenda against the main enemy, U.S. imperialism—the political, economic, and military system of monopoly capitalism that subjugates whole nations and peoples.

At that revolutionary time in history, the strategic linkage of antiracism, national liberation, self-determination, and socialist economic development gave the Third World its moral and political power.

In Durban today, that strategy is needed more than ever. In the post-Cold War era, as the world balance of power has shifted, the antiracist movement is weak, disorganized, and in some instances, recolonized. The U.S. throws its weight around more than ever, no longer challenged by the former Soviet Union and formerly anti-imperialist Peoples Republic of China. Many Third World governments are enthusiastic or subordinated participants in neoliberal schemes, and the U.S. civil rights establishment, representing the privileged and bourgeois classes, functions as an appendage of the Democratic Party. As we approach WCAR, the big questions are: Will the U.S. and the Group of Eight (G8) colonial powers allow any debate at all?<sup>1</sup> Who will stand up to them?

The U.S. government is threatening to withdraw funding and boycott the conference altogether, ostensibly in protest against conference resolutions condemning Israeli racism and apartheid policies towards the Palestinian people and demands by Africans, U.S. Blacks, and peoples of the African Diaspora for reparations for the centuries of the U.S. and European Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

---

1. The Group of Eight Nations (G8)—which originally formed out of a meeting of the world's six largest economies in 1975—is composed of the United States, England, France, Germany, Canada, Italy, Japan and Russia. The G7 (the grouping before the addition of Russia in 1997) continues to meet separately on issues of global economic policy and is still the name used for the world's most economically dominant nations.

As 10,000 delegates prepare for the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) forum (August 27-September 1) and the official United Nations governmental conference (August 31-September 7), many liberals in the U.S. are begging the Bush Administration to send a delegation. But whether the U.S. sends a “high level” delegation (with Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice or John Ashcroft), or no delegation at all, its objectives are the same—the U.S. will try to undermine, suppress, and prevent the success of the conference and the rebuilding of a worldwide movement against racism. This is no time for Democrats and their liberal apologists to take cheap shots against Bush, for were Bill Clinton or Al Gore in power, their objectives, if not their methods, would be the same.

Remember, it was Clinton who destroyed “welfare as we know it” and permitted a national rampage against Black and Latina women and children. It was Clinton who signed the Effective Death Penalty Act that violated centuries of habeas corpus rights and made the imposition of the racist death penalty more “effective.”<sup>2</sup> And it was House Democrats, including most members of the Congressional Black Caucus, who just passed House Resolution 212 that urged the U.S. to attend the WCAR, but which goes out of its way to oppose any discussion of Israeli racism or U.S. reparations to Black people. Instead, the House resolution urges U.S. governmental delegates to “mitigate, rather than aggravate, racial, ethnic, and regional tensions” by only discussing racism in general, “without reference to specific regions, countries, or present day conflicts”—the identical view of the Bush Administration.

---

2. The Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996.

Whether under Republican or Democratic tactical leadership, the strategy of U.S. imperialism is to rule the world. In a society in which big business is king, U.S. led monopoly capitalism relies on profits and superprofits made possible by super-exploitation of human labor and nature in the Third World. It achieves these objectives by “integrating” Third World nations into an international economy structurally dominated by the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organization, which in turn, are controlled by the U.S.<sup>3</sup>

Under this totalitarian capitalist system, Third World nations are systematically underdeveloped through a global network that destroys their local industries, obliterates protective tariffs, penetrates their local markets, privatizes their national and natural resources, and impounds cash crops to feed Western banks. As Christian charities get rich exploiting pictures of emaciated Third World children, they used God to cover up the sinful

---

3. The IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank were both created at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944 to help shape the post World War II international capitalist economy. The IMF and World Bank work in conjunction to restructure the economies of the Global South through the implementation of structural adjustment programs (SAPs), as a condition of loans made to developing nations. Often, SAPs take the form of austerity measures, including cuts in government spending on public services in favor of privatization, and requirements to open local markets to foreign trade and investment. Both operate under a decision making system whereby each nation’s number of votes is determined by how much money it contributes to the institutions—allowing them to be dominated by the world’s most wealthy countries, in particular the United States.

The WTO (World Trade Organization), formed by international treaty in 1995 with 144 member nations currently, is the body that develops and enforces laws of global free trade, which supercede the laws of nation states. The so-called QUAD countries (the U.S., Japan, Canada and the European Union) wield disproportionate power in decision making within the WTO. The WTO was established by Uruguay Round Negotiations (1984-94); its precursor was the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which was also established at the Bretton Woods Conference.

connection between Third World poverty and First World wealth, between structural racism and U.S. imperialism. Today, nations of the Third World are subordinated to the needs of the world's superpower; they are choking with debt repayments, their environment and ecosystems raped and pillaged, their people literally starving to death. The U.S., as the world's policeman, forcibly precludes the option for a social democratic, much less socialist, economy in any country in the world.

