

# Black History and the Class Struggle

No. 18



Stewart/Bethel

## WE WANT FREEDOM

### A Life in the Black Panther Party

Review of a Book by Mumia Abu-Jamal

Page 24



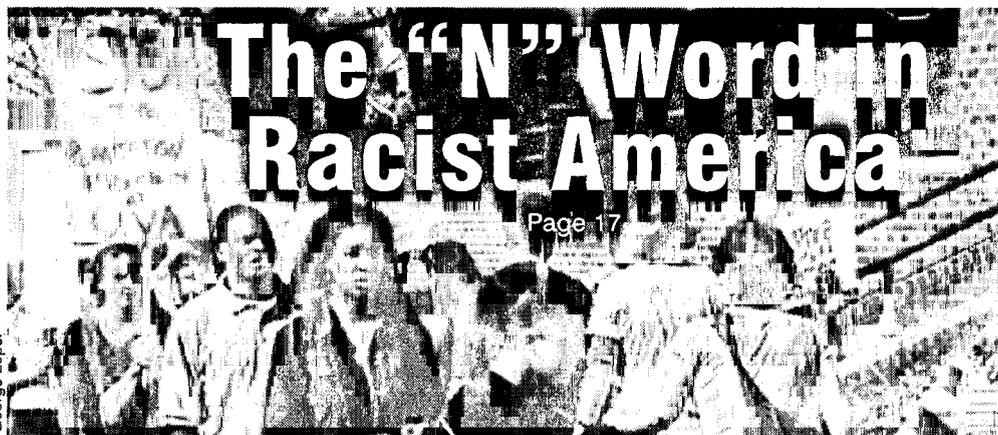
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## How the Liberals and Reformists Derailed the Struggle for Integration

# For Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

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Workers protest manager's use of "N" word and fight for union recognition, demanding: "Stop the Plantation Mentality," University of Virginia at Charlottesville, 21 November 2003.



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George Loper



# Introduction

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a fighter for the oppressed whose words teach powerful lessons and rouse opposition to the injustices of American capitalism. That's why the government seeks to silence him forever with the barbaric death penalty—a legacy of slavery—or entombment for life for a crime he did not commit. The frame-up of Mumia Abu-Jamal represents the government's fear of the possibility of militant struggle against a system that has stripped black youth of a future in this society, condemned them to prison in unprecedented numbers in the racist "war on drugs," or recruited them to the imperialist armed forces carrying out a bloody colonial occupation of Iraq. Our review of Mumia Abu-Jamal's book *We Want Free-*

*dom* chronicles Mumia's political development and years with the Black Panther Party, as well as the Spartacist League's active role in vying to win the best elements of that generation from black nationalism to revolutionary Marxism.

One indication of the rollback of black rights and the absence of militant black leadership is the ubiquitous use of the "N" word today. In this country, the "N" word has historically been a *program of racist violence*. The fact that "gangsta" rappers and black intellectuals use it today doesn't change the truth that the word symbolizes the dehumanization of black people in this country, which has its origins in chattel slavery. Black oppression is the bedrock of American capitalism, and as Marxists we oppose any concession to the pervasive racist ideology, which is an obstacle to the conscious mobilization of labor and the oppressed in their own interests.

"How the Liberals and Reformists Derailed the Struggle for Integration," a speech by Spartacist cadre Don Alexander, examines the reasons why there is an all-sided attack on black rights today, and motivates our fight to link the segregated and ghettoized black masses to the power of a labor movement in struggle against the whole system of class exploitation and the racist oppression which helps prop it up. This must be a struggle on behalf of all the oppressed, as explained by Karen

Cole's article on racism and anti-woman bigotry, "For Free Abortion on Demand!" It was Democrat Clinton who put an "end to welfare as we know it."

Nearly 150 years since the Civil War crushed the slave system and won the franchise for black people, a whopping 13 percent of black men were barred from voting in the 2004 presidential election because of felony convictions (mainly through the racist "war on drugs"). But as our article, "Black Disenfranchisement and American 'Democracy'" spells out, the Democratic Party is no alternative to George Bush and the Republicans. The Democrats supported the Iraq war and campaigned for a more effective "war on terror," which, since the September 11 attacks, has particularly targeted immigrants. The centrality of the fight for black freedom in relation to immigrant rights is explained in the 1999 article, "Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants! Down With Capitalist Rulers' War Against Blacks, Immigrants!" In the post-September 11 climate, the perspective of mobilizing the labor movement and black people in defense of immigrants is an urgent focus of work for the Spartacist League and Labor Black Leagues, and central to our task of forging a revolutionary workers party. The previous issue of *Black History and the Class Struggle* (No. 17) was devoted to this subject, and we urge readers to order a copy. ■

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From Death Row,  
This Is Mumia Abu-Jamal

## In the Shadows of Abu Ghraib Prison

The color photos coming out of the dreaded Abu Ghraib prison on Baghdad's outskirts are racing around the world, silent yet eloquent testament to what Americans really think about the people they allegedly came here to "liberate."

The photos, especially in the age of the internet, are racing through the Arab and Muslim world, and showing a side of the American character that seldom gets to be seen, especially abroad.

The photos of naked Arab men, some posed with laughing, jeering US

women, is the height of humiliation, and tells everyone who can see, that Americans hold the Iraqis, and by extension, other Arabs, in utter contempt.

"This is not America," a politician huffs.

"I am appalled!" yet another exclaims.

Yet, what is truly appalling, and perhaps more chilling than the naked, human pyramids shown, is the sheer glee shown in the faces of the Americans.

The photos flashed in British tab-

*continued on page 5*

reprinted from *Workers Vanguard* No. 833, 1 October 2004



1965: In Selma, Alabama state troopers attack black civil rights demonstrators marching against racist voter registration procedures. 2000: Protesters against racist intimidation of black voters in Florida.

# Black Disenfranchisement and American “Democracy”

In the 2000 elections, Florida made headlines across the globe as its electoral machinery worked to spit out a result favorable to George W. Bush—an outcome subsequently assured by the blatantly partisan intervention of the U.S. Supreme Court, whose chief justice, William Rehnquist, launched his career 40 years ago by purging blacks from Arizona’s voter rolls. While confusing ballots that led many old Jewish women to vote for sinister rightist Patrick Buchanan dominated the news, black people were the target of a concerted effort to rob them of their right to vote. Police roadblocks barred the ways to polling places, and many black people who managed to get through found themselves barred from voting even if they carried a voter registration card.

Nearly 140,000 black men in Florida were denied suffrage in the last presidential election due to felony convictions, many of them resulting from the racist, bipartisan “war on drugs.” In Jacksonville, an astounding 9 percent of ballots cast were invalidated, over a third of them cast by black people. Meanwhile, over in Missouri, the corpse of Democrat Mel Carnahan beat the still breathing John Ashcroft, now Bush’s Attorney

General, for a seat in the U.S. Senate in a stinging repudiation of Ashcroft’s fanatical conservatism—and with a heavy turnout of black voters.

Florida was not alone. In many black precincts in Chicago, as many as one in six ballots were tossed out. The Republicans have forgotten none of this and are hatching new plans to prevent black people, who overwhelmingly vote Democrat, from voting. A Republican state legislator in the bitterly contested state of Michigan, John Pappageorge, has stated bluntly, “If we do not suppress the Detroit vote [in a city that is over 80 percent black], we’re going to have a tough time in this election” (*New York Times*, 13 September). Florida election officials drafted a list of those disqualified due to past felony convictions; of some 48,000 felons, roughly 22,000 were blacks. Strikingly, the list included only 61 Hispanics, who in southern Florida are largely anti-Castro *gusano* reactionaries, a key Republican constituency.

These are nothing less than a frontal attack on the basic democratic right of blacks to vote. While there is not a candidate in this election who represents the interests of workers, black people and

other oppressed minorities, we are intransigent defenders of the hard-won right to vote. The bloody Civil War that smashed chattel slavery won black men the right of the franchise, which was then largely stripped from them in the South during the Jim Crow era. Black people in the South regained voting rights through the courageous struggles of the civil rights movement—struggles that faced brutal police repression and KKK nightriding terror. Civil rights activists Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner and James Chaney, whose bodies were dredged from a muddy dam in Neshoba County, Mississippi in 1964, were among those lynched for fighting for black people’s right to the franchise.

In a throwback to that era, Florida’s Department of Law Enforcement has sent armed state troopers into elderly black voters’ homes on an “investigation” of voter fraud—despite the department having decided in May that the charges were baseless! The president of the Florida Voters League (a group that works to increase black electoral turnout), Eugene Poole, stated:

“These guys are using these intimidating methods to try and get these folks to stay

**Finish the Civil War!  
For Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!**

away from the polls in the future. And you know what? It's working. One woman said, 'My God, they're going to put us in jail for nothing.' I said, 'That's not true'."

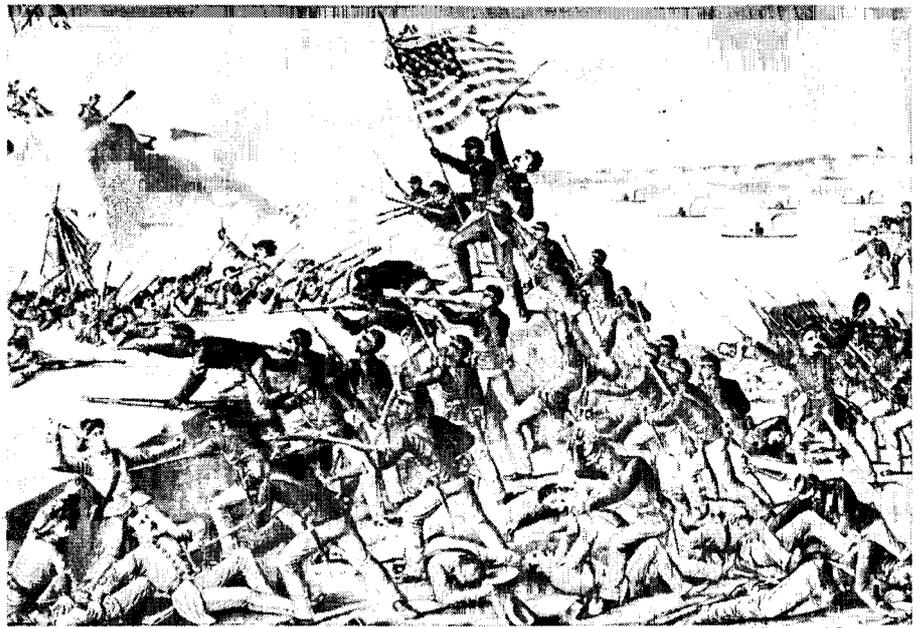
—*New York Times*, 20 August

"Not true"? In 1985, longtime Alabama civil rights activist Spiver Gordon was convicted of "voter fraud" for the "crime" of assisting elderly black people to file absentee ballots, which allowed blacks to vote without fear or intimidation in the privacy of their own homes. The prosecution and conviction of Gordon were part of a concerted campaign by the Reagan administration to disenfranchise black voters, particularly in the South.

Today, a national law, ironically named the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA), has significantly tightened ID requirements for those newly registering and voters across the country, making it easier to turn voters away. In a test run of these requirements in Chicago, 95 percent of the provisional ballots cast by those whose "identity" was in question were invalidated. In an amusing twist, Senator Kit Bond of Missouri, who pushed through the HAVA, found himself struck from the rolls in his hometown and had to go through a tedious rigmarole to vote for himself. The Spartacist League stands opposed to any and all restrictions on the rights of citizens to vote and for the right of all immigrants (documented or not) to full citizenship rights—including the right of franchise.

