JESSE JACKSON: OPERATION PUSH:

Balance of Trade is the Aim

Operation PUSH is now in its second decade, and continues to flourish. The founder, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, talks to Dawn Magazine about the newest thrust and future plans.

By Bob Matthews

(Part one)

Dawn Magazine visited Operation PUSH headquarters in Chicago, to do an in-depth interview with the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who posed for our cover photo wearing a red ribbon.

This was the starting point, as we examine, through the eyes and ears of the founder, the thrust of Operation PUSH today.

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Dawn: You have been involved in the Haitian refugees situation, is the red ribbon you wear a part of it.

Rev. Jackson: Just as the green ribbon was being worn when the children were being killed in Atlanta, and the yellow ribbons were worn when the Iranian hostages were being held, the red ribbon is being worn.

The red symbolizes the blood they shed, it also serves to awaken our people because the basic white media have shown a blatant disinterest in the plight of the Haitians.

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Dawn: This issue of Dawn will appear on the streets around the second week of June. What will Jesse Jackson and Operation PUSH be into at that time?

Rev. Jackson: You can count on us being in the forefront of the PUSH for Economic Justice movement, making corporate America accountable, building this international trade bureau wherein blacks do business with each other.

I suppose if I had to reduce what I'm doing to a simple statement, I am convinced that there must be a new formula of black development. Everything is reduced to a formula. How did Europe redevelop after World War II: aid, plus trade, plus time.



A & T student Jesse Jackson, 1963 president of the student government, poses with Miss A & T of the year, Peggy Martin.



Conference between the Rev. Jesse Jackson (R) and Romeo Horton concerns Operation PUSH for economic justice. Foreign trade is the focus.

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Dawn: As far as blacks are concerned internationally, Nigeria and several other African countries have said there is an opportunity for trade and development with American black business. Is your international arm considering these possibilities and trying to establish trade with African countries.

Rev. Jackson: Indeed. The president of our international trade operation is an African whose mother was born in Georgia and father born in the Caribbean. He was born in Liberia. His name is Romeo Horton.

Romeo went to Morehouse with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Lerone Bennett, Bob Johnson and that generation. He then went back to Liberia and formed for President Tubman, the Commerce Department of the Republic of Liberia.

He then began to negotiate international contracts between Africans and corporations here for raw materials of Africa. After the coup in Liberia — fortunately he was not killed — he became available, but without a green card, he was just another black.

PUSH fought to get Romeo his green card, to get him stabilized. He expressed his loyalty and thanks by using his considerable energy to form the Operation PUSH trade group.

So, there is a trade bureau. I am the chairman, and there is a distinguished board, a president, and it is a bona-fide for-profit business and it is running just like a business.

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Dawn: How is this international PUSH relating to the other countries. We don't hear much feedback from trade relationship with American companies, especially blacks.

Rev. Jackson: Trade, first must be seen as important. We've got a generation of blacks coming out of the best schools who think trade is unimportant. They come out looking for jobs. This is why blacks cannot advocate jobs and justice.

This is as though jobs are the ultimate. We must advocate justice, jobs are by-products. We must advocate better foreign trade, indeed our goal must be trade surplus. Once we have trade consciousness, then we trade with each other, then we demand the folks we trade with, trade with us.

If we learn to trade with each other and demand the people we trade with, trade with us, we then have enough strength to trade with Africa and the Arabs and whomever else.

In relationship to the African and Arab worlds, there is more trading to be done in the port of Baltimore, than the port of Ghana; there is more trading to be done at the port of Chicago or New York, or Houston, than the Persian Gulf.

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Dawn: All right, but what do we have to offer as a trade. Trade, of course, means exchange.

Rev. Jackson: We have a $150 billion consumer market considered by some as the ninth largest market, if combined, in the world. We have consumer power. We have strategic position in America 68 percent in the top 50 consumer markets.

We are 35 percent of America's ground military forces. Our median education is higher than anybody's in the developing world. More blacks have more money than any nation in the developing world. So we have money, we have market, we have ideas, we have strategic position.

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Dawn: All right, but do we have

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product?

Rev. Jackson: Yes. We have lawyers, we have CPA's, we have contractors, we have researchers, we have media, we have banks, we have insurance companies, scientists, chemists.

We are a very scientific people. After all, the head of Argonne Laboratories is a black man, Dr. Massey, largest scientific community in America. The head of the Academy of Sciences out of Washington, DC is a black man, so — we have know how.

Dawn: The latest thrust of your organization is the PUSH for Economic Justice program. One of the key elements in the program is the enlisting of 100,000 supporters, which will give the Operation the clout to resist, wherever necessary to gain a trade balance in the corporate world.

Operation PUSH has started a boycott of Coca-Cola in Philadelphia, and we notice that there is a similar movement in Chicago. Is this a part of the resist you refer to.

Rev. Jackson: We don't boycott, we withdraw enthusiasm. When companies will not trade with us, they kill our enthusiasm to trade with them. The reason I use that language is they've got libraries and libraries on how to stop boycotts — illegal this, and illegal that. They can't say anything illegal about withdrawing enthusiasm.

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Dawn: Has this withdrawal of enthusiasm proliferated to any extent. What other places are there being contemplated in the near future.

Rev. Jackson: Well, Coke for example, has 550 independent bottlers and some bottlers have more economic sanity than others. Case in point: the guy in Baltimore, Washington, Richmond and Norfolk is a very sensitive person. He has taken an aggressive posture, moving toward a trade balance, and really he becomes an example of what is instructive.

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Dawn: Are you using him as an example.

Rev. Jackson: He ought to be used as an example, because for the first time, black papers are getting an ad schedule for Coke. For the first time, all black colleges got a scholarship program. For the first time, he has made black plant managers.

His situation ought to be an example to the others. The reason why corporate America should see this as a therapy, not as a threat is their restraint of trade practices on black America has hurt them.

By locking out our money and our ideas, they're locking our productivity and this is nonsense, like a lockout of Jackie Robinson — athletic trade, or a Marian Anderson — artistic trade.

It is even more nonsense to lockout black money, black ideas and black productivity.

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Dawn: Can you relate this to current happenings. How does this affect a company such as Heublein, for example.

Rev. Jackson: What this does at Heublein is expand their market and develop ours. The so-called "great society" failed although they put out lots of aid, but minus trade, which equals colonialism.

We've got the aid, but the white suppliers got the trade, so it made white America bigger and black America just had a meal while they got the millions.

Enterprise zones will fail, because that's less aid, minus trade. Any form of a minus trade is a colonial formula, because it is one-way trade.

Dawn: Stop right there, and let's talk about enterprise zones.

(To be continued)

