

STATEMENT OF

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I was happy to have been invited to participate in this seminar today. It's all too rare that I have an opportunity to consider one of the most repugnant concepts of all times - racism - in its global context. On a day to day basis we are forced to address racism chiefly as it is manifest within the narrow context of national boundaries; but it is imperative that from time to time we step back and consider racism in its historical and global contexts. For without that perspective we are apt to create myopic solutions to national problems. For racism is a tool of a global network of controls, as is sexism.

Due in large part to the international response to the racial atrocities of the Nazi regime, and subsequently to the anti-colonial campaigns and racial violence in many countries, particularly the south of the United States, the issue of racial discrimination has become one of the major issues of the 20th Century.

In the year 1900, as the century began, at the first Pan-African Congress, meeting in London, W.E.B. DuBois stated in prophetic terms:

"The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, - the relations of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea."

In 1944 near the end of World War II, he wrote "It is with great regret that I do not see after this war or within any reasonable time, the possibility of the world without race conflict; and this is true despite the fact that race conflict is playing a fatal role in the modern world."

Dr. DuBois saw quite clearly the pernicious nature of racism, its past culpabilities and its potential, when used as a mechanism for exploitation and greed to threaten the survival of both exploited and exploiter; for as DuBois wrote in 1944 on the eve of the formation of the United Nations there was clear recognition that in the words of the United Nations Charter, "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war... [they must] reaffirm faith... in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small"...

Yet today, more than 30 years after the formation of the United Nations, the world stands more divided than ever with widespread hunger, poverty and growing polarization among peoples. No description of the world can avoid terminology of division; the world battle-lines are drawn between the "Haves" and the "Have-nots", the "developed" nations and the "underdeveloped", the "North" and the "South", The "Imperialists" and the "Third World". And any casual assessment reveals that the masses of poor, uneducated, exploited peoples of the Third World are Black, Brown and Yellow, while those who dominate are the "uncolored and unpoor".

The figures are staggering. At this very moment, more than 500 million persons around the world are on the edge of starvation. In large part due to policies of the industrialized nations, over half the world goes to sleep needlessly hungry every night. With all its great wealth of natural resources and economic potential, Africa remains the home of 20 of the world's 30 poorest countries. For all its "growth" the great masses of Brazil live on the edge of starvation. Much of the same condition applies for Asia and the balance of the Third World. As long ago as 1967, malnutrition was estimated to have then affected 60% of the populations of the developing world.

Recent reports indicate that over 60 million people who live in East Africa are suffering or will suffer from the affects of growing famine.

Actually, it is quite inaccurate to speak simply of "developed" and "underdeveloped" nations. Within every nation, whether industrialized or developing, various social strata share unequal portions of their country's wealth. Educated, privileged classes live in poor Brazil, and no one can doubt the undeveloped nature of the ghettos of the United States.

The vast majority of Black people, Hispanics, Native Americans, and other oppressed national minorities in the United States live in desperation and misery. According to a recent report of the National Urban League, the average income of the Black family is only 58% of the income of the average white family. In some areas the rate of unemployment among youth is 50%. 28% of Black families belong to the category of poor -- and among white families, only 7%. In the majority of regions where Americans of Mexican or Puerto Rican origin live the income per capita is much lower than the poverty line.

The discrimination against native Americans who live either on reservations or in the crowded inner-city ghettos endangers their very existence as a nationality. The average life span of a native American is 23 years shorter than that of a white American and infant mortality among Indians is 3 times greater than among white Americans.

Such a consistent pattern of deprivation among the dark skinned peoples of the world leads one inexorably to question: "Is there a connection between color and starvation?"

In order to understand racism in the 1980's it must be seen in terms of certain fundamental economic and social relationships which are in part the legacy of the western world's history of slavery and colonialism, and in part the repercussions from more current changes in the world order, involving the international division of labor and production, and the operations of multinational corporations. It is necessary to examine exactly how racism (institutional) and racialism (the acting out of individual prejudice) have operated and reinforced each other.

Historically, economic determination has always been a fundamental factor in racism. Where displacements, land robberies, slavery, and colonization became imperatives of the early economic expansionist periods of western Europe, and its New World diaspora, racist notions were quickly utilized to assuage guilt, circumvent the limitations of the Christian ethic and simplify controls through easy identification of the oppressed group. So, the native Americans and native Australians were massacred, their aboriginal lands forcibly, fraudulently or deceitfully taken away and their culture brutally attacked, all of which being justified by the assertion that they are after all "barbarians," "savages", "pagans", and therefore inferior.