Many states are moving toward electronic balloting. The companies that provide these machines have close links to the Republican Party: Election Systems and Software (its predecessor company was headed by current Republican Senator Chuck Hagel), Sequoia Voting Systems (whose products were rejected as insecure against fraud in the 1990s by New York City), Hart InterCivic (one of whose main investors was an early financial backer of Bush's business schemes) and Diebold Election Systems (also linked to the GOP). These systems eliminate any paper trail and, as the *Nation* (16 August) put it, could be used "to invisibly falsify the outcomes" of elections. With a little finagling with the software, these "innovations" could render old methods of stealing an election, like leaving dead people on the rolls and stuffing ballots, superfluous. And there would be no gravestones to check.

Stealing elections is nothing new, and it's hardly limited to the Republicans. In fact, one could say that this old American "art" was perfected by Democratic Party machines in cities like New York (Tammany Hall) and Chicago (the Daley machine—"vote early, vote often").



Library of Congress

**Fort Wagner, July 1863: Heroic conduct by black Massachusetts 54th regiment galvanized support for black troops in Civil War that smashed slavery and won franchise for black men.**

Beyond dicey electronic voting systems and police intimidation, though, and far more instrumental in the purge of black people from the rolls, is the racist "war on drugs." We have long declared that this "war" is a war against black people. Over *two million* people are in state and federal prisons, largely on drug charges. This attack focuses on black people, whether through cop rampages through the ghettos of the inner cities or through the depredations of regional narcotics task forces, like the one in rural Texas that framed up 46 people in 1999 (see "Tulia Victims Freed, Finally," *WV* No. 813, 7 November 2003). While the white population in prison for drug offenses increased by 306 percent between 1985 and 1995, the number of black people incarcerated for the same period shot up by *707 percent* under mandatory sentencing schemes supported by both Republicans and Democrats—including John Kerry. We are for the decriminalization of drugs.

The war on drugs has a direct effect on who votes and who doesn't. Five states permanently ban felons and ex-felons from voting (including Florida), while only two states allow prisoners to vote (Maine and Vermont—both of which have tiny black populations), and the rest have policies that to one degree or another fall between these two poles. The result is clear. Felony convictions bar 4.6 million Americans from voting (some 2.3 percent of the electorate), of whom over a third are black men. Indeed, *13 percent* of black men are currently barred from voting, and many more felons who could

vote believe they cannot.

All of this emphasizes the tenuousness of basic democratic rights in capitalist America—especially for black people. The Republicans know that they are not going to get the black vote; they are a party of plutocrats, racist bigots and bible-thumping yahoos and make no bones about it. But what of the Democrats, the party that stands to lose from the purge of black voters? At first blush, one would think that they would vigorously defend black voting rights, if only for the obvious electoral advantage.

But no. Even after their betrayal of the black masses following Reconstruction, the Republicans, guaranteed the black vote given that the Democrats were the party of choice for the KKK, were quite willing to let the Democrats terrorize and disenfranchise the black populace—which generally voted Republican until the era of the New Deal, an alliance between Northern liberals and Southern Dixiecrats that did nothing to enfranchise the majority of black people, most of whom then lived in the Jim Crow South. In the aftermath of the civil rights legislation of the 1960s, and with the Republicans' strategic drive to become identified as the party of right-wing reaction, the Democrats have been guaranteed the lion's share of the black vote.

Democrats have been at most tepid in their defense of the franchise for black people. According to the *New York Times* (26 September), there has been a big increase in the registration of new voters, mainly black and minority, in swing

# Abu Ghraib...

(continued from page 2)

roids, of soldiers urinating—pissing!—on naked Iraqis, tells the same baleful tale.

These are the actions of contempt, hatred, disrespect—and conquest.

Are the Americans and the British liberators or occupiers?

One need look no further than the faces in the photos of Abu Ghraib for the answer.

When speaking recently with Emory Douglas, the celebrated former Minister of Culture of the Black Panther Party, and chief graphic artist of its famed newspaper, *The Black Panther*, Emory brought to mind an image that is almost lost in history.

He reminded me of a police raid on the West Philadelphia offices of the Black Panther Party, on August 31, 1970, when the police, armed with automatic weapons, stripped men in the streets.

I also thought of the infamous Charles Stuart case, from Boston, when a white man claimed a Black man killed his wife. The cops descended on Roxbury, Black Boston like a plague. They stripped men in the streets of Beantown.

Many of the Americans working in the prisons of Iraq, especially in the reserves, are cops or prison guards in their civilian lives. Indeed, one of the men identified as a suspect in the brutal mistreatment of people in Abu Ghraib, indeed a corporal in the Army, works here, at SCI-Greene!

The horrific treatment of Iraqis at Abu Ghraib has its dark precedents in the prisons and police stations across America.

Journalist Seymour Hersh, of *The New Yorker* magazine, has alleged that there have been cases of sodomy against Iraqis there at Abu Ghraib, and even killing. Does the name Abner Louima ring a bell?

If you hate someone; if you disrespect them; if you fear them, how can you “liberate” them?

As we have said from the very beginning, the Iraq Adventure is not, and never has been, about “liberating” an oppressed people. Indeed, a recent CNN/USA Today poll suggests Iraqis have come to that conclusion, with 71% stating Americans are “occupiers.”

Americans may call it “liberation,” but they are bringing torture, humiliation, and domination.

Nor are these events the work of people who are “untrained,” “poorly trained,” or the always useful, “bad apples.”

As we have suggested above, many of those who are there in Iraq, and hundreds of the people working in Abu Ghraib prison, were reserves, and came from jobs as prison guards and cops in civilian life. They are perhaps better trained than the average M.P.

Don't buy it.

It is somehow fitting that these depraved acts have happened in one of the most dreadful gulags of the Hussein regime; it shows the continuity of torture and terror.

Now, let us prepare for the inevitable whitewash.

Those of us who know history are certain—it is sure to come.

3 May 2004

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**Send urgently needed contributions for Jamal's legal defense, made payable to “National Lawyers Guild Foundation” and earmarked for “Mumia” to: Committee to Save Mumia Abu-Jamal, 130 Morningside Drive, Suite 6C, New York, NY 10027.**

**If you wish to correspond with Jamal, you can write to: Mumia Abu-Jamal, AM8335, SCI Greene, 175 Progress Drive, Waynesburg, PA 15370.**

states. But the key thing here is *swing states*. In states where a Democratic victory is all but assured, black disenfranchisement continues apace. For example, more than 40 percent of black men in several neighborhoods in south Providence, Rhode Island are barred from voting because of felony convictions.

One of the most striking scenes in Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* showed Al Gore, as President of the Senate, ruling a series of black Congressmen out of order as they contested the 2000 presidential election results due to the events in Florida—the very events that almost certainly cost him the presidency. Because of the black constituencies that these Congressmen represented (or misrepresented), they felt even more robbed by the election outcome than the man from whom the election was actually stolen. But in ruling out these Congressmen, Al Gore was not acting out of faint-heartedness. Rather, it was due to the class nature of the Democratic Party. As a capitalist party, the Democrats are every bit as committed to the maintenance of the racist, capitalist order as the Republicans. They merely argue over the details.

The overriding factor for Gore and the Democratic establishment was that the “sanctity” of the imperial American presidency not be blemished by a dispute

over who won. In urging Gore to back down, for example, the *New York Times* (9 November 2000) wrote: “This is a time for both presidential candidates, their advisers and their parties to proceed with extreme caution—a caution merited by the danger that events could lurch suddenly toward political or constitutional crisis. The tradition of regular, reliable elections and orderly transition of power is one of the glories of American democracy.”

Another “one of the glories of American democracy” is the oppression of black people, which forms a key structural component of American capitalism; the ruling class wields racism to maintain a pernicious division in the working class. Whether it be “ending welfare as we know it” under Clinton, consigning already poverty-stricken families to greater privation, lining up behind the racist “war on drugs” or throwing themselves foursquare in support of the “war on terror,” the Democrats have proven, and every day continue to prove, that they are no friends to black and working people. Even a longtime hustler for the Democrats (and sometime wire for the FBI), Al Sharpton, faced a barrage of hostility when he attempted to simply address the racism black people face in the United States at the Democratic National Convention in Boston this summer. (The

speech of the current black Democratic rising star, Barack Obama, which whitewashed the bitter reality of racist oppression in America, went over much better.)

But while the ballot is a fundamental right, a right we tenaciously defend, fundamental change will not come through voting. It was not by the ballot that slavery met its demise; it was not by the ballot that Jim Crow was ended. Union rights did not come from Congress or the president. All the gains working people and black people have made came through their seizing them, by mass struggles on the battlefields, in the factories and on the streets, from the racist rulers.

These gains, though real, are also, as one can see from the erosion of black voting rights, reversible, and the racist, warmongering Democratic Party is no defense against the racist, warmongering Republican Party. Working people need their own party, a revolutionary party that recognizes that the fight for black freedom and the fight for the emancipation of labor are inextricably linked. We in the Spartacist League seek to build such a party to do away with the capitalist order and create an egalitarian socialist society in which the perfidies of the past shall be relegated to the history books and expunged from the lives of future generations. ■

# How the Liberals and Reformists Derailed the Struggle for Integration

## For Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!



Spartacist banner at rally in support of busing and school integration, Boston Common, 1974. AP

*We print below a forum, slightly edited for publication, given by comrade Don Alexander of the Spartacist League/U.S. Central Committee at a regional educational in New York City on April 3.*

I had to take a little time off in preparing this talk to keep from getting too involved in it, and comrade Karen and I went to hear a Southern liberal academic, who had written a book on the history of intermarriage in the U.S., particularly the striking down of the laws on the books that culminated in the 1967 *Loving* case. It was a quite interesting talk, a lot of anecdotes. In listening to his presentation, I noticed that the words “slav-

ery,” “segregation,” “racism” weren’t mentioned once. That’s a pretty tall task in America, especially when you’re talking about black-white intermarriage, because it’s really the question of the persistence of caste. They can’t deal with it. It really goes to the heart of this racist capitalist system. He was a rather charming gentleman, as they say.

There is a lot of talk today about multiculturalism, diversity, whiteness and “racialized subjects” and other liberal jargon that essentially attempts to erase the centrality of anti-black racism and black oppression in racist capitalist America. Recently, in preparing this talk, I read

something professor Barbara Fields of Columbia University wrote. She was one of the few professors who endorsed our rally at Columbia against the Conservative Club’s anti-affirmative action “bake sale.” She made the point that all of these academic types are talking about “whiteness” and all this stuff—how the Irish became white—but they never talk about how “African and African-Caribbean immigrants became black.” I thought that was a very interesting comment.

The Spartacist League has consistently, over the years, fought for a class-struggle program for black liberation as an inseparable part of the fight for the emancipa-

tion of labor from capitalist exploitation. Our program flows from a Marxist understanding of the nature of class society, of the role of class struggle as a motor force of history and the necessity of working-class rule. Capitalists like to dress up their rule in terms of general abstract slogans, pretending that they represent the "general will," the "people" and the like. But in fact, they have an executive committee that runs their affairs to perpetuate their brutal class rule, and that's called the state. This hideously oppressive and unequal society has perfected the machinery of deception and repression. There's a huge mountain of lies claiming that the U.S. is an "open society," a shining beacon of democracy where there are no classes and everybody is either in the middle class or becoming middle class, and where racism has largely been eliminated through civil rights laws, which have leveled the playing field. I know that if I keep on going in this vein you'll run me out of here, because it does make your blood boil.

