Baltimore Afro-American

OPINION

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Army of occupation

As far as we can see Mayor Schaefer does not owe Police Commissioner Pomerleau a blessed thing seeing as how the top cop treated Hizzoner before the mayor ended up being his boss.

We know the mayor does not owe the commissioner a job.

Therefore, to repeat ourselves, before Schaefer and the City Council offer Pomerleau any extension of job tenure we would want the Mayor and the Council to review recent police department promotions.

No black officers have moved up in this latest shuffle. While we do not say the Commissioner is stacking the deck so that the police department's controlling machinery remains lily - white even as we near the day of a black mayoralty, it sure looks that way.

In the colonialist mind, we know from history, control of law enforcement mechanisms and firepower has always been of paramount concern.

Control the cops and you control the population, supposedly.

But since Baltimore is predominantly black, and given the myriad of antagonistic relationships between high majority group and the police, we feel our city must do as other urban complexes have done - move toward a policy where the head of the police department comes from the majority community. If nothing else it provides more positive symbolism.

This is a sensible direction, given the police - citizen tensions of large cities and it is working in the District of Columbia, in Atlanta and would be a progressive step for our town.

Not to disparage Mr. Pomerleau's innovations and administration but the times are changing.

The mayor and council must ensure that the police department reflects these changes.

To perpetuate a police department that is perceived by too many of us as an instrument of control over black residents, an army of occupation, is not in anybody's best interest.

These recent police promotions go against the grain. Commissioner Pomerleau, except for his thoroughly discredited super-snoop campaign against black non - criminals in the recent past, has modernized the force. That is to his credit.

However, we seriously question whether he is the man for the next chapter in our local law enforcement saga.

Preakness — never again

This weekend concludes the Preakness Festival activities, many of which were rained out.

However the remainder of these festivities go — we are placing on the record in plenty of time for next year's Preakness — our strong feeling that the planning and implementation process must be open to all segments of the community.

This year's Preakness Festival was blatantly lily - white in its conception.

Entrepenurial opportunities for minority businessmen were miniscule if at all available.

Event participation was similarily at a minimum.

Festival planners have countered by saying they appealed to all segments for involvement but received few responses.

We say minority involvement must be aggressively sought and taken into account from the very outset of the planning process. Elsewise, as happened this year, the Festival committee finds itself trying to bring blacks and others into the picture as an afterthought.

There is a sensible way to see that the total community is represented equitably.

Our recommendations are few, but effective, we feel.

1. Through the Council of Equal Business Opportunity (CEBO) Festival planners can involve minority entrepreneurs early on.

2. Bring significant numbers of blacks into the Festival board and committee structure.

3. Hire more than token representation of blacks and other minorities on the Festival professional staff.

4. Conduct a continuing public relations program that puts over the point that the PREAKNESS IS THIS CITY'S KEY SPORTING AND SOCIAL Spring event and has benefits for all citizens.

The Preakness is a Maryland tradition, it is more than a horse race, and where racing was once the sport of kings, it is now an event for all the people.

Never again this nonsense of a pale, elitist and exclusionary Preakness festival!

The horse race is Saturday, May 20. Planning to make the 1979 festival completely meaningful ought begin promptly Monday, May 22.

Anti-black conspiracy

AFRO contributing writer Gordon Crane in the Tuesday, May 16 edition of the Baltimore AFRO - AMERICAN Newspaper, ties together a disturbing situation regarding practicies of the State's Attorney's Office and the police department as they impact negatively on black citizens.

If you did not read his article "Conspiracy against black Baltimore's leadership exposed" you should.

He summarizes the meaning of the ongoing harassment of black "street" people, addicts, prostitutes, ex - offenders, etc., by William Swisher's lackeys on the prosecutorial staff and in the police department, in election - year attempts to discredit local black leadership.

From prisoners in various Maryland correctional facilities the AFRO has heard of threats, promises and deals to them, if these men and women will tell anything detrimental about black politicians, newspersons, civic leaders.

Witnesses before the special grand jury, we understand, have been shuttled in and out and coached on testimony.

So far the unity of black people, legal, illegal, big and small, has withstood this ordeal.

No one has given "The Man" anything to work with.

