

## II. The Continuing Oppression of Minority People

When newspapers and politicians talk about whether minority people have made progress toward full social and economic equality, they assume that gradual changes can overcome racism. But the oppression of minority people is so massive that it is a farce to think that way. U.S. capitalist society is a racist system—a complete mechanism that oppresses minority people in every aspect of life. We will look at a few areas.

### UNEMPLOYMENT

The first thing a worker needs is a job. Here is the unemployment situation working people face:

#### UNEMPLOYMENT<sup>1</sup>

Year	Overall rate	Black rate
1960	5.5%	10.2%
1969	3.5	6.4
1976	7.7	13.8
1977	7.0	13.1
1978	5.8	11.8

(Nov.)

The unemployment rate for black people is consistently about twice that of the overall rate. All the

figures are underestimated, because the U.S. government uses a very conservative definition of unemployment. The figures for black people are underestimated even more than most, because the government is unable to count black unemployment accurately.

Sometimes employers simply will not hire minority people. At other times, they hide discrimination. For example, the Safeway Stores warehouse in Richmond, California, a city with a high black population, has very few black drivers and warehouse workers. The company wrote job qualifications requiring drivers to have five years of experience and imposed similar exclusionary rules for warehouse jobs. These unnecessary requirements effectively screen out local black residents who can do the work. Safeway bosses know this, because during a strike in 1978, the company waived requirements in order to hire any strikebreaker it could find.

### OCCUPATION

Minority people who want to enter better occupations or see their children get into them face a situ-



ation of strong inequality in occupational distribution. Only 6.5% of black working men were professional and technical workers in 1976; the figure for Latino men was given as 7.2%.<sup>2</sup> These figures are less than half the percentage for white men, 14.3%.

Among women, 37% of the black working people are pushed into private home and other service work; the figure for Latino women is 25%. The percentage of white women who are in these occupations (21%) is less than two-thirds that of black women.<sup>3</sup>

Semi-skilled operatives outnumber craftworkers two to one among black men, while among white men those in crafts outnumber the operatives.<sup>4</sup> Nearly twice the percentage of Latino men are still unskilled nonfarm laborers compared to the percentage for white men.

#### INCOME

Because of discrimination by employers at the personnel office and on the job, minority people earn less income. Among full-time employed black workers, median weekly earnings were reported in May 1974 to be only 80% those of white workers.<sup>5</sup> This is the figure for employed people, but minority unemployment is exceptionally high. It comes down to these figures for median income of all families:

#### MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME<sup>6</sup>

Year	Black	White	Black as percent of white
1959	\$3,047	\$ 5,893	51.7%
1965	3,886	7,251	53.6
1970	6,279	10,236	61.3
1976	9,242	15,537	59.5
1978	9,242	16,740	55.2

Among Latino people, the median family income in 1976 was \$10,000 compared to \$15,200 for all families.<sup>7</sup>

Black income is less than two-thirds the white income. Far from making gradual and steady progress, black people have seen their income shackled between 50 and 62% of white income. The better years came after militant struggle by the black liberation movement. For example, the figure jumped from 54% in 1965 to 61% in 1970. These were the climactic years of the great wave of struggle of the 1960's. When gains were won, they were won by marches, huge movements, ghetto insurrections, campus occupations and strikes.

#### EDUCATION

While employers discriminate, refusing outright to hire minority people or hiding behind bureaucratic screening devices, they sometimes place the blame on the educational level of minority people. And here, too, we find that a system of discrimination operates to keep minority people down.