If you read our publications, *Workers Vanguard*, *Black History*, *Women and Revolution* (which continues to be incorporated in *Workers Vanguard* and *Spartacist*), you'll see that we apply a revolutionary program to fight against national, sexual, racial and all oppression because that is part of our fight for world socialist revolution. In particular, when we raise the slogan for black liberation through socialist revolution, it sums up our strategic tasks. It encapsulates our fight for a third American revolution, a workers revolution that will put an end to this very brutal, decadent and violent ruling class. The realization of the age-long dream of black freedom, that is, the complete smashing of the color bar, can only occur



WV Photo

**Norfolk, Virginia longshoremen march against segregation, for school busing in 1983. Labor movement must champion black rights.**

through the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. This means confronting the unfinished business of the Civil War—finishing the Civil War, which was a social revolution that destroyed slavery; but the social relations of anti-black racism were incorporated into the capitalist mode of production.

I want to cite part of what the veteran Trotskyist Richard Fraser wrote, in particular in his lectures of November 1953, "The Negro Struggle and the Proletarian Revolution." We had a comment about comrade Fraser when we put out the bulletin, "In Memoriam Richard S. Fraser" (*Prometheus Research Series* No.3 [1990]). We wrote:

"Although he was hampered by little formal scholarly training, his Marxist understanding and his broad experience in militant struggles with black workers sharpened his insight into the lessons of

history. His dedicated study sprang from his conviction that in order to forge a program for black liberation, it is necessary to study the social forces that created the American institution of racial oppression.... To Fraser, understanding the roots of black oppression in the United States was no armchair activity; he carried his theory of Revolutionary Integration into struggle."

And that's really a very appropriate introduction to what I have to say.

We often quote Karl Marx's statement that "Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded." Fraser argued against the prevailing liberal ideology of his day that "prejudice" is the root of black oppression. He said:

"The racial division of society was born with capitalism and will die only with the death of this last system of exploitation. Before capitalism there was no race concept. There was no skin color exploitation, there was no race prejudice, there was no idea of superiority and inferiority based upon physical characteristics. "It was the advent of Negro chattel slavery in the western hemisphere which first divided society into races. In a measure the whole supremacy of western capitalism is founded upon this modern chattel slavery. The primary accumulation of capital which was the foundation of the industrial revolution was accrued largely from the slave trade."

This was written in 1953 and is a powerful scientific, materialist analysis that has stood the test of time. It is particularly important because we hear this new-fangled stuff about how race is somehow a "socially constructed category." Fraser also talked about how race was "socially constructed" and noted that as a biological category, race doesn't exist. But he emphasized the unique racial oppression of the American black population, the stigmatization of skin color, which was a

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Muhammad Speaks



Adelman/Magnum

Cartoon captures Martin Luther King's cringing pacifism that supported brutal repression of 1960s ghetto explosions. Above: Malcolm X, June 1963.

product of the system of chattel slavery and was grafted onto the subsequent capitalist system.

### Black Oppression and Capitalist Society

What are we fighting for? You have to look at the situation in this country where there is not a class-conscious proletariat today. The proletariat has yet to declare its political independence from the parties of the capitalist ruling class, thanks to the multiple betrayals of the reformists in this country, the petty-bourgeois liberal spokesmen for the black masses and, especially, the pro-capitalist trade-union bureaucracy, which works overtime to derail any serious struggle.

It was over one hundred years after the Civil War that black people got the right to vote, and today black former prisoners have to fall on their knees before Florida governor Jeb Bush to beg for their rights back. This is a reflection of the fact that under capitalism, democratic rights are reversible and that every step of the way we have to fight.

The class divisions in this society are increasingly sharp and hard to paper over. Therefore, the lies become more brazen and the repression more severe. The U.S. imperialists say that those who are resisting the imperialist occupation of Iraq simply don't want to see that freedom has taken root. If you're standing in an employment line here with no prospects for a job in sight—which is the fate of millions—this will sound pretty hollow because these sweet-sounding words of “freedom,” “equality” and “democracy” are coming out of mouths of the parasitic ruling class of the most brutal imperialist murderers in history. No, what they mean by “freedom” is the

right to starve and to have their boots ground into your face. We hear a lot today about how opportunities are there if you just have the pluck and the patience to grasp them instead of whining for a handout. You hear a kinder, gentler version of this coming from black capitalist politicians and their mouthpieces, who complain that black people don't stick together like other races, they engage in “self-sabotage,” and they hold each other back. You also hear the N-word, which lends legitimacy to this lie of black inferiority and is a reflection of its internalization. This scapegoating of the oppressed black masses in the name of “black power” or “black pride” is a reflection of petty-bourgeois contempt for the poor and oppressed. It is also an expression of the fact that today the black population, no less than the white population, is increasingly class-divided—in fact, even more so in terms of income and other inequalities within the black population.

Recently, I read a comment made by a Howard University black student who attended the commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the March on Washington where Martin Luther King Jr. gave his “I Have a Dream” speech—an event that Malcolm X correctly dubbed the “farce on Washington.” What she had to say was, perhaps, typical of a certain train of thought: “We are tired of the struggle for equality and we are tired of the struggle for integration.... If the response is positive, we must organize. If the response is negative, we must organize.”

This despairing tone is a product of the utter absence of any militant black leadership today and the failure of liberal integrationist programs. It is understandable, but it must be combatted. Consider

who spoke at the rally, and you can understand this. Among others, there was the quintessential political hustler, black Democrat Al Sharpton. He railed against the Bush administration, saying that the checks sent to black America have bounced and are coming back marked “insufficient funds.” You also had Martin Luther King III preaching a “revolution at the ballot box” in 2004—in other words, vote Democrat. These pro-capitalist hustlers have time and again led anti-racist struggles into the pigsty of bourgeois electoralism and lesser-evilism precisely at the moment when record numbers of black and Latino youth are in jail—when, as one writer describes it, the ghetto and the prisons are on a continuum. In sharp counterposition, we fight to mobilize the power of the multi-racial working class—the only class in society which, because of its unique, strategic role in production, can smash this racist capitalist system and establish in its place a collectivized, planned socialist economy that produces for human need and not for profit. This will take a fight to forge a revolutionary leadership of the working class that stands at the head of the struggles of all the oppressed and exploited.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in the post-Civil War post-Reconstruction period, you had a certain conservative black leader, Booker T. Washington, who came out openly for segregation, abandoning the fight for social equality. His rise to national prominence came in September 1895 when he delivered a speech at Atlanta's Cotton States and International Exposition. Basically, his speech told black people to stay “in their place.” Here is what Washington asserted that black people are:

"The most patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful people that the world has seen.... In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.... The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly...."

Now, the black nationalists today are cut out of the same cloth. Their bankrupt, petty-bourgeois program of "self-help" and black capitalism is pushed to line their own pockets and defend their own class interests against the ghetto poor. It tells the masses to accept the racist status quo, a product of centuries of racist oppression, and to stay in their so-called place. The Million Man March, organized in 1995 by the black-separatist, anti-woman, anti-Semitic bigot Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam, stood in this retrograde tradition. No wonder that march met with favor from Bill Clinton's White House. It was an appeasement of the capitalist exploiters. Meanwhile, the jails are filled with American capitalism's victims, the so-called "surplus population" of black and Latino youth. In New York City alone, nearly one out of two black men is unemployed. In the entire country, 40 percent of black children live in poverty. Black women are the fastest-growing victims of the AIDS epidemic. This is a society characterized by unprecedented, truly monstrous class divisions. This is the reality of color-caste oppression. It is not negated by the partial reconfiguration of this caste with the growth of a black middle class, which finds out very quickly that there is an invisible, but very real, glass ceiling.

It is sickening to hear Colin Powell and other representatives of the U.S. imperialist military, which is soaked from head to foot in the blood of the oppressed around the world, talk about how inte-

grated their killing machine is. This was one of the themes of General Wesley Clark on the campaign trail—especially in front of black audiences. Clark even had the nerve to say that the U.S. Army integrated the Little Rock, Arkansas high school in the bloody battle there in 1957. The truth is otherwise. Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was president at the time, had opposed the desegregation of the armed forces in 1948. His whole attitude toward the *Brown* decision was to never publicly support it. He made some really gross comments about overgrown black males sitting alongside white girls. He sent the troops into Little Rock to prevent the black masses from *fighting back* against the rampaging white racist mobs.

Right now, it is this same supposedly integrated imperialist army that has invaded Iraq and Afghanistan. Its racist, colonial occupation has spilled the blood of thousands of Iraqis and Afghans, along with increasing numbers of Haitians. We demand that the imperialist troops get out—and that the UN stay out. The working class and oppressed here have a very direct stake in opposing this colonialist occupation which can only further embolden world history's most monstrous imperialist power.

### The Class-Struggle Road to Black Freedom

Under capitalism—the system of private ownership of the means of production, in which the workers have only their labor power to sell as a commodity—a handful of capitalists are the dominant economic class. So it's futile to appeal to the nonexistent conscience and morality of the ruling class. It is not now and never has been in their interests to have a society based upon genuine peace, plenty and equality. There is a system of production for profit and of anarchy resulting in

inevitably recurring economic crises—a boom-bust cycle of overproduction of commodities giving rise to cyclical and structural unemployment and generalized impoverishment. Ending this requires a fight for the abolition of U.S. and world capitalism through international proletarian revolution.

*Our* interests lie in common, integrated class struggle against the racist capitalist rulers. The Spartacist League stands in the tradition of the early Communist International, the Comintern, under Lenin and Trotsky. Through insistent prodding, they reoriented the American Communist Party by uprooting the colorblindness characteristic of the early socialist movement. That movement had said that it had "nothing special" to offer to blacks and that their oppression was an economic problem. The Bolshevik Party under Lenin and Trotsky fought tooth and nail against this position, and actually laid the basis for the American Communist Party to lead an aggressive fight for black equality in the late 1920s and early 1930s. James P. Cannon—a founder of the Communist Party and early leader of American Trotskyism—wrote his seminal essay "The Russian Revolution and the American Negro Movement" in 1959, five years after the Supreme Court *Brown* decision, as that movement was unfolding. He pointed out:

"It is customary to attribute the progress of the Negro movement, and the shift of public opinion in favor of its claims, to the changes brought about by the First World War. But the biggest thing that came out of the First World War, the event that changed everything, including the prospects of the American Negro, was the Russian Revolution. The influence of Lenin and the Russian Revolution, even debased and distorted as it later was by Stalin, and then filtered through the activities of the Communist Party in the United States, *contributed more than any other influence from any source* to the recognition, and more or less general acceptance, of the Negro question as a *special* problem of American society—a problem which cannot simply be subsumed under the general heading of the conflict between capital and labor, as it was in the pre-Communist radical movement."

—*The First Ten Years of American Communism* (1962)

The Spartacist League's several decades of efforts and principled struggle to mobilize the working class in the fight for black freedom and in the liberation of the working class as a whole stands in this tradition and is unique.

As a consequence of the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union, which was a gigantic defeat for workers and oppressed around the world, the capitalists have been emboldened to intensify their attacks against hard-won



National Archives

**Integrated army unit during U.S. imperialism's dirty, anti-Communist war in Korea, 1950. Many black soldiers came back from Korea intent on fighting to overturn Jim Crow segregation in U.S.**



WV Photo



AP

**Spartacist supporter tore down Confederate flag of slavery and Klan terror at San Francisco Civic Center, 1984. Right: Up to 50,000 demonstrators turned out in January 2000 to demand removal of Confederate flag from Columbia, South Carolina statehouse.**

gains. It is no mere coincidence that, beginning in 1991, they have more energetically pushed for the resegregation of the school system—not that they began then, but they stepped on the pedal. There is no Soviet Union today to embarrass U.S. imperialism about the endemic racism which is inherent to this system.