Truth of it is there is little to work with but that has not deterred prosecutors.

Black people in jails are completely vulnerable but, so heinous and obvious has been this tactic that, in the words of one inmate, "I've done some terrible things but I'm not going to give false statements against my people."

As writer Crane has said what's going on with "street" people is just the first step, bother them now, later bother the general black populace.

That this situation could exist in this predominantly black city is deplorable. Crane has asked and we repeat for emphasis "have black Baltimoreans lost their voices?"

We have not lost ours. As we recommended last week a strong black candidate must come forward to run for and win the office of state's attorney.

Integrity, justice and effective law enforcement must be restored to this department.

County racism

Maybe it is as Baltimore County executive Ted Venetoulis says, a curious coincidence, but the Department of Justice suit charging that county government is rampant with discriminatory hiring and staffing patterns does come at a convenient time.

Not for Venetoulis perhaps who is named in the suit because he is boss of the county government but for us because it gives black Marylanders a view of how life is lived in our wealthy northern suburb.

It comes as no surprise that Baltimore County is still permeated with a collective mentality that is anti-black, anti-women.

Venetoulis did not create this situation but surely but how forcefully he deals with the federal charges will do much to inform us how he would deal with the racism that affects as many Maryland institutions from ocean to the Blue Ridge mountains.

As a declared candidate for governor the Baltimore County executive now has the opportunity to show his prowess as a human rights activist.

A LITTLE ABOUT A LOT: MADELINE MURPHY

Expendable workers

By Madeline W. Murphy

With the recent cancer scare in Baltimore and subsequent naming of a health task force to investigate, (which publicly criticized the Mayor's inattention to their warnings) one wonders about free enterprise and the so - called private sector's concern about hiring the unemployed.

Will these newly hired be filtered through high health risk occupations — like those already trapped — to solve simultaneously the problems of unemployment as well as too many blacks threatening the racist tranquility of a regenerating downtown?

And though the private sector carps about too much being done by big government, isn't that a contradiction in terms since with all their big contributions to presidential campaign coffers (and lesser lights') aren't they really the government?

In addition, look at the incentives they already receive to hire the unemployed, tax credits proposed, all the emoluments that would make it attractive to hire them. Adding insult to injury, we still must pay in tax dollars for this continued "cooperation and civic - mindedness"!

Then of course, without screening new industries to assure that they will not add to human ecological problems, will Baltimore continue to be dubbed "Cancer City"?

Now, of course, comes word that all the years that asbestos has been around as an insulating material, the estimated eight to 11 million workers exposed during and after World War II may conceal the 20 - 25 percent of those who will die of lung cancer.

Joseph A. Califano Jr., HEW secretary, alerted 400,000 physicains to an epidemic of cancer among these workers, to the dismay of the Pentagon, which feared suits by cancer stricken workers against builders of ships where asbestos is used as the primary insulation.

And so not only private business, but also the military brass are slowly moving us toward a police state by trying to suppress life threatening information. Workers merely obey without question! Do or die for the long green!

Long green, I might add, that spirals into enormous profits, unquestioned, uncontrolled, while workers are villified for demanding cost of living increases, despite continuing higher living costs. At this rate, wages can never keep up with living expenses unless . . . profits are controlled.

But with the incestuous relationship between business and government, the only controls they think worth talking about are wage controls with wage cutting proposals that will shear the sheep a bit closer.

When one hears talk about human rights, why is it everyone's business in the USSR, in Angola, everywhere else — fair game for the U.S.'s meddling, — but at home everywhere one looks the rights of people are being constantly trampled?.

Another issue of like consequences was the recent tragic death of 51 workers at the Pleasant Power Station in Willow Island, W. Va.

Of the 13 times inspectors had been to the power station since 1973, from the Occupational Health and Safety Administration, numerous violations were found. The AFL - CIO alleges that too hasty pouring of one layer of concrete upon the next without letting the layer below cure caused the slip - from scaffold to become dislodged on the damp cement, causing the disintegration of the lower layer, and the plunge of the workers to 170 feet, to their deaths.

And now word has come that the Occupational Safety Administration had not pressed hard enough to have the violations corrected.

