Third Force

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from the editor

"Know your enemy and know yourself," wrote the Chinese militarist and philosopher Sun-Tzu in *The Art of War*. "In a hundred battles you will never be in peril." This is a worthy lesson with which to introduce ***Third Force***, the new bi-monthly magazine of the Center for Third World Organizing.

Knowing our enemy will be important in these days of transition from clear conservatism to blurry liberalism; knowing ourselves is equally important as communities of color prepare to take full advantage of a small break in national politics.

If we had surrendered to the Inauguration hoopla, we might have fallen for Clinton's expressions of a dramatic difference between his plans and the Reagan/Bush administrations. But few people are celebrating in hundreds of communities across the nation, where material expectations of the Clinton administration are very small indeed.

When Clinton addressed a multi-racial, multi-generational crowd at the Washington D.C. celebration of Martin Luther King's birthday, he credited Dr. King for naming the greatest human challenge: "to close the gap between what we say and what we do." Luckily for Bill, he said very little during his campaign that poor people and people of color can hold him accountable to.

Even if Clinton was not ignoring the issues of the poorest Americans, Reagan and Bush have been so effective economically and culturally that it would take far more than Clinton's got to make significant change for disenfranchised people.

However, Clinton's need to project a movie different from Reaganism does offer communities of color an important psychological moment. While we know things are not going to improve dramatically, we can look forward to a short honeymoon during which change seems more possible. For the first time in twelve years, organizations of low-income people, workers, women, immigrants lesbians and gay men and our allies can let out the breath we have been holding for twelve years as we waited for the newest monstrosity in public policy.

The next breath we take has to be infused with new analysis, strategies and organizational ideas.

The defensive posture that has been forced on us should not be mistaken, however, for inactivity. Throughout the 1980s, ***The Minority Trendsletter*** reported on the development of hundreds of important campaigns and organizations. Those organizations, and the activists who built them, now face a time of critical evaluation in preparation for a new phase in the fight for racial, economic and sexual liberation. They have reached a new level of sophistication, gained the hard way.

ORGANIZING PARADOXES

Under the onslaught of political retrenchment, our campaigns have been muddied by paradoxes and our victories Pyrrhic, as we consistently gave up more than we got. Many small community organizations have won increased police presence as a response to the influx of drugs into our communities — only to find the police acting like an army of occupation. We have won local government funds for job training, only to see manufacturers abandon U.S. workers to exploit cheap labor in developing countries. We have been forced to fight to preserve a declining stock of affordable housing while homeless people continue to fill the streets.

All the contradictions of race, class and gender sharpened over the past decade. As even Clinton admitted, the rich got the gold mine and the poor got the shaft, even within communities of color. David Duke and his cohorts charted a new course of "respectable racism." Los Angeles went up in flames, immigrants and welfare recipients became the new scapegoats and nearly every public institution found itself on increasingly shaky foundations.

On the other hand, twelve years of organizing under these political conditions have yielded unprecedented victories and creative lessons. We can go into this next period with those lessons as a base for sharper political thinking and action.

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