Because of the counterrevolution in the Soviet Union, consciousness has been thrown back. And this has been in the making for a while. In 1983, Jesse Jackson, a former leader in King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, helped knife protests in defense of busing in Norfolk, Virginia. Coleman Young denounced busing in Detroit when he was the black Democratic mayor there in 1974, agreeing with the Supreme Court decision that struck down cross-district busing of black schoolchildren from the inner city to the white suburbs. In 1997, the historically integrationist NAACP held a debate that called into question integration.

Furthermore, this retrogression in consciousness has also affected the so-called "progressive," radical black intellectuals such as Robin Kelley and bell hooks, along with outright pro-Democratic Party hip-hop capitalists such as Russell Simmons. Simmons, who slams integration and also pushes black capitalism, helped organize a massive rally at City Hall in June 2003 (some of us sold *Workers Vanguard* at it) which was joined by Democrat Andrew Cuomo to call for not ending, but reducing the sentences of the draconian Rockefeller-era anti-drug laws. This is the same Cuomo who in the Clinton administration, in the Department of

Housing, actually used the money that was supposed to go to building new housing to build prisons in upstate New York. So they were down there at City Hall supposedly trying to reform these drug laws. We say: Down with the racist war on drugs! We are for the decriminalization of drugs. The so-called New Democrat Clinton escalated the bourgeoisie's attacks on the ghettos and barrios "to end welfare as we know it," expanding the racist death penalty, and putting about 100,000 more cops on the streets.

In a recent interview, Simmons spelled out his program. He said his program is 40 acres and a Bentley. His undisguised hostility to integration is quite understandable in that light. This is what he said:

"Economically, some families in our community had more financial stability during segregation. We had the black dentist, the black lawyer, the black teacher. We had jobs. We had things we had to do for our community and services to provide. Integration tore that down. It damaged our economic stability in our little communities.... They took all of our business."

—Henry Louis Gates, *America Behind the Color Line* (2004)

Well, first, what jobs? Ghettos are impoverished hellholes, and in periods of labor shortage, they *used to be* some kind of reserve army of the unemployed—and I stress *used to be*. These people are pushing black capitalism, which is really about feathering their own nests and flipping a bone to the rest of us.

The so-called "left" black feminist, bell hooks, harking back to a mythical golden era of cross-class black unity, argued:

"That sense of solidarity was altered by a class-based civil rights struggle whose

ultimate goal was to acquire more freedom for those black folks who already had a degree of class privilege however relative. By the late 1960s class-based racial integration disrupted the racial solidarity that often held black folks together despite class difference. Pressured to assimilate into mainstream white culture to increase their class power and status, privileged black individuals began to leave the underprivileged behind, moving into predominantly white neighborhoods, taking their money and their industry out of the segregated black world."

—*Where We Stand: Class Matters* (2000)

Well, this is an utterly fantastic description of what actually happened. Some of what she points out, such as who benefited from the civil rights movement, is true. But the notion that there was ever in the past, or that there ever will be in the future, a significant black capitalist class along the lines of the Carnegies, the Mellons and the Rockefellers is utterly fantastic and utopian. Moreover, there is no such thing as "separate but equal." And that's the point: they have capitulated to that.

Now, there's the very voluble left-nationalist academic Robin Kelley. He rhetorically asks, "Integration: What's Left?" (*Nation*, 14 December 1998). He deliberately conflates the struggle for racial integration with *liberal* integrationism and submission to white liberal gradualism:

"Although black civil rights activists had always emphasized 'desegregation'—the removal of all barriers that kept black people from enjoying full access to public facilities, decent housing, education and so on—in most white liberal circles racial integration came to mean solving the 'Negro problem' by bringing black

people into formerly all-white institutions.... The goal was to produce fully assimilated black people devoted to the American dream. Sharing power was rarely part of the equation."

And what is his program?

"Rather than a new integrationist movement under a left-wing banner, I would like to see a new, revitalized left launching a full-scale assault on white privilege—a new divestment campaign in which white people refuse the benefits of a racist society."

In particular, what Kelley is saying to the mass of white workers, which of course happens to be the most numerous class in this society, is: Prove your commitment for the poor and the oppressed by voluntarily impoverishing yourself. This can only reinforce the hold of the white ruling class upon white workers. Moreover, if he took that to any picket line they'd run him out on a rail.

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers, which was a radical-nationalist organization in Detroit in the '70s, had the opportunity to actually make common cause with white workers. They refused to pass out their leaflets to them. Their program was for more black foremen, for blacks on the board of General Motors and the like. Our program of revolutionary integration, of class struggle, cuts across these kinds of divisive schemes. Our program is to get rid of class exploitation and the brutal racial oppression that props it up, not to pit sections of the oppressed and exploited against each other so that both can be conquered. The depth of the political bankruptcy is astounding, but not surprising.

From our inception in the early 1960s inside the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) as the Revolutionary Tendency, a left-wing opposition that fought against that

party's abandonment of a revolutionary working-class program, we have emphasized common class struggle against a common class enemy. We say that there is an alternative to liberal integrationism—which favors the gradual absorption of "deserving blacks," one by one, into this system—and pro-Democratic Party capitalist politics. And that's the program of revolutionary integrationism, the struggle for black liberation through overturning this racist capitalist system by linking the struggles of the ghettos to the organized labor movement under a class-struggle leadership.

I need to point out that the ruling class today is forced to admit that increasingly U.S. society is being resegregated. In a special education supplement (*New York Times*, 18 January) on the 50th anniversary of the *Brown* decision, a writer admits that "Millions of black students are celebrating *Brown's* anniversary in schools almost as segregated as when it was decided. It is now true, as the court held, that 'separate but equal facilities are inherently unequal.' But 70 percent of black students attend schools in which racial minorities are a majority, and fully a third are in schools 90 to 100 percent minority." Professor Gary Orfield, co-director of the Civil Rights Project at Harvard, has done quite an extensive investigation of the growing resegregation in the U.S. He argues that, practically speaking, the U.S. today hasn't qualitatively progressed beyond the era of formalized segregation embodied in the infamous 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision that sanctioned state-supported segregation in public accommodations.

When you look at what's going on as the schools become more segregated to-

day, the fastest-growing, and now the largest minority affected are Latinos. We, as fighters for a revolutionary vanguard party, point to the common interests of all sections of the oppressed. Our task is to combat not only anti-black racism within the immigrant milieu, but the anti-immigrant chauvinism of many black workers and black people. This is critical from the standpoint of fighting for socialist revolution in this country. What we see is that the ruling class has thrown increasing layers of the population on the scrap heap.

In the annals of judicial history, what they call "*Brown I*" was the Supreme Court decision in 1954 that struck down *Plessy v. Ferguson*. And in "*Brown II*," the second decision a year later, the Supreme Court ordered desegregation with "all deliberate speed," i.e., slowly. In other words, they gave the green light to Southern segregationist foes of integration to obstruct the implementation of that decision. Consequently, by early 1964, a full decade later, only 1.2 percent of black children in the eleven Southern states attended schools with whites. So the law is one thing, and the reality on the ground is another.

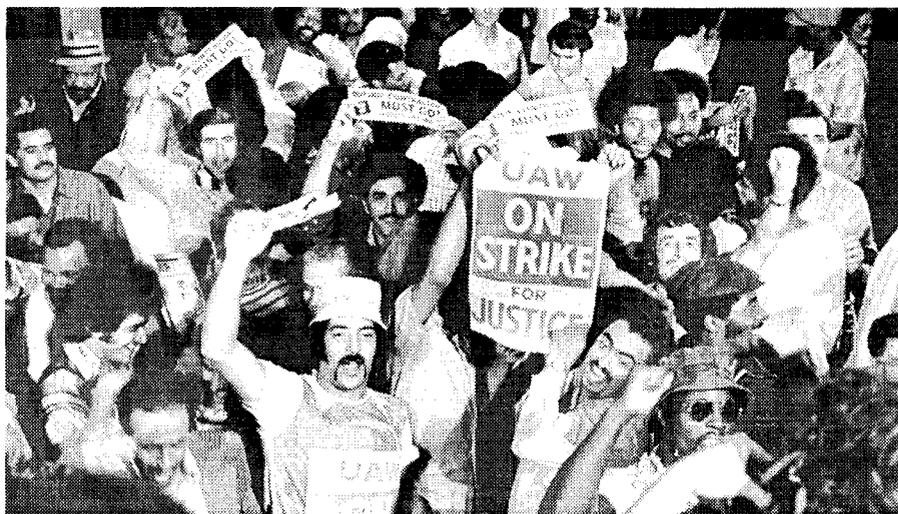
These legal decisions are never made in a vacuum, but they are a product of social struggle. Thus, far from being friends of black people, many judges opposed *Brown*. For example, leading segregationist Mississippi Circuit Court judge Tom Brady, in line with the white-supremacist Citizens Councils, asserted that this was "Black Monday" and that the Supreme Court was leaning toward Communism. The segregationists in Little Rock were circulating questionnaires essentially asking whether black boys would be permitted to solicit the white girls at school soirées? Would they be allowed, white girls and black boys in drama classes, to get together? Someone could really do an interesting study on when was the first time, if ever, *Othello* was performed in that part of the country.

When the first *Brown* decision was handed down, it was trumpeted by U.S. imperialism as an expression of American democracy in its finest hour. In 1954 Secretary of State Dean Acheson underlined their interest in *Brown*:

"Other peoples cannot understand how [school segregation] can exist in a country which professes to be a staunch supporter of freedom, justice, and democracy. The sincerity of the United States in this respect will be judged by its deeds as well as by its words."

—Azza Salama Layton,  
*International Politics and Civil Rights Policies in the United States, 1941-1960* (2000)

And of course, they were increasingly embarrassed because the Soviet Union



WV Photo

**Ford River Rouge workers in 1976 national auto strike. Detroit was center of black proletarian militancy until Big Three auto bosses gutted industry while pro-capitalist UAW tops capitulated.**

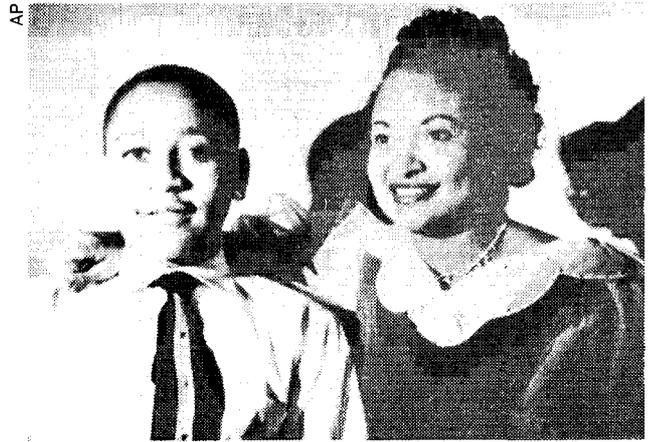
reminded them quite frequently and regularly of the vicious, legalized segregation, while the U.S. rulers railed against "Soviet Communist totalitarianism."

The State Department didn't waste any time in trumpeting the progress in race relations: within an hour of the Supreme Court's decision, the Voice of America broadcast the news all over the world in 35 different languages. And Carl Rowan, a black journalist who was the face of the State Department abroad, traveled far and wide to convince the Third World that America was finally making progress.

Of course it was bull because, in the aftermath of the *Brown* decision, white racist defiance quickly developed. Autherine Lucy, a black woman who wanted to get into graduate school, was attacked by mobs at the University of Alabama when she tried to attend school there in 1956. That angered a lot of European and African governments.