One wonders with the cloud cast over construction, bidding that smells of corruption, whether construction speed - ups in all areas of construction, be it subways, high rises, expressways, state office buildings, are merely a sign of worse thing to come.

Workers at this rate are really expendable, and perhaps this is why the rush toward development of the neutron bomb — called the capitalist bomb — isn't really too alarming when u merely kills people while saving property!

But there's that flickering light at the end of the tunnel in Rep. Parren J. Michell's amendment to the House budget resolution to shift $4.8 billion from Pentagon spending to programs that will serve human needs.

This is counterpoint to the destructive measures mentioned above, long overdue, but sorely needing support from black voters whose needs are endless and whose survival is crucial.

It would be nice if you let him know how you feel and develop support behind it before it is too late.

LETTERS — Remove racial image

Dear AFRO:

Every day for the last 300 years, the minds of Bilalian (Afro-American) people have been subconsciously seduced by the physical teachings of white Christianity.

Do not confuse the spiritual teachings of Jesus with the physical teachings of white Christianity.

Even if you don't attend church, one is conscious of Jesus being a physically white body. The Apostles, angels and saints are all in the Caucasian image.

"The very fact that our minds exist in this environment is enough to make that image and those messages go into our subconscious and cripple black people's ability to lift themselves up out of inferiority.

"It also keeps Caucasian people's minds in a false world by making them unable to see their real worth and value as human beings apart from their physical skin color." (Bilalian News, "Message of Concern to the American People," Emam W. D. Muhammad, third paragraph.)

Some will say that it makes no difference to the color of the physical image of Jesus, the angels or the saints. Some will say that the call for the removal of white racial images is only for the replacement of black images.

This is not true. The call is for the removal of all racial images. The essence of God is spiritual, not physical.

The call for the removal of all racial images is necessary because the time has come for the diabolical plan of white supremacy to come to the light.

It is time for the Bilalian people to see what has been holding us down.

It is time for us to see why we cannot work together as a people. It is time for us to see why black on black crime has been on the increase.

It is also time for us to realize that the constant bombardment of our minds with these physical white images has broken our spirits for unity as a people.

White Christianity brings people with a white complexion closer to the divine because they physically identify with the physical white image of Jesus. These white racial images separate people with color from the divine because they don't identify with the physical image that is before them.

White Christianity is the psychological chain and shackle that have been placed around our minds subconsciously to hold our people down!

"As long as white Caucasian people think that their physical image is in the world as the image of God, as long as non-white people see and know that the Caucasian image is in the world as the physical image of God, there will be no real coming together and no peaceful meeting of the minds of Caucasians and non-Caucasians. The strongest wedge between non-Caucasians and Caucasians is the Caucasian image of God on the cross." (Bilalian News, "Message of Concern to the American People," Emam W. D. Muhammad, fourth paragraph.)

We must realize that the fuel for the Nazi socialist and the Ku Klux Klan is the physical teaching of white Christianity.

KENNETH T. RAGIN

Thank you, Dr. Hammond

Dear AFRO:

For the past several months I have been an avid reader of Dr. Leslie King Hammond's column "On the Creative Community" published in the AFRO AMERICAN Newspaper.

The column fills a void which is found in the black community.

MS. SARA TAYLOR

Nice jobs

Dear AFRO:

This summer they will be hiring children for NYC (Neighborhood Youth Corps) summer jobs.

I hope that they will not do this year as they have in past years.

That is, having our black girls working on trash trucks and shoveling dirt while they give the white girls nice office jobs. How do you expect these girls to act like ladies when they are not treated as such?

I am sure the people who place these young people in these jobs would not like their own daughters to do that type of work.

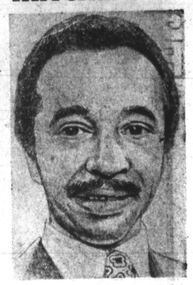
MRS. MARY AIKEN

AFRO invites letters

The AFRO welcomes letters from its readers. Letters should be brief and must bear the writer's name and address. All letters will be given consideration for publication.

Write to Letters to the Editor, Baltimore AFRO-AMERICAN, Box 1857, Baltimore, Md. 21203.

