

## Metro Atlanta DSA – Minutes: April 28, 2007

The meeting was called to order at the Friends Meeting House in Decatur, with introductions; 33 in attendance.

Milt opened with an announcement about the U.S. Social Forum needing volunteers and recognized a group of Agnes Scott students in attendance. After introductions, Kempton Haynes moderated the panel. Following are some notes that I hope will give some sense of what was covered in the presentations and discussion (but you had to have been there):

**Bill Bolling** founded the Atlanta Community Food Bank 28 years ago after working as a community minister at St. Luke's Episcopal Church following service with the armed forces in Vietnam, graduate work in psychology, and living in a Sufi community in Midtown that served food to homeless people. He helped start a community kitchen and other services for the homeless at St. Luke's in the 1970's. He found that there was a lot of surplus food available and that food helps bring people together. Now, the Food Bank serves 800 communities throughout North Georgia. Most are congregations. Its primary mission is to engage, power and educate the community to fight hunger. They've also helped build about 150 community gardens and run a culinary training program. Demand went up 200% after "welfare reform" started in 1996. Most people they feed have jobs but still can't feed themselves or their families. They also lack health insurance and many other basics. The solution is not just to feed people but to change the system. There's a surplus of school supplies, clothing – plenty of everything that doesn't reach people who need it. He works with all religious groups, including the 36-mosque Atlanta Muslim community and the Jewish community.

**Ed Loring** of the Open Door Community said the ethics of the New Testament are closer to the economics of socialism than other systems. He recalled the positive role of Christianity in the '60's with MLK and the Christian socialist movement, supporting the power of faith to pursue justice. He quoted a German theologian and socialist (I didn't catch the name) saying that socialism is the system that finds means to distribute resources equitably. He mentioned foot washing as a practice at the open door and his belief that as a white southerner he has a responsibility to help bring about racial reconciliation. He cited Moses, Miriam, and the Hebrews' experience of slavery. In that respect, "We're all Jews." "The root of poverty and injustice is wealth," in the Mosaic tradition (not the Davidic tradition, which relates to the Temple and hierarchy). Jesus began his walk to Galilee when John the Baptist went to prison. Constantine and Augustine started the lies that Christians can practice infant baptism and violence and get rich. He recommended Gary Wills' book "What Jesus Meant" and Cornell West's "Democracy Matters" and the example of Dorothy Day, whose Catholic Workers movement is an inspiration for the Open Door. We need to look to the people who are marginalized. Socialism is about human good, not profit.

**Murphy Davis** of the Open Door Community said we on the left have to find common ground. This is especially crucial today. We need a disciplined, united progressive movement. E. B. White in his essay "The Town Dump" said if you want to understand a town, stop by the dump and see what people throw away. The Bible talks about people

who are thrown away. This society throws a lot away. We need to push ourselves to learn about people on the margins and their history. Her faith is expressed in Matthew 25 when Jesus made his last teaching to his followers before the crucifixion, saying the people welcomed to the beloved community at the judgement will be those who had welcomed others and lived in the beloved community already. This is an example of the political analysis in scripture, where Jesus said to look to people at the bottom of society if you want to understand what's going on – go to Grady, homeless shelters, Crestview Nursing Home, prisons and courts (including the truly “guilty poor”). That's where you'll understand the biases and injustices in our society and what people in this state and city really value, especially in the prison system. Jesus said to visit the prisons and set people free. She recommended the Jewish and Christian scriptures for their political teachings.

**Leonard Tate**, recently retired from Trinity Community Ministries after 15 years, said he is blessed to be a black man in America. He grew up in a small town then moved to Cleveland, where he was attracted to the poor side of his neighborhood and ended up in reform school, then served with the Marines in Vietnam, and joined the Cleveland Police force before going to college in the '60's. He joined the Black Panthers and worked in a job placement program. Following those experiences and reading Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn etc. he figured out that we suffer from runaway monopoly capitalism and imperialism. Now we have to get together to do something about the current situation (which he denounced very effectively). He said the homeless men he worked with at Trinity were just like other people he knew except for their addiction. Now, HUD has put up barriers for admitting people to the program. Due to time constraints, his message for action was delayed till the discussion period.

Discussion covered divisions on the left, the disconnect between the left and the poor, divisions between secular and religious people, etc. Rev. Tate said we need to organize “at the point of injustice” and build coalitions and alliances. Even disability groups are divided. There needs to be a scientific approach to how progressive organizations can come together. Otherwise they'll put in a Democrat who is not really liberal but will hold things down without letting the pendulum swing to the left or even to the center, so that after four or eight years their rightwing regime will come back and make it even worse than before. There has to be a collective unity of diverse groups. Asked what moral issues the left can use (as the right did to win recent elections), Murphy said there's a broad spectrum of issues and we aren't as willing to be focused on our issues the way the right is on abortion and gay rights. They've also kept a clear focus on the judiciary, not just elections. That's literally where the black community is being killed. Healthcare might be a coalescing agenda for the left. In 1999 Grady voted to charge people fees even if they had no income, so the Open Door helped form a huge and diverse coalition that demonstrated in the streets. It's not just an issue of the poor. Bill Bolling mentioned the environmental issues and how they effect our food etc.