A year earlier, in 1955, Emmett Till fared worse. Emmett Till was a 14-year-old black youth from Chicago visiting relatives in Mississippi. He was lynched for the alleged "crime" of whistling at a white woman. His horribly mutilated body was shown. His mother insisted upon an open casket funeral, and all over the world people saw the barbarity of lynch law. Thousands of black people all over this country marched after that, and many say that the beginnings of the civil rights movement began with the demonstrations around Emmett Till. A couple of weeks ago the *New York Times* (22 March), in an editorial titled "The Ghost of Emmett Till," said that there is a reinvestigation of his murder being planned by the Justice Department because they have new information on Till's murder. If somebody is nailed,

**Emmett Till and his mother. The lynching of this 14-year-old black youth in Mississippi in 1955 for the alleged "crime" of whistling at a white woman helped fuel civil rights movement.**



he'll probably be 95 years old, on a respirator with one lung, one kidney and one hour to live. And if it's not that, the system is still one of murderous legal lynchings and racist frame-ups that keeps on keeping on. Just look at the cases of Mumia Abu-Jamal and the many other class-war prisoners in this country, like Jerry Dale Lowe.

Every step forward for workers, black people, women and all the oppressed has been won by militant struggle against the racist capitalist system. Reliance on the bourgeois courts politically *disarms* the workers and oppressed. The unions in this country were built by defying the bourgeoisie's laws against trade unions, laws that called unions "criminal conspiracies," which the capitalists could revive again.

Black youth hurled themselves against the infernal machine of the racist, segregationist, law-and-order establishment, playing a very important role in shattering the McCarthyite Cold War consensus and atmosphere in the South. The law had to adjust to the new facts on the

ground. In other words, it was no thanks to good-hearted and benevolent judges that the walls of Jim Crow segregation came tumbling down.

Robert Weisbrot, the author of *Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement*, noted that before the *Brown* decision:

"Sporadic local protests also sent a message of growing Negro assertiveness, but few, black or white, received it. In November 1953 forty-eight black soldiers in Columbia, South Carolina, were arrested and fined more than \$1,500 because one sat next to a white girl on the bus. That same year a Negro boycott of buses in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, lasted a week before officials permitted blacks and whites to occupy some seats on first-come, first-served basis."

Now, after several decades of bipartisan racist reaction and attacks on the standard of living of the working masses, sections of the ruling class openly embrace the "ghosts of the Confederacy" and their heirs. For example, Attorney General John Ashcroft has expressed his admiration for the Confederacy. Trent Lott, the Republican Senator, got a slap on the wrist for *openly* stating his support for the segregationist Strom Thurmond. Thurmond was the rabid segregationist who led Southern racist resistance to the integration of the armed forces under President Harry S. Truman and bolted from the Democratic Party to form the Dixiecrat Party in 1948. And none other than the current head of the Supreme Court, William Rehnquist, as a clerk to Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson, wrote a memo in support of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. This is the ruling class that is in power.

### **The Failures of the Civil Rights Movement in the North**

When the civil rights movement went North, it ran into a brick wall. It went up against the bedrock of the economic oppression of the black population. It was not de jure (in law) segregation but



Ernest Richie Collection

**Blacks in Baton Rouge, LA, organize boycott of segregated city buses, 1953.**

de facto segregation that they had to contend with. The collapse of that movement flowed from Martin Luther King's and the SCLC's bankrupt, liberal pacifist program of reliance on the racist federal government and the Democratic Party. That is what crippled that struggle.

As a result of the inability of the liberal-led civil rights leadership to address the capitalist roots of black oppression, many black activists embraced a separatist road and rejected integrated class struggle, which is not only in the interest of blacks but is in the interest of the entire working class. The result was that the best of an entire generation of young black militants, particularly embodied in the contradictory radical-nationalist Black Panthers, was cut down through murderous FBI Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTEL-PRO) repression, facilitated by murderous internal factionalism.

Some of this history is being revised in the anarchist milieu. You have, for instance, the Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists (NEFAC). They recently had an article, "A Synthesis of Race & Class: A Look at the Black Panther Party & Its Goal of Liberation" (*Northeastern Anarchist*, Summer/Fall 2003). What the anarchists say is quite interesting because it indicates why their rejection of a Leninist vanguard party makes them incapable of understanding the fact that what really led to the demise of the Panthers was not simply FBI repression. It was not simply what the anarchists call the Panthers' "authoritarian, top-down structure" or their advocacy of a vanguard party (which was of course vanguard in name only, because there was male chauvinism within that organization). What NEFAC says is this:

"The Black Panther Party was the most important revolutionary organization in America during the late 20th century.... [The party] was able to develop a truly revolutionary political platform that presented a more just and viable alternative...."

"Perhaps the party would have benefited and maximized its potential as a Revolutionary Black Nationalist organization by broadening its struggles to both remedial and immediate programs as well as more militant activities so long as they were both aimed at a common and revolutionary goal: the necessity for black people to gain control of the institutions in their own communities, eventually transforming them into cooperatives, and of one day working with other ethnic groups to change the system."

This petty-bourgeois rejection of the working class is exactly the Panthers' type of New Left sectoralism. Thoroughly anti-working-class, it is based upon the utopian, classless notion of a "black community," or "black communities," which are really impoverished

ghettos. What are you going to control? The Panthers were nationalists; they were radical nationalists. They wanted social revolution, but they rejected mobilizing the integrated working class to sweep away this system: This is the key reason for their political demise. It wasn't simply that the state was all-powerful. There was sympathy among white workers in the Bay Area. In the early 1970s we had supporters who worked in a General Motors auto plant in Fremont, California. This was a factory where the Panthers briefly had a caucus, which they later liquidated.

Today, the effects of the destruction of the Panthers' organization and the defeats of the movement are deeply felt. The black population is leaderless. Under the conditions of relentless racist attacks today in the name of the "war against terror" at home and abroad, it is vital to know who our friends and who our enemies are. Things didn't have to turn out this way. If you really look at the road forward, it has to be based on this program of class-struggle revolutionary integrationism, by forging a revolutionary workers party that tells the bitter truth. In

that regard, we have to clear the ground of the reformist and centrist obstacles that block the road to power.

Don't be fooled by the occasional socialist rhetoric. The International Socialist Organization (ISO) is a good example of what we're talking about. Time and again, they stand with the Democrats against workers and the oppressed. On 23 October 1999, they were out there in the rally organized by Sharpton to defend the Klan's right to march. He went to court on behalf of the Klan, whereas the Spartacist League and the Partisan Defense Committee, along with the Labor Black League, mobilized a mass labor-centered mobilization that stopped the Klan.

So what does the ISO say is the way forward? In a recent article called "Racism in America Today" (*International Socialist Review*, November-December 2003), they say that, despite the persistence of institutional racism in America,

"It would be wrong, nevertheless, to conclude that things are just as bad as they were before the civil rights movement. Many of the legislative gains from that period—from affirmative action to ending segregation—are under attack. But

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the impact of the movement has been longstanding, fundamentally changing the attitudes and perceptions of millions of people about African Americans."

Where do you start, right? One thing to say is that the lie of black inferiority, the recrudescence of "scientific racism" in this *Bell Curve* book, which was a best-seller at the time it was published in 1994, which preached the genetic inferiority of black people, struck fertile soil. The point is that the civil rights movement failed to end black oppression because it was tied to the Democratic Party, and these fake socialists cover up that fact because they are busily tailing the Democrats today. There was nothing in that article about breaking with the Democratic Party. I think it is because the ISO's whole perspective is to reform this racist, capitalist system. And, of course, they supported every counterrevolutionary nationalist movement, every anti-Soviet struggle in the past, which culminated in the destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers state.

So their program is very illustrative of what we are dealing with out there. We have so-called socialists in this country who practically ignore the growing resegregation of the U.S. In the case of the League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP), they actually openly champion segregation—for example, opposing school busing in Boston. Their virulent hostility to integration is no accident since they are virulently Stalinophobic, anti-Soviet. Rejecting defense of the gains of the Russian Revolution led to



НЕГРАМОТНЫЙ ТОТ-ЖЕ СЛЕПОЙ  
ВСЮДУ ЕГО ЖДУТ НЕУДАЧИ И НЕЩАСТЬЯ

A. Radakov

1920 Soviet Russian poster reads: "He who is illiterate is like a blind man." Today SL/U.S. calls for free, quality integrated education for all.



Young Spartacus

March 2004: SYC initiated protest demanding "Down With Racist Provocations on Campus!" and "Defend Affirmative Action!" at Columbia University.

accommodation to American imperialism at home on the strategic question for proletarian revolution in the U.S., the fight for black liberation.

The kind of "integration" that the ruling class is interested in aims to recruit the best of those minorities whose skills and training can be utilized to defend the capitalists' interests at home and abroad. This involves being able to intervene into countries with large non-white populations, sitting astride regions where there is oil, gold, diamonds and the like. So the white ruling class will drop the color bar to get a Colin Powell and a Condoleezza Rice to do their bidding in enslaving and murdering thousands of dark-skinned peoples, and other oppressed peoples, around the world. This has nothing to do, of course, with the obliteration of the color line, but rather the obliteration of horribly impoverished people around the world. So the class enemy has a consistently counterrevolutionary strategy and program, and we have to have a consistently revolutionary strategy and program.

If you want another example, look at the support from sections of the U.S. officer corps for retaining affirmative action at the University of Michigan last year. Why? They remember their long, losing and dirty colonial war against Vietnam—which was conducted with a racially torn military. Now, they have a Hispanic commander leading troops in Iraq.

The bourgeoisie wants "integration" insofar as it furthers their struggle for unbridled exploitation. We defend affirmative action as one of the remaining minimal and very inadequate gains of the civil rights movement, which were wrested from the white ruling class in struggle. However, affirmative action does not and cannot attack the race and class biases inherent in this system. In the

universities, we fight for open admissions, free tuition and a fully paid state stipend, especially to enable minority and working-class youth to attend those schools. Very recently, the Spartacus Youth Club mobilized actions at Columbia University against an anti-affirmative action "bake sale" sponsored by the Conservative Club, which is in cahoots with an assortment of sinister racist imperialist elements, such as the pro-slavery ideologue David Horowitz. The Conservative Club had in their cross hairs blacks, Jews, Hispanics, gays and others. We mobilized against their racist provocation at Columbia while organizations like the ISO refused to endorse the SYC-initiated action because they were basically trying to pressure the administration to defend minority students.

### Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

We fight to build a vanguard party that bases its program not upon the current consciousness of the working class, but upon its objective interests, its interests as a conscious revolutionary class. This is really the hallmark of what we're fighting for, a party that is a tribune of the people. Under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky's Bolshevik Party, the workers of Russia smashed the untamed capitalist system. This was the first and the only successful workers revolution in history. Today, U.S. imperialism is seeking to destroy the remaining bureaucratically deformed workers states in China, Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea. Despite the political misrule of the Stalinist bureaucracies in these countries, the smashing of capitalism there is a good thing for the workers internationally. We Trotskyists unconditionally defend those workers states against imperialist attack and inter-

nal counterrevolution. It's a good thing that North Korea has nukes. Otherwise, the U.S. imperialist bandits would have obliterated them a long time ago. We fight for workers political revolution in those countries to oust the treacherous Stalinist bureaucracies whose anti-internationalist, anti-working-class program facilitates the imperialist drive toward capitalist restoration. To be a Marxist, a Trotskyist, a fighter for world revolution, you have to be a proletarian internationalist. Our task here is to build that revolutionary Trotskyist party and finish what the Bolsheviks started in 1917 by fighting for new October Revolutions.