WASHINGTON REPORT: PARREN J. MITCHELL



Mr. Mitchell represents Maryland's 7th District in the U.S. House of Representatives

On May 15, 1978, the House of Representatives completed consideration of its version of the target budget resolution for Fiscal 1979.

This resolution was crucial for two reasons. First, it is the deadline for the reporting of legislation authorizing new spending initatives.

Second, it is the deadline for the adoption of the target resolution. This target resolution provides guidelines for the appropriation Committees to introduce appropriation bills that provide funds for the various agencies or government to operate their programs.

Prior to the adoption of the target resolution, however, neither House may consider spending bills that will be reflected in the following year's budget.

While the adoption of the target resolution is important from a legislative stand point it is equally as significant from a political standpoint. This is particularly true with respect to the budget for Fiscal 1979, which signaled a mood in the Congress that is increasingly conservative, anti- black and anti - poor.

Surprisingly, the opponants of the programs for the poor and the socially disadvantaged and the jobless do not place their opposition to programs for these groups as the basis of need and priorities but, rather they talk about massive federal spending and inflation.

In other words, the budget process is used as a mechanism to air views that are politically expedient instead of a process to establish legitimate national priorities.

Ironically, in the absence of the Budget Act, one could understand the abuses. Yet, the abuses prevail although clothed somewhat differently.

During consideraton of the budget for Fiscal 1979, there were several amendments, which proposed to make drastic reductions in spending for health, education and jobs programs.

While most of these amendments did not prevail, as mentioned earlier, they signaled a new mood in the Congress and our country.

One such amendment would have cut by two percent all categories of the budget except defense, agriculture and veterans programs. Interestingly, the author of the amendment contended that his amendment would not hurt any farmers or veterans.

In effect, this amendment would have represented about $5 billion in funds to be spent in Fiscal Year 1979.

In addition, there was an amendment which proposed to hold the level of services in all federal programs at their 1978 levels. The effect of such an amendment would have meant the loss of $2 billion for programs in Fiscal 1979.

In short, this amendment would have meant that the rate of progress in meeting human needs would have been limited to the rate of inflation — in other words, no growth at all and no new person served.

Specifically, this amendment would mean fewer jobs, fewer training opportunities for our young people, less help for education and a halt to major social services initative that many state and localities depend on.

Finally, an amendment was offered to reduce by two percent across the board all programs contained in the budget. Although this amendment failed by a narrow margin, it exemplified the sence of conservatism prevalent in the Congress.

In response to this insensitivity and irresponsibility, I was one of the concerned members of Congress who fought diligently to preserve funding for human service programs and thereby retain the integrity of the Congressional Budget Process.

G. JAMES FLEMING: NOW AND THEN

No black mayor next time

By G. James Fleming

There is growing concensus that the next four - year term of mayor of Baltimore City will not be filled by anyone black. There are many hopes and wishes to the contrary, but the practicalities of politics say, "Not necessarily so."

The most important determinant seems to be the decision of the money-men, who put up big money that makes the campaigns for mayor and governor possible.

For both the right and the wrong reasons, these money - bags have made it known, so far, that they will not support William Donald Schaefer for governor, for the reason that his exit from City Hall will open a Pandora's box of blacks vs. whites in the race to replace him. They are afraid of a spread of interracial bitterness

On the other hand, these political "angels" will go "all out" to support the mayor for another term and perhaps another.

The power-structure has still another reason for wanting Schaefer for another term. They like his style; they appreciate his emphasis on building up the downtown area; and they benefit from the fiscal health of the city under him.

The VIP's are joined by countless black voters who also are outspoken Schaefer boosters. They remember him from his days in City Council when they could depend on his listening to them and helping them. They appreciate his continuing to live in a racially mixed neighborhood.

The best bet for a black mayor will come when all the candidates are neophytes. It is too much to expect to defeat a popular incumbent office - holder, in this case a mayor, regardless of his race or color.

Fifteen years ago, this writer felt that a "natural" for mayor, by now, would be Clarence Mitchell III, now state senator; but our current soundings tell us that this is "not necessarily so."