As Eric Williams has said of the African slave trade: "The reason was economic, not racial; it had to do not with the colour of the labour, but the cheapness of the labour." Africans were brought to the Americas as slaves to be exploited as a labor force that would

enable the development of the land for large-scale agriculture - an economic necessity of what was pre-industrial, mercantile capitalism. A belief in the inferiority of the African served to steel the psyche of the slave-trader against the brutality of his profession. For those whose life-style of privilege was based on slavery, the necessity to consider Africans as sub-humans became a corporate need of the community. White supremacy and solidarity soon became a political doctrine, ascribed to even by non-slaveholding whites who benefited from the status it gave them.

Just as slavery was a product of the economic imperatives of a pre-industrial mercantile society, the slave system was ended by the demands of industrial capitalism for a mobile work force. So the introduction of coffee in Brazil destroyed slavery in the Northeast of that country, and the slave system of the Old South of the United States was defeated by the industrialist North.

The motive for colonialism has also always been first economic - the exploitation of cheap labor force, the acquisition of raw materials and of new markets - and secondly military - the acquisition of strategic bases that can guarantee the control and power to assure the possibilities of future expansion to gain new markets, cheap labor force and so on. But what was initiated as an economic enterprise soon turned into a political game in which distant pawns of Africa, Asia and America were arranged to reflect the ever-changing political power constellations in Europe. So imperialism was established through the force of the gun and inequitable treaties. The justification was that the arrangement brought the "civilizing" superiority of European culture to the "primitive backward natives".

Today, with but a few exceptions (Puerto Rico being a notable one) the colonial era has past. Yet in the words of A. Sivandandan, an Asian scholar of British race relations:

"One epoch does not lead tidily into another. Each epoch carries with it a burden of the past - an idea perhaps, a set of values, even bits and pieces of an outmoded economic and political system. And the longer and more durable the previous epoch the more halting is the emergence of the new."

Since the late 1940's nearly all of the industrialized nations have become multi-ethnic societies. This is due in large part to the dismantling of foreign empires after World War II, the post-war expansion of the industrial economies, and the fact that the colonial era had so mutated the indigenous economies that they could not support their populations. So to meet new demands for labor the industrial powers naturally turned to the exploitation of colonial or ex-colonial labor as though nothing had changed - except that this time the labor was to be employed in the metropole. And so, the creation of the new ethnic minorities was the result of the migration of workers from the poorer peripheral areas of Europe and from the Third World countries to meet the needs of expanding Western economies.

Britain supplemented its traditional Irish labor reserves by recruiting Italians and later black workers from former colonies in the West Indies and India. After recruitment from Southern Europe, France drew workers from former colonies in North and sub-Saharan Africa as well as the Caribbean. Belgium recruited miners and other workers from Italy, Turkey and Morocco and the Netherlands took workers from its former Indonesian colonies and later from Surinam. And a new supply of cheap labor for the United States was supplied from Mexico and Puerto Rico.

This then is part of the colonial continuum . And the racism which deemed black people inferior, and sub-human, thereby justifying their exploitation in the colonies, came to be directed wholesale against blacks to justify their exploitation as workers in the 'mother country'. A pattern was emerging everywhere. Black workers were being seen as merely units of labor filling the filthy, ill-paid jobs in the most "backward" sectors of industry - the jobs that white workers would no longer do. They were being forced to settle in inner-city housing, abandoned by indigenous workers - ghettos were forming. Everywhere migrants lacked civil and political rights.

The system worked well for the capitalist. In the early years of labor migration the workers who migrated were young and had no dependents. Their labor power, then, could be used to the full, while the social costs of its reproduction was left to the country of origin. The profitability declined, however, as soon as the workers started to send for their wives, children and parents. The wives were of no great problem because they could be super-exploited, given the worst jobs for the lowest pay. But the children and the elderly created social costs the capitalist did not wish to bear, and the family as a whole put limitations on the mobility and flexibility of the worker. So as the strategy of expansion based on cheap and easily controllable migrant labor lost its viability and new strategies were developed, the recruitment of black migrant labor was replaced by racist immigration policies.

What are the new strategies? The new strategies are the export of labour-intensive stages of production to 'off-shore sites' in low-wage areas of the Third World. Those stages of production for which it is cost-effective to use new technologies based on micro-processors remain in Western Europe and the United States. This restructuring of the world economy into a global assembly line assures that workers (usually women) in countries like Taiwan, South Korea, Haiti and Brasil can be utilized by capital at minimal wages. There is no need to take account of the reproduction costs of labour, for the reserves are almost inexhaustible and the governments of these authoritarian political regimes - themselves the creatures of the multinationals - act in complicity by repressing both trade union and political rights and any indigenous economic development that would be competitive.