The class-struggle program for black liberation is directly tied to the struggle for proletarian revolution. In this regard, every generation comes to revolutionary consciousness in their own way. My personal road was tortuous, starting as a follower of the petty-bourgeois radical-nationalist Frantz Fanon, who seemed to be offering an uncompromising assault on the citadel of racism and imperialism—looking for the “wretched of the earth” to rise up spontaneously to drive off the imperialists. Only when I joined the Spartacist League did I learn that Fanon's “radical” nationalism was an expression of the prevalent New Leftism which propagated the myth that the working class was *not* the agent of revolutionary change, but had been “bought off” and integrated into the racist capitalist system. I'll skip some of the other delusions that I had to discard along the way.

We've learned a lot from the Bolsheviks. When you look at some of the history of what the Spartacist League has fought for, such as the struggle for busing in Boston, it is really important to see how we swam against the stream. I was fortunate to spend some time with Dick Fraser, along with other comrades, in Los Angeles in the early 1980s. We tried to assist him in various ways—he was a very sick man at the time. We had one friend in common, a guy by the

name of Earl Ofari [Hutchinson], who was a friend of mine, and Dick had done some writing with him too. In the early 1970s, Ofari played a role in breaking me from the dead end of “revolutionary nationalism” and in telling me over and over again that a woman's work is never done. He wrote a useful book called *The Myth of Black Capitalism* which really assisted me in developing a class perspective.

We had a big argument in 1974-75 about the demand, which Ofari supported, that the government send federal troops to Boston to protect black school-children, who had been bused to integrate schools in South Boston, a white enclave. At the same time, Ofari denounced the Maoist Revolutionary Union, the predecessors of today's Revolutionary Communist Party, which capitulated to the racist anti-busing forces in Boston and came out with an infamous headline in their press: “People Must Unite to Smash Boston Busing Plan” (*Revolution*, October 1974). This was a gross capitulation to the racist scum from the Nazis and the Klan to Louise Day Hicks, who was a leader of the racist outfit called ROAR (Restore Our Alienated Rights).

Ofari's main fire, however, was directed at the so-called “sectarian” Spartacist League. We were in the forefront of fighting for mass integrated labor-black defense to defend the black school-children against the howling racist mobs in South Boston. We fought for low-rent, racially integrated public housing, for quality integrated education for all, and for the implementation of busing and its extension to the suburbs as a minimal—although inadequate—step toward black equality. We weren't successful in getting the labor movement organized along those lines. However, this was in the interests of workers and the oppressed.

The trade-union misleaders in that city didn't lift a finger so as not to alienate the Democratic Party so-called “friends of labor,” such as Teddy Kennedy and

others. Initially, Kennedy made some mild support statements, and they ran his butt off the stage.

We linked this fight to the struggle for socialist revolution and a workers government. In contrast, the reformist Socialist Workers Party (SWP) called for federal troops to “defend” black people and tailed behind the petty-bourgeois liberal NAACP. In pursuit of their class-collaborationist bloc with the liberals, the SWP sought to rewrite history by claiming that through mass pressure the armed forces of imperialism could be made to fight for the oppressed. They consciously distorted history to suit their reformist appetites. They tried to erase the indisputable fact that every time troops were called in, particularly in response to black rebellion, it was to suppress those who were fighting back. The capitalist state—its cops, its courts, its armed forces—is not neutral. These bodies are instruments of capitalist rule and racist repression. The Workers World Party of Sam Marcy was tailing behind this black Democrat, Bill Owen, who opposed busing and was looking for a political career. Marcy put out a pamphlet, *Busing and Self-Determination*, which should have been titled “The Right to Tailism.” In it, they stated: “Separation or Assimilation—It's Up to the Oppressed.” So they simultaneously tailed the petty-bourgeois liberals of the NAACP and the Black Muslims. They betrayed the struggle for black equality.

Finally, the fight against the resegregation of America cannot be separated from the unrelenting ruling-class offensive against labor and oppressed minorities, which has resulted in increased concentration of wealth at one end of society and increased segregation and misery at the other. The recent five-month-long, bitter, sold-out UFCW grocery workers strike in Southern California indicates that there are today thousands of workers determined to resist the capitalist attacks. They fought, and it was not

Young Spartacus



**REVOLUTION** 25¢

**People Must Unite To  
Smash Boston Busing Plan**

October 1974

1974: Predecessor of today's Revolutionary Communist Party sided with white racist backlash against busing (above), while reformists of Socialist Workers Party youth group pushed illusions in federal troops to defend black children.



impossible for them to have won. But the treacherous trade-union bureaucracy isolated that strike, refused to extend it nationwide and played by the bosses' rules. That's why we say you need a class-struggle leadership of labor to unleash its power. Such a leadership is based upon the recognition that the fight for the emancipation of the working class is inseparable from the struggle against the brutal, racist oppression that is endemic to this capitalist system.

How can this power be brought to bear? A powerful message would have been sent to the bloodsucking capitalists had there been ten thousand transit workers, hospital workers, city workers downing their tools to protest the racist killings of black woman unionist Alberta Spruill and black youth Timothy Stansbury. Or, a few years ago, Amadou Diallo. Or the several Latino youth killed by New York's "finest" racist killers. Or in defense of class-war prisoners such as Mumia Abu-Jamal. That social power must be mobilized. The capitalists would be forced to take notice if there were a significant presence of workers out there on behalf of women's rights—especially in the fight for abortion, which is under attack. The possibilities of integrated class struggle are palpable and, on a modest scale, very real. White, Latino and Asian workers were out there together on the picket lines during the recent UFCW strike. They fought, and their union wasn't broken, even though they were bitterly sold out.



Washington Post

**Spartacist League initiated 5,000-strong labor/black mobilization that stopped KKK march in Washington, D.C., November 1982.**

How do we get that kind of leadership? By drawing the class line. By breaking with the program of class collaboration that preaches the lie of a "community of interests" between the workers and the bosses and of "lesser-evilism," which is pushed by the reformists and labor fakery. That party will be built by unmasking the enemies of the workers and the oppressed, no matter what their color or nationality is. A necessary task for the working class in this country is the forg-

ing of such a revolutionary workers party, a political weapon to advance a fight for jobs for all through a shorter workweek with no loss in pay, for free medical care, for free universal education, for full citizenship rights, for immigrant rights, for militant defense of the rights of gays. The fight for free abortion on demand, the fight for freedom of all class-war prisoners is a fight for a socialist America. And this fight will be realized through expropriating the capitalist class.

I want to end with this quote from a black youth in Roxbury, Boston, who was inspired by the struggle for integration in that city. It underscores one of the points that we've made, namely, that in the past, on most occasions, the black population has sought every opportunity to fight for integration and equality as opposed to opting for a separatist road. It is only in periods of defeat and out of despair that some have turned toward pseudo-nationalism. Reflecting the egalitarian sentiments of a significant number of black people in the civil rights era, an eleven-year-old black youth said: "Busing's just got to be, man. Got to be. We got it coming to us. We got to open up ourselves, spread out. Get into the city.... Go to good schools, live in good places like white folks got.... That's why they're busing us" (*Brown v. Board of Education* [2001]). To realize this dream of genuine equality, you must fight for a socialist revolution. You can't get it unless you have a party that swims against the stream and that bases itself upon the lessons of the class struggle and the fight to smash capitalism on a world scale. ■

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# The "N" Word in Racist America

The word originated amid the horrors of the Middle Passage, the bartering in human flesh, the crack of the overseer's whip—the systematic enslavement and dehumanization of black Africans and their descendants on North American soil. Later, it was carved by lynch mobs, savagely intent on enforcing Jim Crow racial segregation, into the hideously mutilated bodies of their black victims. It was and remains the white-supremacist rallying cry heralding cross-burnings outside black homes, firebombings of black churches and assaults on black people on city streets. Cops bark it as they rampage through the ghettos, beating down black youth and dragging them off to jail.

Yet in recent years the word "n-----" has come to be casually thrown around by youth of all ethnic backgrounds as a sign of contemporary "hipness" and a "term of endearment." It is blasted through the airwaves in songs listened to by millions across the world and in the routines of popular black comedians. It screams from the shelves of bookstores and newsstands, the title of a best-selling book by black Harvard Law School professor Randall Kennedy last year. It has even been heard from the platforms of leftist antiwar demonstrations. In a cruel twist, the increasingly promiscuous use of this racist epithet has been driven by the hip-hop music originating in ghettos like the South Bronx and South Central Los Angeles.

For such youth, hip-hop lyrics often are an expression of defiance in the face of the raw racist reality of American society and a ruling class that could not care less whether the besieged and impoverished ghetto masses live or die. But far from being a protest against racial oppression, as some leftist black intellectuals would have it, the pervasive use of the "N" word is a result of the racist rulers' denigration of black people. This is a form of "defiance" born of demoralization and despair, a product of the ever-worsening conditions of black life and the absence of any significant social struggle in the decades since the collapse of the civil rights movement.

It is no coincidence that the only other music today that commonly includes the

word in its lyrics is that of the fascists, such as the filth put out by the neo-Nazi Resistance Records. For racist reactionaries, the one redeeming feature of hip-hop is the regular use of the "N" word. In the early years of "gangsta" rap, *Newsweek* (19 March 1990) featured a "Rap Rage" cover, which did its part to encourage state repression and racist victimization of the hip-hop music scene by whipping up white fear and hatred. But the editors of *Newsweek* did hail "the disinterment of the word 'n-----'" as the "most visible contribution" to rap music's "Culture of Attitude."

We revolutionary Marxists in the Spartacus Youth Clubs have no particular attitude toward hip-hop music. What one listens to, watches or reads is a private affair. But the word "n-----" is a *program* for racist reactionaries, and we oppose its use by whites and blacks alike. In his powerful 1829 *Appeal* against slavery, black abolitionist David Walker wrote:

"The white Americans have applied this term to Africans, by way of reproach for our colour, to aggravate and heighten our miseries, because they have their feet on our throats."

No less today than in the past, it means not only race-terror and the lynch rope but also that the victims "deserve it." In Meridian, Mississippi earlier this month, a deranged white racist gunned down five people, including four blacks, at an aircraft parts plant, after having repeatedly terrorized black co-workers with how "he was going to come in one day and kill up a bunch of n-----s" (*New York Times*, 9 July). In this violent, racist society, the "N" word is a fighting word, as both black and white people are aware. Recalling the intense struggles of the civil rights movement, a black SL comrade explained:

"Its use by whites was an assertion of white supremacy and the inferiority of the black race.... My home instructions



Young Socialist

**Beaten, gassed and jailed over the course of a 64-day strike in Memphis, 1968, sanitation workers protest racist contempt for black people while marching for union recognition and improved wages.**



AP

Police occupy Benton Harbor, Michigan in June 2003 after black population erupted over cop terror (above). Material conditions of life have worsened for the black masses since the 1960s.

Chicago Historical Society



were to defend the race at all cost—the ‘N’ word was a fighting word. You fought, period. To walk away was cowardice. My mother, a Southern-born woman, wouldn’t allow cowardice in her house—not on this issue. But the shame would not have ended there. In the neighborhood I lived in, the scorn would have been just as intense. A white insulted your people, and you did nothing! This was the highest shame.”

That black oppression is at the foundation of American capitalism is a direct legacy of black chattel slavery. The chains of slavery were shattered by the American Civil War, the last great bourgeois revolution and one which ushered in the most democratic period in American history, Radical Reconstruction. But the promise of Reconstruction was betrayed by the property interests of the Northern capitalists. Until almost a century later with the civil rights movement of the 1950s and ‘60s, built on the courage of thousands of activists, white supremacy and Jim Crow police-state control of black people reigned in the South. Blacks who

fled North were integrated into the workforce at the bottom and forcibly segregated into inner-city ghettos. The subjugation of the black masses at the bottom of this society continues to this day—but black workers also remain integrated into strategic sectors of the industrial proletariat, which alone has the social power to shatter this racist capitalist system. For the capitalists, the color line is a key weapon in enforcing class exploitation by keeping the working class divided and weakened.

