

The Myth Of The NAACP'S 'Call For Deregulation'

The following article, written by Benjamin Hooks, Executive Director of the NAACP, and distributed to hundreds of papers around the country, answers once and for all the critics of the NAACP who have tried to restrict debate on the civil rights organization's energy statement to whether the NAACP has "sold out to the oil companies" by supporting deregulation of oil and gas prices.

In no uncertain terms Hooks states, "The current debate...is centered around one principal aspect of the revolutionary document — regulation. Nowhere in the statement is the word deregulation or regulation used."

Here is that article, reprinted in full.

The NAACP energy policy statement which was adopted on Jan. 19, 1978, by the National Board of Directors, resulted from seven months of intensive research and review. The major thrust of this policy is to protect as well as to foster the creation of jobs for Black Americans in the major urban centers where they now live.

The NAACP feels that the Carter Administration's national energy program overly emphasizes conservation at the expense of directing national goals to the development of new and alternative energy supplies. This thrust, we are convinced, will cost Blacks their jobs by forcing the flight of industry away from the older cities.

The President's emphasis on energy conservation could severely restrict the expansion of the nation's economy, since the rate of economic growth historically has depended on the abundance of energy supplies.

The NAACP believes that a stagnant economy, which would result from the President's energy plan, would have a disproportionate and disastrous effect on Black Americans' employment.

Not Endorse Deregulation

The NAACP also questions the Administration's complex energy, tax and regulatory proposals. While the Statement does not endorse regulation or deregulation, it raises questions about the best approach for meeting the energy crisis.

The NAACP recognizes that government sponsored programs must continue to provide the basis for ending poverty, especially among the traditional victims of racism. Nevertheless, in a country such as America, government alone cannot be expected to provide the final solution. U.S. corporations with their massive resources in finances, capital, technical and professional skills must be encouraged, where they cannot be compelled, to participate in the process of providing equal opportunities for minorities.

This is, and will continue to be, the goal of the NAACP.

The current debate over the NAACP energy policy statement is centered around one principal aspect of the revolutionary document — deregulation. Nowhere in the Statement is the word deregulation or regulation used.

Intent Clouded

Yet the preoccupation with this facet of the several issues involved in a national energy policy has clouded the true intent of the NAACP statement.

This is to direct the attention of our members and the nation to the historical realities of Black progress. Namely, as we saw in the 1960s, the chances for bringing Blacks into the mainstream of the nation's economy are best during periods of healthy economic growth.

At present, despite all the studies and reports showing that Blacks have been living in a Depression state since 1969, despite all the protests, complaints and warnings of dire consequences, the prospects for developing real solutions specifically directed at the Black condition seem very distant.

Consequently, the NAACP recognizes that there are new dimensions to the struggle for equal opportunity. To meet these complex challenges, new outlooks and new strategies must be developed by Black Americans under the NAACP's leadership.

Amsterdam News Sticks Foot In Mouth

Following an attack it published last week on the NAACP's energy proposal, the Feb. 4 issue of New York's Amsterdam News follows the lead of the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times and tries to keep alive the myth that a major controversy is brewing inside the civil rights organization over the energy policy.

In a front-page article titled "NAACP Reverses on Energy," the Amsterdam News erroneously states that "Benjamin Hooks, Executive Director of the NAACP, has now apparently reversed that organization's position on the deregulation of oil and natural gas prices."

This is not the case — as the following excerpts from the Amsterdam News's own article show:

...In an exclusive interview with the *Amsterdam News*, Hooks declared that the organization "never has and never will advocate the deregulation of the price of oil and natural gas."

...While the NAACP has not actually favored deregulation it has favored the end of price controls, and to many experts in the field the semantic argument amounts to the same thing.

...Hooks denied in the telephone interview that he is concerned about the criticism.

"...Most of the criticism has not been directed against the NAACP's actual position but against the way our position has been interpreted in the press...The NAACP never, in its January 9 (energy proposal) paper, used the word deregulation. That word was first used in a *New York Times* headline; and the Times simply misinterpreted our position," Hooks said...

Following their news article, the Amsterdam News reprinted a nationally distributed article by Hooks (see

above) and excerpts from the NAACP's original policy statement, to "prove" by the comparison that Hooks has indeed reversed the organization's policy. We here reprint the Amsterdam News's comparison "highlights" and likewise ask our readers to "compare them for yourself."

Hooks said: "The NAACP also questions the Administration's complex energy, tax and regulatory proposals. While the Statement does not endorse regulation or deregulation, it raises questions about the best approach for meeting the energy crisis."

The NAACP document said:

"While we endorse the (Carter National Energy) Plan's objectives of eliminating energy waste and to improve utilization efficiency, we cannot accept the notion that our people are best served by a policy based upon the inevitability of energy shortage and the need for government to allocate an ever diminishing supply among competing interests. Those aspects of the plan which would perpetuate price controls on newly discovered oil and natural gas and extend those controls to new areas appear to us to be incompatible with the need for new supply development. We also believe that many of the prohibitions proposed with respect to the industrial use of oil and natural gas will force the closing of many job-producing industries in urban areas and cause a massive shift of industries away from areas where most Black people live and work."

Afro-American:

NAACP Makes Carter Look Good

Jumping on the bandwagon of black press criticism of the NAACP, the national edition of the Afro-American, published in Baltimore, Maryland, uses the "Washington Viewpoint" column by Samuel Yette to falsely report that the NAACP statement asks Congress to "remove all price ceilings on oil and gas."

The criticism hinges on an unfavorable comparison between the NAACP's position to portions of President Carter's State of the Union address. Here, excerpts from that column, which was titled "Carter's Budget Bad, NAACP Worse":

...What Carter is proposing of course is the same trickle-down system of economic distributions that have for centuries made the rich richer and the poor poorer. In other words, give the money to big business and in time some of it will trickle down to the little guys. By now it should not be astounding that Carter, like virtually all Presidents before him, would make such proposals.

What is truly astounding and would seem dangerous is that the NAACP has taken the same direction.

Even while offering our lives and fortunes to the big oil companies, Carter has at least couched most of the offerings in language that made it appear that he was trying to hold down the windfall profits and the windfall prices...

But three weeks ago the NAACP opposed even that restraint. They proposed that Congress remove all price ceilings that now prevent big gas and oil companies from pricing the general public into slavery.

So bad was the NAACP pro-oil position that even Carter's jabs at a press conference a few days later (after the State of the Union address — ed.) made Carter look good and the NAACP look comparatively foolish, if not venal.

Detroit Trade Unionists Use 'Deregulation' Line to Attack NAACP

On Jan. 31, NSIPS contacted Horace Sheffield, a leader of the Detroit, Michigan branch of the National Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, for a statement on the NAACP's energy policy statement.

"Margaret Bush Wilson (the chairman of the NAACP Board of Directors — ed.) is a dear friend, but the deregulation call has put the NAACP in unchartered waters..."

Mr. Sheffield then read the letter which William Lucey, the head of the coalition and the national secretary treasurer of AFSCME, sent to Wilson on Jan. 17.

"The Coalition of Black Trade Unions is totally opposed to deregulation, and to an alliance of big government, big minorities, and big oil. Our interests are contradictory, incompatible, incongruous, and unlikely."