

LISTENING IN/George Vukelich

The Real Issues

Eugene Parks is the newly confirmed affirmative action officer for the city of Madison. Born here in 1947, he was educated at La Follette High School and the UW-Madison. He served three consecutive terms on the Madison Common Council as a representative of the 5th District, and was the primary sponsor of Madison's affirmative action ordinance, which has become a model for cities around the country. From October 1979 to this year, he was administrative assistant to the Madison fire chief. Parks is married to Marilyn; they have four children.

"When I served on the Common Council and members talked about the issues of defense spending and foreign policy, all I heard was: 'That's wasting the council's time.'

"Well, I'm sure that I'll hear the same thing—maybe from the same people—when I say that the issues of war and peace are issues we confront daily in the affirmative action office.

"We confront issues of employment, and war and peace have a profound effect on employment all over the world—and racism and sexism are tools in that war.

"It shouldn't surprise anybody that the president of this country is against affirmative action. His election was the result of a coalition of interest groups intent on taking something away from other interest groups. What people failed to understand was that while they were promoting policies that might dis-

enfranchise blacks, they were also promoting policies that would break up their unions or take them off their farms.

"Affirmative action means affirmative action for *everyone*. When affirmative action brings about equal employment opportunities for blacks, women and the handicapped, it has to bring about equal employment opportunity for white males also.

"What the people who have supported the president and his militaristic, sexist and racist policies don't realize is that those policies are working against *all* of us, not just some of us.

"Of course, Reagan didn't do all this by himself. He is simply the epitome of a policy that's designed to oppress and repress people around the world. That policy is financed by an expenditure of funds that's just killing our communities in this country. And the Republicans haven't done this alone. The Democrats aided and abetted this political effort that, over the last 10 years, has attempted to eliminate affirmative action.

"Yes, there's an attempt to turn the clock back. Can the clock be turned back? Absolutely not. And let me say that the policies we have in place today aren't just anti-black. They're *anti-human*.

"As we put people out of jobs because of their color or their sex, as we throw people off farms, as we take their hard-earned money and build more bombs with it, what we are really doing is creating violence in our communities



BRENT NICASTRO

Eugene Parks

and in our world. And we will *all* suffer the consequences.

"The policies that are now in place are not good for anybody but the wealthy—but when the bombs fall, the bombs won't discriminate on the basis of sex or race or wealth.

"We live in an era in which far too many politicians are gutless, ambitious creatures who mold their political stances to what they perceive to be the most acceptable political viewpoint. They are

consumed with winning. They are prostitutes. And this is true of both Republicans and Democrats.

"When Congress supported aid to the contras, it demonstrated that it is not responsive to the will of the American people. All the polls show that the people *opposed* aid to the contras by two to one.

"What the Reagan administration clearly shows us is that the struggle never ceases. We thought that we had made some gains. We thought that these gains were fairly permanent. We see now how fragile all those gains were.

"We simply have to organize and stay organized to challenge the policies that the politicians bring us. We have to challenge the notions of the traditional political parties.

"I absolutely believe in the ability of the American people to understand what they have done and what is being done to them. That's why I also believe that both of our traditional political parties are in great danger, because both of them are failing to respond to the needs of our people and our world today.

"We live in a very desperate time, but I think there's a lot of hope here, too. I think the farmers have learned. I think some labor union leaders have learned—certainly their members have learned—that our country is hurting. Most of our people are hurting.

"In every city agency in every city in America, we're looking at the issue of war and peace. It comes right down to that. That's heavy duty." ■