The frequent use of the “N” word in hip-hop music precipitated a wide-ranging discussion within the Spartacus Youth Clubs on race in America and how it is reflected through youth culture, culminating in an educational presentation at the Youth Commission of the Eleventh National Conference of the Spartacist League/U.S. last summer. As vanguard fighters against black oppression, we struggle against every manifestation of racism and bigotry in this profoundly racist society. Against liberals like the

NAACP, who appeal to the government or school authorities to censor “politically incorrect” language, we reject the illusion that racism can be legislated away. Such censorship only accords the capitalist government additional powers of repression, which are invariably used against working people and the oppressed. As one SL comrade observed in a pre-conference discussion contribution:

“We are materialists which, with respect to the issue at hand, means our interest is in changing material reality, that is, in forever destroying the social basis for racist oppression in this country by welding labor/black power and effecting a proletarian socialist revolution. We do not hold that this can occur by sanitizing social reality à la...the advocates of ‘politically correct’ discourse. The mirror opposite of such efforts is attempts to make the ‘N’ word hip and thus, according to the proponents of this ‘strategy,’ to erase its racist impact. Either of these idealist pursuits shares the assumption that it is what people think that is responsible for racism and not that racist oppression is the bedrock on which the American capitalist order is maintained.”

Black workers are potentially the most combative section of the proletariat; and mobilizing the labor movement in the fight for black liberation is not just one more case of championing democratic rights, but is the key to the American socialist revolution. Likewise, the “N” word is not just one more racial or ethnic slur, but is the watchword of hardened reactionaries who would spearhead a counterrevolutionary offensive rather than accept a socialist society in which black people are truly free. Any adaptation to this word can only redound to the benefit of those who view black oppression as a virtue of the existing social order. Its use can only *retard* the development of communist, i.e., liberating, consciousness.

### Black Apologists for White Racism

The ideological campaign to “reclaim” the “N” word as a “term of endearment” was given national attention last year with the publication of Randall Kennedy’s *N-----: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word* (a grotesque parody of the title of C. Vann Woodward’s insightful history, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* [1955]). In his viciously satisfying riposte titled “The N-Word as Therapy for Racists: Randall Kennedy’s Idiotic Assault on Black People’s Honor” (*Black Commentator*, 27 June 2002), Martin Kilson, the first black professor to receive full tenure at Harvard in 1968, denounced as “idiotic” the “notion that the more White Americans mouth the ‘N’ word the greater will be the purge of Negrophobia in their souls, as if by comparison the more today’s Ger-



Herb Robinson



Daily Pennsylvanian



Ohio University

**Left-wing intellectuals Manning Marable, Robin D. G. Kelley, Michael Eric Dyson despair of integrated social and class struggle, accommodate racist status quo and use of "N" word by blacks.**

mans mouth the K-word the greater will be the eventual purging of Jewish-phobia in German society."

Kennedy's book "was tantamount to tossing a match at a gasoline-soaked building," wrote Kilson, pointing to a series of racist provocations unleashed by the book at Harvard Law School last spring, including a Web posting using the slur "n-g" and an e-mail by a white student crowing, "I have actually begun using the 'n-----' word more often than before." In a reply to Kilson, Kennedy confessed, "It so happens that the students involved were my students" (*Black Commentator*, 22 August 2002).

Kennedy's service on behalf of the forces of racist reaction was widely hailed by the American bourgeois media. Typical was the review in *Newsweek* (14 January 2002): "He's made his case: that this 'troublesome' word is only a word. And that words—like people—can always change." What purpose can a "changed" definition of the "N" word serve in capitalist America? None other than to legitimize the continuing degradation of black people.

Kennedy's vile little tract is a slap in the face to every black person. But attempts to legitimize the growing use of the "N" word in public discourse extend to more left-wing black intellectuals like Robin D. G. Kelley and Michael Eric Dyson. Commenting on the controversy surrounding Jennifer Lopez's use of "n---a" in her "I'm Real" remix single with rapper Ja Rule, self-described "hip-hop intellectual" Dyson wrote in the *Chicago Sun-Times* (31 July 2001):

"One of the few privileges blacks may derive from their oppression is the ability to linguistically subvert its corrosive meanings....

"And it is one of the consequences of black freedom that white folk—and other nonblacks—must not pretend not to un-

derstand the difference between blacks calling each other 'n---a' and whites and others calling us 'n---er.' Only a heady moral insolence could feign such innocence. So J-Lo, here's the deal: Puffy can say 'n---a'; you can't. Now that's real."

Responding to the likes of Dyson, Ron Scott wrote in the *Amsterdam News* (9 August 2001):

"Well, if you really want to keep it real, try reading '100 Years of Lynchings' by Ralph Ginzburg and 'Without Sanctuary, Lynching Photography in America,' by James Allen and Hilton Als, which graphically depict the hideous lynchings of African-Americans in America. The latter has some photographs that show the N word, which was carved on their chests."

As for the supposed distinction between the term of affection and the slur in ending the word with an "-er" rather than an "-a," this is, as Scott observed, a distinction without a difference: "Remember, many white people weren't that educated, just racist as hell, so in many cases, it was spelled the latter."

As Scott remarked, "When a word is placed in the public domain the way the hip-hop community has somewhat recklessly dropped the N word, it's evident that one can no longer define who uses it." Witness the case of white Cincinnati cop Thomas Haas, who gunned down 21-year-old Rickey Moore only months after the cop killing of another black youth, Timothy Thomas, touched off a long-simmering explosion of outrage in April 2001. Five years earlier, a complaint was filed against this same cop for calling a black prisoner "n---a" while beating him into submission. According to the police report of the incident, quoted in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* (5 August 2001):

"Officer Haas claims he used the term in a friendly manner and that he was not attempting to be disrespectful.... He also claims this is an acceptable term used by persons on the street, primarily drug dealers. He states that he is trying to be a

good community police officer by 'acting the role' and by presenting himself in a manner close to the persons he serves."

## The Politics of Despair

In an essay titled "Kickin' Reality, Kickin' Ballistics: 'Gangsta Rap' and Postindustrial Los Angeles" (reprinted in *Race Rebels* [1994]), Robin Kelley notes, "The generation that came of age in the 1980s was the product of devastating structural changes in the urban economy that date back at least to the late 1960s." As the rubber and steel factories that had formerly provided jobs for black youth disappeared, South Central L.A. experienced a 50 percent rise in unemployment and an almost one-third drop in median income. The ghettos "were turned into war zones," housing projects "were renovated along the lines of minimum security prisons" and "police helicopters, complex electronic surveillance, even small tanks armed with battering rams became part of this increasingly militarized urban landscape." It was these conditions that gave rise to the massive 1992 upheaval provoked by the acquittal of four white cops who had beaten and tormented black motorist Rodney King.

South Central was emblematic of every ghetto in America. From the time of the first mass migration of Southern blacks to the Northern cities in the early decades of the twentieth century, the ghetto population was used by the capitalist rulers as a "last hired, first fired" reserve army of labor, brought in when their labor was needed and cast aside in economic downturns. Witness current unemployment figures, which for black teenagers today hover at 40 percent. As the capitalists took the wrecking ball to the steel works, shut down the auto factories and cut millions of manufacturing jobs beginning in the 1970s, the population of the inner cities

came to be seen as a surplus population not "worth" providing with even the most basic needs of subsistence. The "war on poverty" of the 1960s was replaced by the "war on drugs," a concerted onslaught on the ghetto masses leading to the imprisonment of up to a million young black men and women at any given time. While the 13th Amendment abolished chattel slavery, it excluded prisoners from protection against enslavement. The mainstream use of the "N" word, a symbol of slavery, recurs at a time when blacks are disproportionately imprisoned.

In the article "Deadly Symbiosis" (*Boston Review*, April/May 2002), Loïc Wacquant noted that the massive intensification of state repression in the ghettos came as "the capacity of the ghetto to ensure caste domination was undercut in the 1960s by economic restructuring that made African-American labor expendable." The result was "to make the ghetto more like a prison" and "the prison more like a ghetto." The further impoverishment and all-sided degradation of the inner-city masses has been used to intensify the exploitation of the entire working class, axing social programs and branding the black "underclass" as "undeserving," "indolent" and "criminal."

A few decades after the mass struggles of the civil rights movement broke the back of legalized Jim Crow segregation and formal equality for black people was decreed in this country, the conditions of life of the ghetto masses have worsened by every material standard: average family income has plunged, schools are more segregated than before civil rights pro-

grams were implemented, the unemployment rate among black youth is twice that among white youth, and an astounding 28 percent of all black men are destined to spend some time behind bars. Poverty, chronic joblessness and jail, schools that are no more than holding pens, AIDS, crime and cop terror—these are standard aspects of life for the black population under decaying American capitalism.

Focused as it was on winning legal reforms, the liberal-led civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s was bound to the Democratic Party and thereby the capitalist order. As such, it was incapable of addressing the desperate conditions of the black inner cities, which are materially rooted in the whole system of American capitalism. A series of spontaneous ghetto rebellions broke out beginning in the mid '60s and was smashed with brute force as heavily armed police and the military occupied entire neighborhoods. At the same time, widespread anger at the Vietnam War fueled the radicalization of youth in the army and at home.

Nationalist groups promoting black capitalism and liberal politicians like black Congressman Adam Clayton Powell responded with efforts to keep the cities safe for racist American capitalism, from installing black front men in the mayor's office to colluding directly with the cops, as in the case of cultural nationalist leader Ron Karenga in Los Angeles. These betrayals had the backing of major American corporations, which were eager to fund such programs dedicated to containing black unrest and promoting business.

The government set up "war on poverty" programs that successfully co-opted a layer of black activists for the purpose of re-establishing control over the rebellious ghettos. A number of blacks like Coleman Young in Detroit and Maynard Jackson in Atlanta were installed as mayors to fire city workers, close inner-city hospitals, slash funds to social programs and bolster racist "law and order." Once the turmoil in the black communities was tempered, in the early '70s the poverty programs were massively cut. Soon after, the deindustrialization of the 1980s ravaged the black working class.

The conscious selling out of the social struggles of the '50s and '60s, which potentially could have taken a revolutionary direction given the proper leadership, and the absence of any significant struggle since that period have produced a climate of defeat and reaction in which the "N" word has gained wider "respectable" public currency. The liberal and leftist apologists for its use are both products and promoters of that defeatist mood. They reject any possibility of mass social

struggle, much less integrated workers struggle, and instead glorify "cultural empowerment," which posits that black oppression exists in people's minds rather than being inherent to American capitalism. Now as in the '60s, this is a program for capitulation to the racist status quo and is simply another means to blame the oppressed for their oppression. This gains literal expression with the prominent political influence of Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam (NOI) on the hip-hop scene.

## Farrakhan: Bad News for Black People

Farrakhan has been the keynote speaker at a number of "hip-hop summit" meetings. Many black youth who disdain the "respectable" inch-at-a-time gradualism of mainstream Democratic Party politicians like Jesse Jackson take as good coin Farrakhan's occasional rhetorical forays against the racist rulers. In turn, black leftists, looking for an audience that would provide them some access to corridors of influence in this society, seek to peddle their liberal and reformist wares in Farrakhan's shadow. Thus Dyson extols Farrakhan's 1995 Million Man March as "a dramatic testament to the magnitude of black male hunger for racial rescue and moral requirement."

