After 25 years:

Recalling Selma's 'Bloody Sunday'

By Leon Daniel

WASHINGTON — A quarter century after the "Bloody Sunday" that stunned the nation and spurred passage of the 1965 voting rights act, racial tension still afflicts Selma, Ala.

When I read on the wire that Blacks were boycotting public schools to protest the firing of Selma's first Black superintendent of schools, I decided to phone Mayor Joe Smitherman."

Joe and I met soon after he was first elected mayor, shortly before Selma became a historic battleground for civil rights.

In those days, Joe didn't mind admitting to the media hordes that swarmed into Selma to cover its racial woes that he was a diehard segregationist. He had a quick lip that often got him bad ink in newspapers.

So Joe was an embattled young mayor new to his office on that shocking Sunday I witnessed and reported for United Press International the brutal assault by Alabama troopers on about 500 voting rights marchers on Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7, 1965.

Gov. George Wallace's "storm troopers," as the demonstrators called them, wore gas masks and helmets when they blocked a march on the Jefferson Davis Highway at the foot of the bridge on the edge of town.

The marchers were ordered to disperse but instead stood fast, some of them kneeling in prayer.

"Charge," an officer roared into a bullhorn, sending troopers wading into the demonstrators, firing tear gas and swinging clubs.

A crowd of Whites cheered as a posse of rednecks on horseback also charged, lashing the retreating marchers with bullwhips and jabbing them with cattle prods.

White men chased and beat Black women pleading for mercy. March leader John Lewis collapsed in the onslaught, his skull fractured.

In the 25 years since Bloody Sunday, much has changed and much has not.

Lewis is now a Democratic congressman from Georgia.

And his honor, the mayor, no longer claims to be a segregationist. Joe has mellowed considerably in the years since Bloody Sunday. He points out he could not have held his office all these years without a lot of Black votes. But now Joe accuses boycott leaders of "trying to polarize the Black vote.

He bitterly charged that Black leaders are trying to block White participation in the upcoming celebration to mark the 25th anniversary of Bloody Sunday.

One of them, State Sen. Hank Sanders, denied this, telling me emphaticaly, "We want White to participate, but the mayor wanted to take over the celebration. We just don't want him to dominate it."

MAYNARD JACKSON TAKES the oath of office as the mayor of Atlanta as his wife, Valerie, looks on, Jackson first held the office 16 years ago, serving two terms (1974-82), the maximum number of consecutive terms allowed by the city charter.

Satellite teleconference to set new Black agenda

Age-old tradition and space age technology will come together to unite thousands of African-American communities on Jan. 27, in a nationlly broadcast teleconference organized by the National Council of Negro Women in cooperation with the Black College Satellite Network.

With the theme, "Extend the Family Spirit," the program will set forth a new agenda for self-help via a reinforced sense of community as the extended family. The three hour telecast will be aired from 2 to 5 p.m. (EST)

Hosted by actress and record artist Melba Moore, it will join down-link locations in almost every state to the broadcast center in Washington, D.C.

The program will include demonstrations and discussions on problem-solving of contemporary issues with strong emphasis on traditional and historic Black family values.

Atlantic City mayor charged with bribery

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — Mayor James Usry, who rose to power in the oceanside gambling resort after his predecessor was ousted on corruption charges, has been indicted on an allegation of accepting a $6,000 bribe to allow motorized chairs on the world-famous Broadwalk.

Mr. Usry was charged with conspiracy, official misconduct, bribery, accepting gifts from public servants and campaign contribution violations. He faces up to 36½ years in prison and $315,000 in fines if convicted on all counts.

Also indicted were Robert Harrison, manager of human resources for the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency; local entrepreneur Ernest English and Clarence Gillard, English's associate.

Mr. Harrison was accused of destroying evidence involving a fund-raising dinner for Mr. Usry — after being served with a grand jury subpoena.

"English and Mr. Gillard were accused of attempting to influence Mr. Usry with a $300,000 bribe to allow motorized rolling chairs on the city's Boardwalk. The alleged bribe was never paid.

Mr. Usry, 67, president of the National Conference of Black Mayors, is the fourth of Atlantic City's last six mayors to be arrested in political scandals. He is the only Black Republican mayor of a major New Jersey municipality.

During a news conference arranged by his lawyer the day after his arrest, Mr. Usry admitted taking the $6,000 from a private detective working for police but said the cash was intended for a charity fund-raising effort.

The mayor left his office in the early afternoon, hours before the indictments were announced. He could not be reached for comments but has said in the past that he would not resign from the helm of City Hall.

WALDABA STEWART, HEAD OF the Panamanian Political Organization of New York, opposes the U.S. invasion of Panama and told an audience at the National Press Club in Washington that his group is demanding $5 billion in reparations from the U.S. government.

Zimbabwe college system

Zimbabwe's Parliament has approved a recommendation to make private universities part of national policy.

Parliament must now enact a law that recognizes private universities and create a national commission on education to receive and approve applications for private schools. Zimbabwe now has no private universities.

The proposal to create the United Methodist University in Mutare, Zimbabwe, would be processed through the commission, said the Rev. Roger W. Ireson, head of the denomination's General Board of Higher Education and Ministry here.

Full approval of the African University proposal by the new commission could come as early as late September, he added.

Parliament's action came when members approved and adopted a recommendation from a special panel set up in 1988 by Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe, Mr. Ireson said. That panel researched and studied higher education needs in Zimbabwe.