The tax incentives, easy repatriation of profits, super-exploitation of labor that capital thus assures to itself is at the same time the source of misery to Third World peoples. What capitalist development has meant to the peoples of these countries is increased poverty, the corruption of their cultures, repressive regimes - and all at once.

So in effect, Third World countries are now getting the worst of two worlds. Industrialized nations produce manufactured goods and technology; Third World nations supply the world's raw

materials and cheap labor. The Third World's work is essential to the global economy, and without it the industrialized world could not survive in its present form, yet its productivity is made possible by great deprivation of the workers. In Central America and the Caribbean, for instance, at least half of the agricultural land grows crops for export while 70 percent of the children are undernourished. During the Sahelian drought of the 1970's exports of cotton and peanuts from some sub-Saharan African nations actually increased, while 100,000 people starved and 7 million were left dependent on handouts from the West.

And when the question is raised as to why the industrialized world which represents only one-third of the world's population accounts for 80 percent of annual global resource use while the Third World starves; when the question is raised as to whether there is a connection between color and starvation; the response is that scarcity in the Third World and the ghettos of the First World is caused by overpopulation as a result of the unrestrained sexual habits of the "natives". And so the myth of the population explosion is used to mask the issue of redistribution of resources, and contraceptives and sterilization are to substitute for equity.

When in the early 1950's John D. Rockefeller, the Fords, the Mellons and other corporate giants founded the Population Association they clearly felt as President Johnson later stated that "\$5 invested in population control is worth \$100 invested in economic growth". Today, involuntary sterilization is a national problem. As reported in the National Center for Health Statistics for 1977, New York City hospitals are sterilizing twice as many Black and six times as many Hispanic as white women. It is estimated that one-fourth of all Native American women have been sterilized. While the battle is still

being waged in this country to allow federal medicaid to cover the cost of abortion for low income women, it is available to pay for 90% of the cost of sterilization.

Abroad, as at home, U.S. government policy is to discourage what is viewed as dangerous fertility of the oppressed through programs of both the U. S. Department of Health and the Agency for International Development (AID). In Puerto Rico, where U. S. corporations directly control 85% of the economy and the U.S. Congress has the right to veto over government decisions, almost 44 percent of the people whose income is \$4,000 to \$5,000 a year have been sterilized, that is one-third of Puerto Rican women of child-bearing age.

Yet it is clear that it is not a question of overpopulation but of injustice. It is not scarcity but inequity that is the cause. In a speech given at Howard University in Washington, DC during the Summer of 1977, President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania said: "The poor nations are told to reduce their high birth rate. But it is development which brings down the birth rate, not the other way around. The best contraceptives are: A standard of living high enough for confidence that your children will not die before maturity. A reasonable education, and electricity."

When there is a commodity exchange with the Third World, rather than being those commodities necessary for basic subsistence or even to advance the country's technology or indigenous economy, those commodities that flow to the Third World are replete with the throw-aways of overproduction such as the contraceptive pill depra vera or baby formulas which have been denied circulation in home markets because they have been proven to be unsafe, or the artifacts

of the western disco culture that create further attacks on traditional values in the name of new markets for consumer goods.

On top of this structure and reinforcing it is the foreign policy of the industrialized nations - servant of corporate interests. The Western Powers have traditionally sought to stabilize their economic advantage through military and diplomatic support of repressive regional caretaker regimes around the world. At the close of World War II, Great Britain informed the United States that it was no longer capable of militarily safeguarding western interests in the Middle East. Thus, the torch of western leadership was passed to the United States and Israel was charged with the responsibility of stabilizing the Middle East with little or no concern expressed about the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians rendered stateless. South Africa, the self-defined bulwark of Western civilization in Africa, could not repress its overwhelming black majority without the enormous support it continues to enjoy from the United States, West Germany, Great Britain, France, Canada, Japan and Israel. The fact that none of Brazil's growth benefits have trickled down to its Indians and Blacks appear to be of no concern to its western sponsors. Ferdinand Marcos in the Phillipines, together with repressive regimes in South Korea and Indonesia is the western stabilizer for Asia. President Mobutu of Zaire has arrested thousands of his people and slaughtered many, yet the level of economic and military support from western democracies does not change.

From one end of Latin America to another, from SRI Lanka to Iran, from El Salvador to Pakistan, the developed nations in their relations with the rest of the world have most frequently concerned themselves with the protection of their narrow economic and strategic interests and all too seldom with the treatment that any regime perpetrates against its constituent population.