It was reported that "the suburbs of New York, Chicago and Detroit spend at least twice as much per pupil as the central city spends per pupil."<sup>8</sup> And where are minority children enrolled? More than half—56%—of all nonwhite children were enrolled in central city schools in October 1976, compared to only 22% of white children.<sup>9</sup>





Black children simply received less education, because of poor education provided by the school system, poverty, family pressures stemming from low income, and the barriers to employment that confront even educated minority people. Over one-fourth of all black people age 25 to 29 are not high school graduates, compared to a national average of 15%. On the other hand, 24% of the population in this age bracket has completed four years or more of college, but among black people the figure is only 13%.<sup>10</sup>

In higher education, black sociologist Harry Edwards calculated some figures for the University of California at Berkeley. He found that in the early 1970's, black undergraduate enrollment dropped by half in five years and is down to the 1963 level. What models of success do black students at UC have to look to? Among the 1408 faculty persons with tenure, only 13 are black—less than 1%. In the struggle to obtain tenure, 63% of whites succeed, but only 23% of blacks.<sup>11</sup> The case of Edwards himself is an exception. He won tenure at the UC Berkeley sociology department over initial rejection only because a mass struggle was waged for this outstanding scholar and author of several books.

Latinos have the right to bilingual education in areas of high Latino population, but they do not receive it. In the Southwest, 17% of the school pupils are Latinos, but in 1972 only 7% of the schools had bilingual programs, and these were insufficient—only 3% of the potential users of the programs were actually in them.<sup>12</sup>

These figures are the product of racism in an educational system dominated by capitalist interests. Businessmen and their candidates run school systems. Colleges and universities are notorious for having boards of regents and directors composed almost entirely of big corporate executives and owners.

And federal funding for education is controlled by a Congress of lawyers and businessmen elected through campaigns financed by corporate interests.

## HOUSING

The U.S. government recently spent \$1 million to confirm the fact that black people are discriminated against when they look for housing. Government investigators posed as people seeking to buy homes or rent places. A black and a white investigator would be sent one after the other to the landlord or realtor. The study found that in making four visits looking for housing, a black person had fewer choices 75% of the time when looking for rentals and 62% of the time when seeking to buy.<sup>13</sup> The sources of discrimination are the landlord who will not rent to minority people, the banks and financial institutions that will not provide mortgage money to minority people, and real estate agents who decide what the "character" of a neighborhood will be. (The idea that black purchases in a white area cause values to decline is false. Values stay the same or rise because there are more potential buyers in integrated neighborhoods—except when a real estate ring creates a wave of panic selling in the practice called blockbusting.)

It is because of this documented discrimination that minority people live in worse housing in ghettos. Black people in 1975 occupied 10% of all housing units, but they were forced to live in 32% of all the housing units that lacked some or all plumbing.<sup>14</sup> Black-occupied housing is older, more crowded, and more expensive for the value received.<sup>15</sup>

For the nation as a whole in 1975, owned housing units outnumbered rented ones by 47 million to 26 million, but black people were in rented units rather than owned ones by a four to three ratio.<sup>16</sup>



This is because blacks are discriminated against in the housing market and because the overall oppression they suffer leaves them less income to buy homes.

### UNEQUAL JUSTICE

Harassment of minority people by the police, the court system and the prisons is well known to many. Every year produces cases of brutal police killings of minority people on the street. The courts railroad minority people to jail. Twenty-five-year old Tommy Lee Hines was convicted of raping a white woman based on the statements of two cops. Yet he is mentally retarded with an IQ in the 30's, incapable of committing the crime and is even unable to drive the care involved. He sits in an Alabama jail today. Minority people are not born criminals; they are a special target of state repression. Black people wind up in jail far more often than their percentage of the population or any other measure would indicate: 42% of all inmates of local jails in 1972 were black. Of the whites in these jails, one third were there awaiting trial; among black inmates, 41% were incarcerated while awaiting trial to determine their guilt or innocence.<sup>17</sup>

For the same type of crime, minority people are given longer sentences. Among cases not on appeal, here is the length of sentence imposed for various crimes:

### LIFE EXPECTANCY

The infant mortality rate for black infants is almost 25 per 1000, compared to an average for white babies of 15 per 1000.<sup>19</sup> Harlem has the highest infant mortality rate in the country. In California, East Oakland is a black and Chicano ghetto only five miles from wealthy Piedmont, but the infant death rate in East Oakland is seven times the Piedmont rate. Why? The number of pediatricians (child-care doctors) in East Oakland is declining; the Piedmont families can buy all the medical care they want. The federal medic-aid program covers only 20% of East Oakland mothers, yet few of the other 80% can afford the necessary pregnancy and baby care on their own. And when these figures were released in May 1978, the charge was printed in major newspapers that the State of California refuses to provide funding for maternity services at Highland Hospital, the one nearest the East Oakland community. Instead, the state fa-