Church council makes grants to fight racism

GENEVA, Switzerland— the World Council of Churches has made new grants totalling $635,000 to organizations combatting racism, one of them a South Africa-banned group which dominated recent elections in adjoining Namibia.

The largest grant from the council's fund to fight racism, $165,000, went to the South West African People's Organization, which garnered 57 percent of votes to elect 41 of 72 members of Namibia's assembly, which is to produce a constitution for the newly forming state.

SWAPO's chairman, Sam Nujoma, who presided at the assembly, expressed gratitude for the role churches have played to the struggle of Namibia's independence from South Africa, reports a U.S. Observer, Diane Porter, the Episcopal Church's deputy for public policy.

Three other groups fighting White-minority rule in South Africa and previously in Namibia also received grants, including the African National Congress.

The fund, supported by contribution, mainly from European churches and governments, makes grants only for humanitarian, non-military purposes. Since 1970, the fund has made grants totaling $8.7 million.

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James Baldwin

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THINK

Gen. Colin Powell withdrawing U.S. military forces from Panama

PANAMA CITY, Panama — Gen. Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has ordered his commanders to withdraw the American forces from Panama,has two law makers lead the criticism of the U.S. invasion.

Several members of a U.S. congressional delegation in Panama said most of the 14,000 troops sent to the Central American nation for operation "Just Cause" could be withdrawn within a few weeks as the country's new security force takes shape.

Papal Nuncio Jose Sebastián Laboa, who for nine days reluctantly sheltered Gen. Manual Antonio Noriega in his embassy, said the deposed strongman surrendered to American soldiers because he came to fear a Panamanian lynch mob — not because the Vatican forced him out of the nunciature.

Monsignor Laboa said he and the ousted strongman's aides convinced Noriega he was better off facing drug-trafficking charges in the U.S. courts than staying in the nunciature, which the Vatican envoy led him to believe might be stormed by angry Panamanians wanting to lynch him.

"I told him a situation might develop that U.S. soldiers (guarding the nunciature) could not control," he told a small group of reporters at the Vatican mission.

"I never gave him an ultimatum," he said.

His statement contradicted claims by Gen. Noriega's attorneys in a Miami federal court that he was pressured and taken from Panama against his will and therefore could not be tried by a U.S. court.

In Washington, the Pentagon said about 24,500 U.S. troops remained in Panama, 900 fewer than on Thursday. About 12,000 U.S. troops are stationed permanently in Panama; the others were deployed in the Dec. 20 U.S. invasion.

Japan's ambassador in Washington told the United States his country will recognize the new Panamanian government, boosting the Bush administration's drive to bolster the fledgling political credibility of the U.S.-installed leadership in Panama.

Colin Powell

More food needed for starving Ethiopia

NAIROBI, Kenya — Drought-stricken Ethiopia will need more food aid than was previously thought to avert widespread starvation, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization said.

The FAO said in a statement that 700,000 tons of emergency food is urgently needed following massive crop failure. U.N. officials in mid-December had estimated the need at about 500,000 tons.

Previous estimates said as many as 4 million people are threatened with starvation, most of them in the northernmost provinces of Eritrea and Tigre.

Powerful rebel groups control much of the two provinces, and it is unclear whether the Ethiopian government will permit relief shipments into the conflict zones.

The FAO, noting that food aid pledges now amount to 270,000 tons, said that "only a major international relief effort will avert widespread loss of life in the coming months."

Local food supplies are expected to run out in the first few months of 1990, said the FAO, which based its statement on a fresh crop assessment.

It said lack of seasonal rains had destroyed 80 percent of the crop in Eritrea and half the crop in Tigre.

The current crop shortfall is Ethiopia's third major food emergency of the decade.

As many as 1 million people died during the great famine of 1984-85 despite a major international relief effort. A million tons of food aid prevented another disaster following the failure of rains in the north in 1987.

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Namibia faces transition

The newly independent southwest African nation of Namibia is surrounded by potentially threatening forces which could make the transition to true independence difficult, a recently returned American Friends Service Committee observer declared.

Edgar (Ted) Lockwood said the United States could contribute to the stability of the region by stopping its aid to the anti - government UNITA forces in Angola, headed by Jonas Savimbi, who is allied with South Africa.

Mr. Lockwood, who observed the first-ever elections in Namibia, said, "U.S. aid to Savimbi is very contradictory to peace in Namibia." He said that Savimbi forces go back and forth between Angola and Namibia.

Mr. Lockwood added that military forces trained and, until recently, controlled by South Africa, remain active in Namibia. Two former battalions have been offered resettlement in South Africa, and said Mr. Lockwood, could become an ongoing military force capable of committing sabotage in the new Namibia.

The recent election for a constituent assembly did not involve Walvis Bay, the country's only deepwater port, which remains under South African control.

South Africa maintains at least 1750 troops there. Almost all Namibian exports other than to South Africa pass through the Walvis Bay enclave.

More than 90 percent of Namibia's trade is with South Africa. "So long as this economic dependence continues," Mr. Lockwood said, "it constitutes a chokehold in the political independence of the country."

He called South Africa's economic dominance over Namibia "acute colonialism."

Mr. Lockwood said Namibia needs international support for an unpressured process as its constitutional convention leads toward the shape of the government to come.