As inadequate and self-defeating public welfare systems have been set up to anesthetize the terminally poor and oppressed in the developed countries, foreign assistance programs have been set up by the developed world to anesthetize the economically subject nations of the world's poor.

And when a Third World leader, such as Michael Manley of Jamaica, has the courage to stand-up and say "No, enough is enough! We won't accept unconscionable foreign assistance and loan agreements that are designed only to accelerate the downward spiral of underdevelopment and perpetuate the relationship between the poor and the rich nations!"; when a Third World leader such as Allende of Chile stands-up to wrest control of the country from puppet dictators and demand economic and political self-determination, then Big Brother in the North will send out the troops in a thousand disguises to destabilize, to divert and even to murder - all to protect corporate and strategic interests.

In any case the developing nations of the world want equity, not charity. They want better terms of trade, fair prices for their goods, markets in the west for products that their own industries might produce, jobs and a more comfortable existence for their millions.

No I have not strayed from the central issue of racism - for what I have been trying to say is that racism is a structural feature of modern capitalism, and therefore, of the current world order. Without this clear analysis, in concrete terms, racial liberation is simply reformism which finally disperses the forces and points to false enemies.

But let me say that while what I have described today is the current reality, and that of the past, it is not the future. As I see it, the future will be molded out of the following:

1) The dependence of Imperialists on the Third World for vital energy resources is a critical factor. The underdeveloped nations are rich in raw materials essential to heavy industries. The current world energy crisis is an example of how, if astutely managed, Third World peoples can have the upper hand in a matter essential to human existence,

2) No doubt regimes that do not reflect the overall interests of their constituents will fall notwithstanding the support they receive from sponsoring friends. They necessarily must, for a people's tolerance is finite. As Iran, Nicaragua, the Portuguese in Africa and Ian Smith in Rhodesia could not last forever, nor can the South Africas, the El Salvadors or the South Koreas.

3) In the same way that the movement of Pan-Africanism unified a sector of previously segmentalized oppressed peoples, the concept of the Third World and further, its identification with all economically oppressed groups, is creating a massive unified force opposed to the domination of the rich few over the impoverished many. At current rates of growth, Southeast Asia will double its population in 30 years, the entire African continent in 27 years and Latin America in 24.

Looking a century into the future, at current rates of growth, the industrialized wealthy nations of the west will have a population ranging from 1.4 to 1.7 billion people while the nations of the Third World will have 40 billion. If one of the lessons of the Viet Nameese War is that the techonologically advanced opponent can be defeated by sheer numbers and determination, then the outcome in the future is clear.

4) Clearly, a human being's capacity to tolerate exploitation, abuse and hunger is finite. A life too painful to live is a life easily committed to revolutionary purpose. Though it is frightening to contemplate, sometime in the not too distant future, scores of nations will have nuclear capability. China has demonstrated that a nation with only limited industrial capacity can produce a nuclear weapon. Poor nations less developed than China will be able to develop a nuclear capacity as by-products of atomic power plants that many of them are now building or intend to build. It is not farfetched to anticipate that if the rich continue along their current course, wars of wealth redistribution will one day be fought by the poor with nuclear arms. Either the selfish myopic nations of the developed world are brought to reason or we shall all perish in hugh numbers together in the forseeable future,

Indeed economic justice as a broad human objective will be achieved. But at what cost. How many must die from war and starvation to achieve simple dignity and minimal pleasure from life?

Finally, since this week we are gathering as an international group of women, let me say that racism is indeed a woman's issue because on the labor intensive end of the global assembly line, there in the sweatshops of the Philippines, Indonesia, Taiwan, and South Korea, 90% of the super-exploited labor force is female. Racism is a woman's issue because the brutality of the migratory labor system has devastating effects on woman whether as in Latin America they are the vast majority of that mobile labor force, or, as in Southern Africa, they are "widowed" by it as their men who are forced to migrate to the labor centers are denied the company of their wives and families because they are considered "superfluous appendages." Hunger is a woman's issue. In most of sub-Saharan Africa, much of Southeast Asia and some parts of Latin America, women make-up 50 to 90% of the agricultural labor force. It's the women who grow cassava in Africa and beans in Latin America and plant and dry rice in Southeast Asia. Yet they are the first to suffer from famine and malnutrition because of social and cultural restrictions on their food intake. And so it is the women in both the rich and poor countries who suffer first when puppet regimes in developing countries are persuaded to join with industrialized countries in spending for military hardware instead of using those funds to seek the solutions to such problems as hunger, disease, illiteracy and wretched living standards for millions of people.

So, if you do nothing else over these next two or three days, I would hope that you make a clear commitment to address these issues of racism in the ways that they manifest themselves in the current world order.