

15,000 March Against Bakke

Turning Point in Struggle of Minorities

Washington, D.C.—On April 15, in Washington D.C. 15,000 people marched against the Bakke decision, against racism and discrimination. 15,000 people full of the determination and rebellion that had opened up lunch counters, smashed segregation, won open admissions, and burnt cities. A sea of Black and white, Puerto Rican and Asian-Americans, shoulder to shoulder, with one common chant, "Beat Back the Bakke Decision." After 7 years of little organized response to discrimination, the April 15th march was a turning point.

If you watched the network news the evening of April 15, that Saturday held no special significance. The only report of a demonstration in Washington, DC was about 400 Elvis Presley fans who want his birthday to be a national holiday.

But news blackouts can only hide reality, not change it. The anti-Bakke demonstration was the biggest outpouring of protest against racism this country has seen in the 1970's.

It delivered the People's Verdict against the Bakke decision and served notice to this country's rulers, right in their seat of power in Washington, that people don't plan to let the capitalist scales of justice crush them into deeper poverty and degradation.

Without any major media build-up or coverage and without any significant financial support, word about the march was spread to hundreds of thousands in schools and communities throughout the US.

A large number of those marching came from the major urban ghettos in the Northeast. 30 busloads left from 125 St. and Lenox Ave., in the heart of Harlem.

Although predominantly Black, the

crowd included a large number of white people, exposing the myth that Bakke's "reverse discrimination" stands for the interests of white people.

Bakke says he was refused admission to the University of California at Davis medical school while "less qualified" Blacks got in through a quota system which sets aside a maximum of 16 of 100 places per class for minorities.

His case rests on the absurd assertion that there is no longer any discrimination against minorities, so special programs to upgrade their education and job opportunities are not needed. Now, claims Bakke, white people are the victims of "reverse discrimination."

While its true that the system has less to offer daily to either Black or white people by way of education or jobs,

minorities are still hit hardest. It is not in the interest of whites to fight for the few crumbs the system throws to Blacks.

DEEPER POLITICAL UNDERSTANDING

This march showed a much deeper political understanding than there had been at demonstrations in the past. While the marches of the early 60s made demands that Black people be granted rights long denied them by the legal system, there was only a beginning awareness that racism stems from the entire economic system (and supporting legal system) that we live under.

But the ghetto rebellions in the 60's, the experience of the Black Panther Party, and the rising tide of struggle against

New Case Outdoes Bakke Attack on Affirmative Action

No matter what the Supreme Court decides on Bakke, new legal challenges lie ahead in the ruling class' offensive against the gains of the 60's. Earlier this year the highest federal court in the south decided a case entitled Weber vs. Kaiser Aluminum. Weber involves an on-the-job training program adopted by the USWA and Kaiser for its Gramercy, La. plant.

This program instituted a ratio of one minority trainee for each white trainee in order to increase minority participation in craft jobs to a level reflecting the racial composition of the area. At Gramercy 2% of the craft workers are Black, while 40% of the surrounding population is. Because Blacks are generally excluded

from the crafts unions where they could gain the needed skills, very few would be able to ever get into such skilled positions without a special training program.

Weber, a white worker at Gramercy, challenged the program as discriminatory under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on race in employment. It would be quite possible for Bakke to lose and for Weber to win.

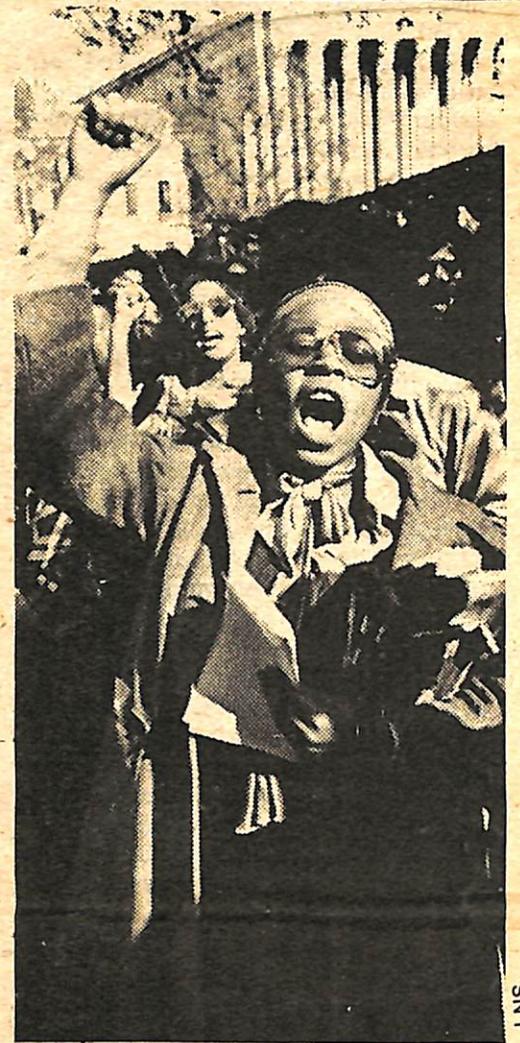
What would a Weber victory mean if the Supreme Court hears his case in the fall? The Government would have to prosecute any employer or institution which had special programs to overcome discrimination against Blacks, Latins, and even women!

