

What's at stake, in the battle to save the nation's capital

by Anton Chaitkin

This speech was given by EIR history editor Anton Chaitkin to community hearings on "The D.C. Reform Plan: Blueprint for Nazi Economics," organized by the Schiller Institute, in Washington, D.C. on Aug. 27. Chaitkin is the author of the book Treason in America, and the co-author of George Bush: The Unauthorized Biography.

What is the Control Board? We have to know what it is. What is it for? It is for imposing what we call *austerity*: That means, further cutbacks in the living standards, in the services, in the incomes of the population of the city. That is the *purpose* of the Control Board. Now, the way they get away with this, is they say that the city is *spending too much*. Sometimes they don't say that directly; they say that it is *mismanaging* the money that it has. There are a lot of stories in the newspapers, particularly Katherine Graham's newspaper [the *Washington Post*]. This is an old line, as I'll tell you in a minute. But the city and the nation are spending *far too little*, and that's a scientific fact that can easily be determined. There's a terrible and terrifying underinvestment, as we know, in our infrastructure, in our society.

There was a change that was imposed by the people who put this Control Board into action. Who is the Control Board backed up by? It is the London financial boards, and their junior partners on Wall Street. That's who is designing that policy. They put through a change in the 1960s, after the murder of John Kennedy and Martin Luther King. The change was to stop the forward motion of our society in industry, in science, in technology, and the progress of the population's living standards. They took down the industry of the United States. They converted the whole economy, in the 1970s and '80s, to drug-money laundering, pornography, entertainment, and speculation. They closed steel mills. They closed nuclear plants. They stopped the space program. They closed down factories of all kinds. And they taught the children — many of you — that these things were not even good to have, that if you had somebody working for \$20 an hour in a steel mill, that was a bad thing, it hurt the environment. They said, just lower people's living standards; there's a New Age coming in, a post-industrial society.

They started demanding austerity in the cities. Before they did it here in Washington, you had it in New York City. They

set up a Financial Control Board there, because they claimed the city was bankrupt, and they had to "save" it. They did the same thing that they're going to try to do here. It was called Big MAC. The result of that was that *they devastated the city*. The Control Board devastated the city, *ruined* the city, lowered all the services, further bankrupted the city.

In the 1970s, after 100 years of no voting in Washington, the civil rights movement got us home rule, or a certain type of voting rights in the city of Washington. Mayor Barry was around then, and he got people some jobs, many jobs in the government, and so forth. There was a certain benefit there. *But the whole country's economy was being devastated by this*

How Washington was built

In New Federalist newspaper of April 3, 1995, Anton Chaitkin elaborated on the real history of the nation's capital. We summarize a few highlights here:

The permanent seat of the federal government was fixed on the Potomac River by an act of Congress passed July 16, 1790. A "territorial" form of government was organized for the District of Columbia on Feb. 21, 1871, combining the governments of the City of Washington, Georgetown, and Washington County.

President Ulysses Grant appointed as governor Henry D. Cooke, the brother and partner of the nationalist railroad builder and banker Jay Cooke. Jay Cooke's bank had defied the London and Wall Street financiers and had raised money from ordinary citizens for the Union cause during the Civil War. Cooke's close ally, developer Alexander R. Shepherd, was the executive officer of the board of public works.

Grant appointed to the "upper house" Frederick Douglass and two other African-Americans, representing the tens of thousands of African-Americans who by then lived in the capital. Douglass had moved to Washington in 1870,

financial and economic change to the post-industrial society. Most of you never even saw a productive economy. Disintegration and drugs and prostitution and pornography and entertainment, is the only economy most people know.

Now this policy, of budget cutbacks, lower living standards, is being implemented all over the world. You must understand this: *This is a worldwide policy.* It is imposed by the International Monetary Fund, by the banking and financial lords that we're talking about. It is imposed on each country: They say you have to close government services altogether. That is called "privatization." Turn over your gold and diamond mines, and all of your assets, to foreign speculators. And shut down factories and schools and don't spend money. They do that in Russia now, in eastern Europe, all over Africa, South America. China's resisting it, because they've got power to resist.

What's the result? Look for this here, if we don't turn this around. Not just the standard of living is going down, but the longevity. People in Uganda are now living ten years shorter lives, on average, than they were a few years ago. The result of this would be a new Dark Age on this planet, if it weren't for the fact that the entire world economy, the financial system, is about to *blow up* because of the way they have mismanaged this world.

They talk about Mayor Barry mismanaging Washington, D.C. The people who put this Control Board in here, have *mismanaged the world*, and we've got to take it away from them. We've got to take the power over decision-making on world policy away from them.

That's the global setting.

Now, we had the right to vote in Washington, and a home rule situation, in a crucial moment of the city's history. Very little is known about it. And it was won by the United States Army defeating the Confederacy in the Civil War. Frederick Douglass—and I have here an article about the political history of the city, featuring Frederick Douglass's role [see box]—was the leader of the government of Washington, D.C. for three years: 1871, '72, and '73. Why is that important? Because, number one, they had partial home rule. And number two, they *built the city*. There was no Washington, D.C., as you know it, before that. It was a pest-hole. There were no paved streets, there were no sewers, people died of diseases all over the place. And in the space of three years, under the Presidency of Grant, Frederick Douglass, in the upper house of the city legislature, together with his employee, a guy named "Boss" Shepherd, Alexander R. Shepherd, working for Douglass, and Jay Cooke's brother Henry—they planted 50,000 trees; they paved hundreds of miles of roads; they built

and his newspaper, the *New National Era*, spoke eloquently for nationalism and civil rights, attacking British free-trade dogmas.

In the short time-span of its existence, Cooke, Douglass, and their allies changed Washington from a pigsty into a modern city, despite the frantic opposition of the British and the former Confederates.

The board of public works paved 150 miles of streets and laid down sidewalks. Gullies were filled in, swamps drained, and hills levelled. Gas pipes, water mains, and a massive sewer system were installed below, and gas lights above the streets. Some 50,000 trees were planted. There was a five-member board of health; John Mercer Langston, head of Howard Law School, was the health board's only African-American member and its legal adviser. The board of health started Washington's first street cleaning and garbage disposal program. It inaugurated a system of vacuum pumping and sanitary disposal from outhouses, and banned animals from wandering the streets.

In his 1873 Annual Message, the President praised the success of the D.C. government:

"Under the very efficient management of the governor and the board of public works of this District, the city of Washington is rapidly assuming the appearance of a capital of which the nation may well be proud. From being a most unsightly place three years ago, disagreeable to pass

through in summer in consequence of the dust arising from the unpaved streets, and almost impassable in the winter from the mud, it is now one of the most sightly cities in the country, and can boast of being the best paved.

"The work has been done systematically, the plans, grades, location of sewers, water and gas mains being determined upon before the work was commenced, thus securing permanency when completed. I question whether so much has ever been accomplished before in any American city for the same expenditures. The Government having large reservations in the city, and the nation at large having an interest in their capital, I recommend a liberal policy toward the District of Columbia, and that the Government should bear its just share of the expense of these improvements. Every citizen visiting the capital feels a pride in its growing beauty, and that he too is part owner in the investments made here."

He concluded, "I suggest for your consideration the enactment of a law to better secure the civil rights which freedom should secure, but has not effectively secured, to the enfranchised slave."

Within months, an attack was mounted in Congress against the D.C. government, which was accused of overspending and corruption. The government was finally abolished by an act of Congress of June 20, 1874, and voting by D.C. citizens was forbidden for nearly a century.