### SENTENCING<sup>18</sup>

<u>Type of crime</u>	<u>White sentence</u>	<u>Black sentence</u>
Robbery	1 year	4 years 5 months
Simple assault	3 months	6 months
Drug possession or use	5½ months	11 months
Rape	6 months	11 months
Murder or kidnaping	6 months	5 years 6 months



vors concentrating maternity services at Alta Bates Hospital, which happens to be closer to Piedmont than it is to East Oakland. (The New Voice, June 26, 1978) The State did not refute the charges.

There is one white doctor per 700 white people, but only one black doctor for each 3,800 black people in the United States, and only one Latino doctor for every 30,000 Latino people.<sup>20</sup>

And so the life expectancy from birth for nonwhite people was 67.9 years in 1975 versus 73.2 years for whites—a difference of five years and three months.<sup>21</sup> For Chicanos, the figure lags by 10 years.<sup>22</sup> When minority people rebel, they are saying, we have the right to live, too!

#### SUMMARY

By every measure of the quality and quantity of life, the capitalist system discriminates against nonwhite people. It denies them jobs, pushes them into lower-paying occupations, pays them less for the same work, and so results in a nonwhite income far below the average. Education and the housing environment of minority people are rigged against them. They are forced into worse housing, confined to selected areas, and made to pay more for a place to live. The schools their children attend are underfinanced, and their access to higher education is limited. The law is more likely to attack them, to deny them justice in the courts and to keep them imprisoned for longer sentences. Basic health facilities are located outside their geographic and financial reach, so that minority life expectancy is lower.

Passing the blame is a favorite excuse of powerful persons responsible for one or another area of social life. Employers discriminate, but they try to blame the lack of education of minority people. Yet it is business interests who dominate the school systems and

higher education. They in turn moan that they cannot integrate the schools because of housing patterns, but it is capitalists who are the landlords, who run the banks and mortgage associations, and who operate the real estate industry. They discriminate, but they say that minority people simply do not have the income. Yet it is the systematic economic, social and educational discrimination practiced by all these capitalists and their corporate and governmental institutions that keeps minority people down.



The capitalist system of racism, although it is an interlocking set of discriminatory and oppressive practices, does not stand up by itself. Businessmen and their politicians are continually active maintaining the many forms of inequality and injustice dealt to minority people. When anti-racist struggles are waged against any form of oppression, the resistance and alarm of the rulers of this system reveals how fearful they are. The black liberation movement has fought for equality in jobs and pay, for better educational opportunity, against police repression, for fairness in housing, etc. Every one of these forms of struggle touches the nerve of racist discrimination. That is why they are real struggles—because the capitalists know they must not let the racist barriers be breached anywhere. The battle is sharp because the stakes are high!

## NOTES

1. AFL-CIO American Federationist, Jan. 1978 for 1960-76; Monthly Labor Review, Feb. 1978 for 1977; Bureau of Labor Statistics for Nov. 1978.
2. Monthly Labor Review, Nov. 1977.
3. Same source.
4. Same source.
5. American Federationist, Jan. 1978.
6. Same source; 1978 figure from National Urban League.
7. Guardian, April 26, 1978.
8. Ebony Handbook 1974, p. 126.
9. Statistical Abstract 1977, Table 214.
10. Stat. Abs. 1977, Table 216.
11. Progressive, Nov. 1977.
12. Guardian, April 26, 1978.
13. San Francisco Examiner, April 17, 1978.
14. Stat. Abs. 1977, Table 1336.
15. Ebony Handbook 1974.
16. Stat. Abs. 1977, Table 1336.
17. The social and economic status of the black population in the U.S., 1974, U.S. Census Bureau, Table 113.
18. Same source, Table 116.
19. National Urban League, The State of Black America, 1978, p. 111.
20. Study by National Coalition to Overturn the Bakke Decision.
21. Stat. Abs. 1977.
22. Guardian, April 26, 1978.