The senator has a good district following; he is personable; he is an entertaining speaker; he is an activist; and he is lucky to have the right name. A number of other factors seem to declare, however, that it will take a miracle to get him elected citywide.

There is some questioning as to whether Sen. Mitchell could even carry a majority of black precincts, if his opponent were strong, waged a vigorous campaign, and well known to blacks.

GOON SQUAD GOES PUBLIC — The "Goon Squad," about which many people have whispered for years, goes public in the May issue of "Baltimore" magazine.

The members are given credit as having an influential hand in making a black mayor possible, and the "Goon Squad" does not deny this role. Neither does it oppose the conclusion that the next term will not bring a black mayor — but in 1983, if all goes well.

"Going well" means, for instance, that Baltimore blacks will have to increase their number in City Council and will have to develop more clout at the voting machines.

The "Goon Squad, as pictured in "Baltimore" magazine, are: Congressman Parren Mitchell; the Rev. Vernon Dobson, pastor, Union Baptist Church; the Rev. Harold Dobson, director, OIC; the Rev. Wendell Phillips, pastor, Heritage United Church of Christ; Dr. Augustus A. Adair, professor of political science, Morgan State University; Judge Joseph Howard, of the Supreme Bench; Dr. Homer E. Favor, dean, School of Urban Affairs and Human Ecology, Morgan State; the Rev. Marion Bascom, minister, Douglass Memorial Community Church.

In black political circles, the "Goon Squad" is credited with the ability to give and the capacity to take away, speaking in terms of political preference and power. When a black mayoralty contender is flushed up, the "Goon Squad" expects, and is expected, to have a big hand in the flushing.

FOR ALL WE KNOW: ELIZABETH M. OLIVER

By Elizabeth M. Oliver City Editor

MRS. ALICE PINDERHUGHES, the educator and widow of William (Bill) Pinderhughes, may run for the Maryland Senate to step in Sen. Verda F. Welcome's shoes. Is that right?

CITY COUNCILMAN Michael Bowen Mitchell says he will be campaign manager for his brother, Sen. Clarence M. Mitchell III and no one else.

VARIOUS CANDIDATES have each already purchased 10 of those $100 gold tickets for Clarence III's May 25 affair at Blue Crest North. Buffet (a full dinner) cocktails galore, dancing are included in the extravagant evening which they say will out - do all others.

WHOEVER is running for election and can afford the 10-ticket bit can give out bumper stickers, literature, cards and anything else plus get up on his own box and preach about himself. Wow! On the scene will be the whole Mitchell clan, including P.J., the congressman and all the third and fourth generation.

ONLY OTHER fete to rival this was the May 9 buffet and cocktailer by Archbishop Borders and Rev. John Geaney, media director of the Archdiocese. 'Twas a swinging party with drinks across the board, delicious food, plenty crab cakes and so forth.

SEN. MITCHELL'S on his 3rd term in the Senate. His 16th year in Annapolis includes the time he was elected to the House as the youngest in the history of the nation. He's 38 now, has a ticket listing — Dels. Larry Young, Lena K. Lee and Ike Dixon and Sterling Paige and John Jeffries for the State Central Committee.

GRAPEVINE'S flash news reveals WEBB may be purchased by an ABCD Corp. for $300,000 or $400,000) not $7 million which could buy two or three of the main radio stations).

TURNING IT OVER in their minds are David Allen, lawyer and accountant; Bethel's Rev. John Bryant; Rev. St. George Crosse and Radio pastor and disc jockey Rev. Naomi Durrant. Whatever happens, WEBB could be a great force for good in the community.

ALPHA KAPPA ALPHA Sorority's local grad chapter Epsilon Omega, has listed important dates: JUNE 24, 1 - 6 p.m. Mondawmin Mall, Health Fair, AUG. 3 7:30 p.m., MSU McKeldin Center, Forum for all governor's chair candidates. JULY-SEPTEMBER — Register to vote campaign. Idell Pugh Massileus and Wendy Davis, chairman.

OUR BONNIE Matthews Butler, longtime AFRO ad exec, is finishing Morgan Sunday and we're proud.

A NEIGHBOR of the family whose child was killed by drowning, reveals that she witnessed five deaths that week. One of them was the lady who died in Grandpa's Store. The dead lady had just purchased an order of candles and incense and collapsed in the good neighbor's arms.