At the Durban conference, we can expect the U.S. and the European governments to try to decontextualize racism, to restrict its discussion to concerns about isolated acts of seemingly irrational and individual cruelty. By contrast, Left forces will try to draw the explosive and revolutionary connection between antiracism and anti-imperialism. The following assessments guide my expectations.

Organized forces from the U.S. and Africa are demanding reparations from the European and U.S. perpetrators of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. In 1965, Malcolm X proposed that Black people bring their demands as a colonized people to the United Nations. In recent years, in the U.S., the Reparations Movement has been given focus by Randall Robinson's book, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*, and a growing number of Black organizations that have made reparations their central focus.

The World Conference Against Racism will be marked by an important world confrontation on reparations, with the NGOs and many African governments proposing strong language for the final conference document, while the United States is leading the charge to prevent any discussions on the subject whatsoever. This already shows the value of the UN—as

Malcolm X understood—as an international forum; the U.S. will be forced to either defend its position or walk out, in either case a victory for the antiracist forces.

International condemnation of U.S. racist practices grows. Amnesty International's recent report, *Racism and the Administration of Justice*, published in preparation for WCAR, reports that "Black and ethnic minorities" constitute 60 percent of the 1.7 million people currently in jail in the U.S.<sup>4</sup> The racist character of the death penalty is demonstrated by cruel and unusual statistics: in Pennsylvania Blacks are 800 percent more likely to be executed than whites, in Georgia, 1100 percent. The war on drugs also reeks of racism; Blacks and Latinos constitute 63 percent, and whites 37 percent, of all drug offenders sent to state prison.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination noted that in the U.S. "members of minorities, (especially Blacks and Hispanics) may be disproportionately subject to adverse treatment throughout the criminal justice process."<sup>5</sup> These are seemingly meek words but courageous in terms of UN parlance.

Durban represents an international arena in which to help revitalize the U.S. antiracist movement. The Black Radical Congress, progressive Black legislators like Cynthia McKinney from Georgia and John Conyers from Michigan, grassroots groups

---

4. Amnesty International, *Racism and the Administration of Justice* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 2001), 22.

5. United Nations press release, "Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination Adopts Conclusions on Report of the United States," CERD 59th Session, 13 August 2001.

like the L.A. Bus Riders Union, the Center for Third World Organizing, and several key women of color organizations represent important pieces of the puzzle that make for a broad antiracist united front in the U.S. They are going to Durban in search of international allies. The questions remain: Can we build a functional and effective united front? Can we coalesce an opposition to U.S. governmental defiance? Can we find concrete ways to offer material support to Third World movements against racism and imperialism?

A growing South African resistance can shape the conference and the antiracist movement. South Africans are seeking allies as well. The Durban Social Forum, a new coalition of grassroots groups in South Africa, is planning demonstrations at the Conference to highlight the growing poverty and mass suffering in the post-Apartheid period. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) is proposing “the mother of all strikes, a general strike” if the South African government does not abandon its neoliberal policies, which include the privatization of water and mass evictions from housing and land. How will those demonstrations, timed to pressure the South African government in the midst of an international conference in Durban, impact the actual deliberations and alliances at WCAR? What can the U.S. antiracist Left learn from the advanced theory and practice of the continuing South African revolution?

With these initial assessments, I go to South Africa with many questions. What is the strategy of the South African Communist Party and COSATU to challenge privatization and neoliberalism, the new face of international racism? Is there any form of organized Third World caucus or movement or tendency that is willing to challenge the U.S. at WCAR? And is it strong enough to force

the discussion of Palestinian self-determination and Black and African reparations onto the front pages of the public debate? Is there a true left wing of the NGOs, or are most of them integrated into their own nation-states and world capitalism? Can the left, antiracist U.S. forces work in any coordinated fashion and toward what ends? Will the demonstrations by South Africans challenge the entire conference and create a new political reality on the streets? What roles will the People's Republic of China and Cuba play?

I go on this journey in two roles, with two goals. As a correspondent, I will find every way possible to give more voice to the voiceless, through my own *Dispatches From Durban*, distributed by the Labor/Community Strategy Center in Los Angeles, the *Black Radical Congress News*, and the South African Independent Media Center. As an organizer, I will try to demonstrate that there are Jews in the U.S. who care deeply about Palestinian rights, whites in the U.S. who want to challenge the racist policies of our government, Leftists who are committed to drawing constructive lessons from this historic event—as part of a strategy to help coalesce the left, anti-imperialist forces against racism.

I will keep you posted.