US imperialism in Southern Africa has left its mark on those who marched and the many who supported them.

One of the largest and best received contingents in the march was the 600 member Soweto Brigade, marching behind a banner declaring, "Fight Imperialism and National Oppression from the USA (Union of South Africa) to the USA (United States of America)." Their chant of "Soweto" was greeted with cheers throughout the march, reflecting the widespread inspiration Black people get here from their brothers and sisters in struggle in South Africa.

The Bakke decision of the California Supreme Court (which the US Supreme Court will rule on within the next month) has the potential to wipe out all

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The Bakke demonstration was an important step in rebuilding a movement to fight discrimination and national oppression.

Bakke

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affirmative action, be it minority admissions or minority hiring programs.

If affirmed, the Bakke decision only promises more of the hell minorities face—the rat infested ghettos and broken down tenements, the drugs and crime, the 40% youth unemployment, the killer cops—life in America for Black, Latin and Asian people.

The Bakke demonstration reflected a growing tide of discontent among this country's minorities. Though many of the people who marched were students too young to remember the marches of the 60s, they brought with them the same intense desire for freedom and liberation that inspired the civil rights movement and the Black liberation movement.

The major force in the April 15th mobilization was the National Committee to Overturn the Bakke Decision (NCOBD). Starting out as a handful of student activists less than a year ago, NCOBD moved into a void left by the inaction of the organizations that led the marches of the early 60s, like the NAACP and the Urban League.

The NAACP and the Urban League

act as if the lessons of the 60s, the ghetto rebellions, the Panthers and Malcolm X never happened. The links between oppression in Africa and the US are slighted or ignored.

The NAACP and the Urban League boast membership lists in the hundreds of thousands, but do little more than politely haggle with the upper levels of the US ruling class. They lobby, beg and plead with Congress to "fix-up" discrimination in the US.

What they don't do is organize people to fight. (It's quite possible that they can't—after their prediction of 20,000 people at an NAACP rally protesting South Africa's participation at the Davis Cup Tennis Tournament in Nashville last March, only 2,000 showed up.)

The NCOBD, made up primarily of veterans of the Black liberation movement and several left groups, recognized the possibilities and necessity for mass movement and brought people out to DC. They too, however, were held back by certain limitations.

First was their narrow focus on the Bakke decision. They made the court decision the beginning and end of the battle and aim everything at influencing the Supreme Court.

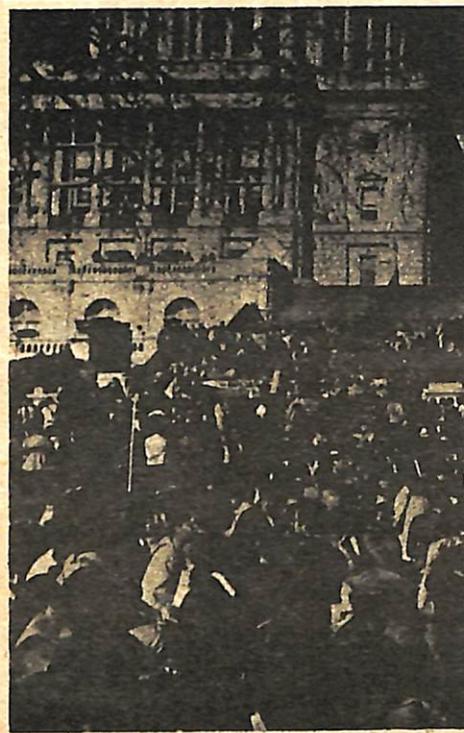
No matter how the Supreme Court decides, the struggle to defend affirmative action will continue. already "reverse discrimination" is being used to dismantle affirmative action programs. In several states (N.J., Louisiana, etc.) recent court rulings have found quotas to be unconstitutional—quotas which right now are the only guarantee that minorities will be able to get into professional programs.

Although Bakke is the *main* attack now coming down on minorities, the NCOBD doesn't link it to the 1001 other attacks, from the attacks on MOVE in Philly to the cuts in Black and Latin Studies departments on college campuses.

The unity against Bakke was weakened by NCOBD's failure to struggle for unity with other anti Bakke forces, particularly the Anti-Bakke Decision Coalition, a smaller group with a strong base among Chicanos (Mexican Americans) and Asian Americans.

All in all, the demonstration was an important step, a turning point in the fight against discrimination and national oppression which showed the possibility of building even broader unity against racist attacks.

The anger and discontent reflected in



Washington on April 15, will continue to spark struggle against particular instances of discrimination, against the whole system of racism and in support of the fight of the people of Southern Africa.