ENGRAVED invitations in double envelops announce the Reed children's black tie reception for their parents Rev. and Mrs. Samuel T. Redd at Martin's West, June 28. Elegant!

1978 COPPIN State College grads have a wine and cheese reception set for May 23 for all alumni. It's 7 p.m. in the Office Classroom Bldg.

JAMES E LEWIS, director of MSU Gallery of Art is recipient of the 1978 Artists Equity Asso. award June 4 at a grand brunch at the Woodholme Country Club, Pikesville. Kenneth Kahn, executive director, Md. Arts Council, is also an honoree. Presentors are Dr. Lincoln Johnson and Dr. Theodore E. Klitzke.

BIRTHDAY SALUTE to Susie Murphy, May 26 at Wayland Baptist marks her 75th birthday and church membership 27 years. Her Susie Murphy Nurses Unit, was organized in 1952. She was one of nine who first started the USO during WW II. The Murphy Family Circle Club in 1947 and the 3000 block Gwynns Falls Neighborhood Club are accomplishments. For 26 years she worked with Dr. Lillie Jackson in the NAACP. More on the lovely lady will come at the affair.

SOME $6.3 million is the fund the State Board of Education is asking for 7,300, 4 - year - olds to enter 105 state schools by 1979. The April news letter pictures Patrick Williams, the dearest of 4 - year - olds, doing carpentry work at the Frederick Towne Mall simulated classroom. Each classroom would have a teacher for every 15 tots.

SATURDAY MATINEE Ensemble, meeting for 30 years, had Ruth Russell as hostess last week in the loveliest affair yet. Members together three decades included Ruth, Odell Payne, Violet Whyte, Lucy Swain, Esther Bailey, Roselyn Wood, Catherine Dixon. Guests were Sarah Rayne, Irena Damcy, Elizabeth Brooks, Louise Dennis, Rosa Lee, Irene Templeton. Dinner's highlight was a flower for each one's hair. Gifts for all were a gracious end to the nicest evening I've had in many a day.

DR. JOYCE PARKS, the new dentist, her husband Vertis and family will be guests at the Dozens Country Club June 3, a fabulous summer fun affair.

MAY 27 is the Sugar Hill Assembly's cocktail and dinner at Blue Crest and it'll see all the old neighbors swinging together: 2500 block McCulloh, Druid Hill, Whitelock etc., an elegant group.

MAINSTREAM: MARION BANFIELD

To honor our own

Mrs. Banfield is district director of Family and Children's Society. She also hosts "Metro," which appears on WJZ-TV at 7:30 p.m. Saturdays.

At Edmondson High School's Student Scholars Day, I addressed the honor roll students. Parents, friends and faculty were in the audience.

So many came up to me after the program that I decided to repeat some of the highlights in this column.

Students who have perfect attendance have exercised perfect self-control for each school day. They have resisted the temptation of their peers who prefer to bring others down to their level of incompetence and focus on fun and rebellion.

Those students who have used their brains to reach the honor roll deserve our highest praises.

Some have come from motherless or fatherless homes. A few have survived with one or more parents whom one would expect to be placed in a mental institution. The unpredictable parents whose mood swings made home environment uncertain between atmospheres of hostility and later bursts of affection and kindness had not destroyed the motivation of the honor students who respected themselves enough to succeed in school.

In the audience were parents who had worked hard and sat with pride enjoying the fruits of their labor. Beside them might have been sitting parents who encouraged their children to excel in scholastic pursuits so that those children might escape the poverty that can be anticipated with too little education.

Girls, I reminded, that in the pursuit of scholarship, they might be less popular than some of their sexy sisters. Twenty years from today when they hang up their professional certificates, they will be the permanent successes.

To the girls who had babies but had sense enough not to become dropouts, special praise was given.

To the fine young men who handsomely sat up straight in their seats went my special encouragement not to allow themselves to be steered away from academic excellence by descriptions of racism or how hopeless our economic and social system.

Graduate school was the goal I suggested for them. In choosing a wife I urged them to choose a woman with similar ambition. They cheered when I reminded them in marriage to use birth control until they were really ready for children.

Hold Your Heads UP!

The atmosphere of happiness and pride in accomplishment that permeated Edmondson High School was evidence of what happens when administration and faculty respect the abilities of our children.

MORE LETTERS

So-called fraud

DSS chief's views on welfare fraud

Dear AFRO:

Welfare is an intensely difficult, intensely emotional and intensely emotional issue. Every national administration since President Kennedy has proclaimed the welfare system "a national disgrace" and proposed "welfare reform legislation.

In President Carter's recent words: "The system is neither rational nor fair. It is anti - work, anti - family, inequitable in its treatment of the poor and wasteful of taxpayers' dollars."

The system is so complex and choked with red tape that it is recognized to be an administrative nightmare and fundamentally unmanageable.

While liberals and conservatives alike agree that the present system is very bad, the Congress cannot agree how to change it, and President Carter's welfare reform legislation is conceded to be dead.

In the meantime public anger and frustration are vented on welfare recipients, workers and administrators who are left to bear the brunt and the blame for the "mess" that remains.

It is against this familiar background that the Baltimore City grand jury recently reported an "appalling" error and fraud rate at the City Department of Social Services (DSS) and cited the agency as inefficient and inepdy managed.

At such moments, it is small comfort to either the public or the agency that the same findings of error and fraud and mismanagement are regularly reported by the grand jury in every large American city, and the Baltimore City Grand Jury issues a similar report at least once a year.

On the one hand we know objectively that the system is inefficient and unmanageable. On the other hand, it is hard emotionally to resist the temptation to think the whole welfare problem might go away if only the bureaucracy were more efficient and the recipients were more honest.

I do not want to minimize the legitimacy of the Grand Jury's concern. Error and fraud are a serious problem. The bureaucracy can do better. But at the same time, on such a complex and emotionally charged issue as the error rate, there needs to be special care to achieve accurate and balanced reporting, and this the grand jury — perhaps a victim like the rest of us of the system's overwhelming complexity — has not been able to achieve

Error rate

1. The grand jury did not apparently understand the error rate statistics and therefore presented a misleading impression o: the nature and extent of the error rate itself. In fairness the "error rate", is a highly technical, bewildering HEW procedure which is extremely difficult for anyone to understand.

First, the error rate is not the fraud rate. Each error does not mean that a client tried to cheat.

Of the 28.5 percent error rate cited by the grand jury, only 11 percent is suspected fraud. Further, many cases of suspected fraud do not turn out upon investigation to be fraud at all.

The rate of actual compared to suspected fraud in Maryland and nationally is in the 3 to 5 percent range.

Second, the error rate does not mean that each error represents a client who received a grant to which the client was not entitled. The error rate is an aggregate of overpayments and underpayments, as well as erroneous determinations of eligibility.

Third, there are many errors which do not affect either eligibility or payment level. That is, the error may be the worker's failure to score 100 percent on the long checklist of forms and documents, even though the error made no actual difference.

Fourth, the error rate divides into so - called "agency error" (caused by a worker's error) and "client error" (caused by the client).

Of the overall 28.5 percent error rate, only 8 percent is agency error.

The City has a lower agency error rate than the combined counties in Maryland despite the heavier demands of serving the urban poor; this is regarded as a significant measure of DSS's relative effort and progress.

I want to re - emphasize that the purpose of these comments is not to minimize the problem of fraud and error but to place both the problem, and our efforts to combat the problem, in fair perspective and balance.

2. The grand jury was apparently unaware that enormous efforts have been made and substantial progress has been achieved to reduce the error rate. The error rate has been reduced from 48 percent to 28.5 percent over the past three years. To be sure the rate is high, but it is in the same range as other large cities, and undeniably it has decreased considerably.

The error rate has dropped throughout Maryland as a result of an intensive effort by the State Department of Human Resources (of which the Baltimore City Department of Social Services is a part). Many steps have been taken, among them computerized screening of employment security and Social Security records, special redetermination - of - eligibility projects, and additional verifications and documentations.

DSS efforts

Within the next year a statewide computerized eligibility determination system will be instituted and this promises further reduction in the error and fraud rate.

In addition, in recent months DSS has developed its own local management initiatives to increase efficiency.

These include: position control actions resulting in equalization of staff among units and fewer staff vacancies; reorganization and clarification of lines of authority; productivity quotas and work measurements; the most thorough personnel evaluation system in state government; and additional technical assistance for field staff.

These efforts at both the state and city levels will continue to receive priority attention. Still we can anticipate, based upon our own experience and the experience of other large urban agencies, that despite these efforts, the error rate will never drop below what the public will preceive as efficient and acceptable.

Red tape

This obviously results from the horrendous complexity and mind-boggling red tape of the system itself. The grand jury was exactly right when it said that "excessive red tape (its underline) is the most obvious cause for the error rate."

Unfortunately, the grand jury did not note that the red tape is not of our own choice or making; rather it is federally and state mandated.

Today the average eligibility worker must try to cope with hundreds and hundreds of regulations and forms which are confusing, conflicting and constantly changing. The workers manual is 1000 pages and five inches thick.

Someone has said that the welfare laws make the Internal Revenue Code seem simple.

Yet our workers are not lawyers or accountants. In a classic case of budgets being pennywise and pound foolish, job qualifications under the state merit system for our workers have been gradually reduced.

The great majority of DSS employees are competent and diligent, but we are often no match for the layers of paperwork and labyrinth of changing rules and regulations.

Tasks multiply; yet we have no more than half the staff we need to manage efficiently our routine worloads.

We may have reached the point at which so - called corrective actions to reduce the error rate, unless highly selective, may be counter - productive. More corrective actions breed more complex forms and rules, which require more work and which, since we receive no additional workers, may cause more errors than they eliminate.

As a matter of fact, in the first four months of this year, the error rate throughout the stae is on the rise again. Not because we have relaxed our efforts but because the federal government has redefined what constitutes an error and imposed an additional set of forms and rules upon us.

Like the faboled Red Queen in Alice in Through the Looking Glass, welfare departments have to keep running harder just to stay in the same place.

It is regretable that the grand jury limited its inquiry almost exclusively to the error rate statustics and therefore was unable to grasp the extent to which the complexities and deficiencies inherent in the system itself affect and limit management efficiency.

The grand jury interviewed only one DSS staff member. No member of the grand jury visited the agency, interviewed or observed any worker or supervisor, or conducted any "study" of either the welfare system or the agency's operations.

A broader inquiry might have given the grand jury a broader, more balanced perspective on the effort and progress we have made despite serious obstacles.

The public should be made equally aware of the underlying structural deficiencies in the system.

For example, in Maryland the level of welfare payments is 50 percent of the poverty level; Maryland, the third wealthiest state, ranks 36th among all states in the level of welfare payments.

For another example, the welfare system contains strong incentives for husbands and fathers to desert their families and is therefore literally and lethally destructive of family stability among the poor.

Scrutiny welcomed

The public should also see that we are as zealous to protect the rights of those who are entitled to public assistance as to cut off the benefits of those who aren't.

Such scrutiny should include outreach (the percentage of those in need whom we reach); promptness in appointments and processing applications; staff courtesy and helpfulness; and not least of all, a low error rate on determinations of ineligibility.

Last year New York City undertook a well - publicized crackdown on new welfare applications, but has now stated that as many as half of the rejections may have been incorrect.

Over the range of our responsibilities we welcome concerned, knowledgeable citizen oversight, whether by grand juries or other citizens groups. We work very openly and closely with community and client groups. Although they also take us to task, their criticisms and suggestions assist us in trying to be as responsive and effective as possible, no matter what the limitations upon us are.

In the final analysis, that is what welfare administration is most about: doing the best with the "system" you've got to work with.

The welfare system remains a disgrace to a nation that prides itself on either efficiency or justice, and we in Maryland and in Baltimore City, like other public welfare agencies across the country, are left to do the best we can to cope with the inadequacy, complexity and red tape of the system.

Of course we can do better. We are trying and will keep trying. But the achievement of true reform — that meets the needs of both the poor and taxpayers — will not occur until the system itself has been reformed in the Congress.

KALMAN R. HETTLEMAN, Director, Department of Social Service.