Despite the just outrage at racist America felt by many in attendance, the Million Man March was a reactionary, woman-hating mobilization for "atonement," which forgave the oppressors and exploiters for their enormous crimes against black people, working people and the poor, while blaming the oppressed for their oppression. In an article in the *Black Scholar* (Winter/Spring 1996) titled "Million Man March Appeases Racist Exploiters" (reprinted in *WV* No. 647, 7 June 1996), Bay Area Spartacist spokesman and Labor Black League member Don Cane wrote:

"In the 1960s, 'I'm Black and I'm Proud' race consciousness, influenced by masses in struggle, was defiant of the racist capitalist rulers. Today we witness 'I'm black and I'm not a criminal' race consciousness influenced by a desperate black middle class begging for 'understanding' from the racist rulers. The black misleaders, branded by race themselves, can barely conceal their contempt for the black masses on whom they call to 'atone.' I say **black people have nothing to atone for!** But the false prophets of the 'American Dream' blame the victim for not 'succeeding' and degrade the proud history of black working people who have struggled long and hard for freedom from the chains of racist oppression."

Columbia University professor Manning Marable, a leading figure in the social-democratic Committees of Correspondence, opposed the Million Man March at

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Reuters

### Sinister demagogue Louis Farrakhan addresses 1995 Million Man March.

the time. But in "The Politics of Hip Hop" (*Along the Color Line*, March 2002), Marable complains of the refusal of "the liberal integrationist, middle class black establishment" to "engage in a constructive political dialogue with the hip hop nation" and enthuses over the NOI:

"The Nation of Islam has understood for decades that black culture is directly related to black politics. To transform an oppressed community's political behavior, one must first begin with the reconstruction of both cultural and civic imagination."

It is an indictment of the "black establishment" that they have written off a generation of black youth. But here Marable retails the discredited notions of the '60s cultural nationalists. "Black art initiates, supports and promotes change," wrote Ron Karenga in 1967, for whom this was an explicit renunciation of the need for the economic and political liberation of blacks. In a retort applying equally well to Marable today, black scholar Robert Allen exposed the real meaning of this program in *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* (1969):

"It has allowed a passive retreat into 'blackness' on the part of some of those who call themselves revolutionaries. These so-called black revolutionaries measure their militancy by how much 'black awareness' they have or how 'bad' they can talk. Verbal militance thus replaces action, and the net result is passive nonresistance to oppression."

Farrakhan's alternative to the fraud of liberal integrationism is to peddle segregationist bigotry so that he and his coterie of like-minded petty-bourgeois followers can gain the exclusive "right" to exploit the ghetto for themselves. The "self-respect" he offers is the misogyny of a husband forcing his wife to walk ten feet

behind him, and his "race pride" comes in the form of vindictive denunciations of Jewish, Arab and Asian shopkeepers as "bloodsuckers."

The idea of "black capitalism"—predicated on the possibility of consolidating a significant black bourgeoisie in racist America—is both reactionary and utopian. But it expresses the outlook of that small layer of black entrepreneurs like Russell Simmons of the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network (HSAN), who have "made it." The glorification of criminality not infrequently promoted in Simmons' productions is but the flip side of Farrakhan's appeals for "atonement"—both accept the racist stereotype of the ghetto poor as a criminal underclass. "Many people who are racist don't even know it. Part of our struggle is to take our advantage of that—move that racism around, use it for your business, your objectives," exhorts Simmons in a 2002 interview with Marable. This attitude parallels what Ishmael Reed observed among some Bay Area rappers who "come across as cynical, amoral capitalists who know what turns on their white suburban audience. This audience seems to need their 'n----' fix" (*Los Angeles Times*, 3 February 2002).

### Black Oppression and the Bankruptcy of Liberalism

Marable's real perspective is Democratic Party pressure politics. Thus, he applauds "respected rappers" who "emphasized the need to mobilize artists around progressive goals, such as supporting voter education and registration campaigns." In fact, Marable sits on the board of HSAN, itself nothing other than a vehicle to hustle the "hip-hop generation" vote for the Democratic Party. HSAN works closely with bourgeois politicians like presidential hopeful Al Sharpton, who has sought at every opportunity to channel ghetto anger against cop and fascist terror into the confines of bourgeois electoralism.

Kelley also partakes of the mood of defeat in promoting the use of the "N" word in hip-hop music, justifying this with the grotesque implication that the use of the word is actually an expression of class consciousness. Kelley argues that the use of the "N" word in hip-hop "speaks to a collective identity shaped by class consciousness, the character of inner-city space, police repression, poverty, and the constant threat of intraracial violence." He concludes:

"In fact, N---a is frequently employed to distinguish urban black working-class males from the black bourgeoisie and African Americans in positions of institutional authority. Their point is simple:

the experiences of young black men in the inner city are not universal to all black people, and, in fact, they recognize that some African Americans play a role in perpetuating their oppression.... By linking their identity to the 'hood' instead of simply skin color, gangsta rappers implicitly acknowledge the limitations of racial politics."

However, the "N" word does not denote the wage slaves of the working class, but the chattel slaves of the old South. Black working-class males (and females) who identify with the word objectively deny their historic class interests and social power as *workers* and will never transcend "the limitations of racial politics." Far from being a sign of a subversive assault on the language of oppression, the pervasive use of the slave masters' epithet by black youth reflects a profound, if unconscious, demoralization and self-hatred, an internalization of the demeaning view of black people propagated by the capitalist rulers and the mass media. Its use represents a *retreat* from the fight against racism and within the working class can only offend and divide.

Oppression oppresses—when not combatted, it is internalized and re-directed against others among the oppressed. Motown groups like the Temptations could at least sing about when "there's plenty of work and the bosses are paying" in 1965's "Since I Lost My Baby." Rap can sometimes capture the misery of life in racist



Wide World

**Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), 1967. Reactionary logic of cultural nationalism: Jones built black capitalist political machine and in 1968 colluded with police to quell Newark riots and mobilized followers to break teachers strike.**



Reuters

HSAN founder Russell Simmons (second from right) and rapper Sean "P. Diddy" Combs (far right) alongside Democratic Party politicians at NYC protest against Rockefeller drug laws. Black nationalists, liberals view hip-hop as vehicle to mobilize the youth vote for capitalist candidates.

America, but all too much of it also glorifies backward lumpen consciousness. Retrograde language and the social attitudes it betrays not only are an expression of the reactionary ideology with which the ruling class justifies the all-sided oppression endemic to capitalist class society, whether of black people, women, gays or immigrants, but also reinforces that oppression. This finds expression not only in the widespread use of the "N" word but also in anti-gay and anti-woman bigotry. Hip-hop albums are littered with songs—from Jay-Z's "Big Pimpin'" to Ludacris's "Move Bitch"—referring to women in the most vilely

derogatory and misogynous terms.

Black working-class women are triply oppressed under American capitalism, often relegated to the lowest-paying jobs with little opportunity for advancement and demonized by the racist rulers as "welfare cheats" and "irresponsible" unwed mothers. Perhaps the most extreme form of capitalism's exploitation and degradation of women is prostitution. So it is symptomatic of his acceptance of the inviolability of the rule of capital that Kelley argues in *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!* (1997) that a prostitute is "resisting what would otherwise be her fate in an increasingly service-oriented, low-wage economy with shrinking opportunities for working-class ghetto residents." Only in a planned economy under a workers government can women be freed from the isolation and drudgery of the family as well as its accompaniment—sex as a commodity. Won to the communist program, black women will be in the forefront of the struggle against all aspects of capitalist oppression.

The grotesque notion that "reclamation" of the "N" word ameliorates racial oppression speaks to the political bankruptcy of the liberal program of many of the prominent black intellectuals like Dyson and Kelley. They can offer no way forward, only idealistic moralism, and it comes at the cost of disarming black youth confronted by a vicious, hostile society. Comparing such types to Booker T. Washington, a black apologist for Jim Crow and accommodation to the racist status quo in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one comrade observed in our pre-conference discussion:

"These latter-day Booker T.'s have no solution to black oppression so instead they are reduced to seeking their bonafides by defending the 'flexible' use of the word, which inflexibly denotes a people relegated to second-class status." As the comrade stressed, "For us the fight for black liberation is key to proletarian revolution in the U.S. All our comrades are women's liberationists and all our comrades are black liberationists."

### American Workers Revolution Needs Black Leadership!

The overwhelming feeling of powerlessness that weighs down on ghetto youth stems not mainly from the absence of objective opportunities for social struggle but especially from the betrayal of struggle by self-proclaimed black leaders and the existing trade-union leadership, whose first loyalty is to the capitalist profit system. The refusal of the misleaders of organized labor to wage any struggle on behalf of the ghetto and barrio poor has contributed not only to the increased destitution and despair in the inner cities but also to the devastation of the trade unions.

Today, the conditions of life for working people are under increasing assault as the result of a contracting economy and the post-9/11 drive for "national unity." The situation cries out for a class-struggle fight for *all* workers and the poor—for free, quality, integrated education, for decent medical care and housing, for jobs for all. Despite the hardening of segregation in American society and the erosion of union strength over the last two decades, black workers remain integrated into strategic sectors of the industrial proletariat, including in such basic services as health care, urban transit and longshore. But to mobilize that social power in a struggle to break the material chains of exploitation and oppression requires a political struggle to break the ideological chains that bind labor and minorities to the agencies of the capitalist oppressor, chiefly the Democratic Party. As comrade Cane said in a presentation to the Bay Area Spartacus Youth Club last year:

"If we are to be the best defenders of the ghetto poor, the best fighters against the prevailing conditions grinding down a generation of black youth, we must face reality squarely and combat every aspect of lumpen culture that retards forward movement of the working class. The black question is the decisive question facing the American workers revolution—the black ghetto cannot be separated out from it. Our party must sink deep roots into the working class and develop a communist worker cadre. Through the black component of this

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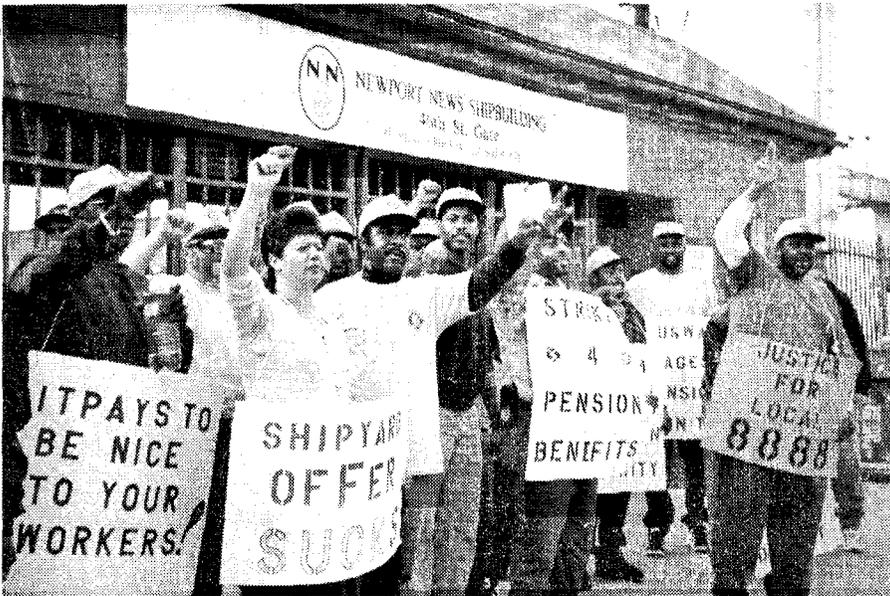
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WV Photo

During 1999 U.S. imperialist bombing of Serbia, integrated Newport News, Virginia shipyard workers shut down production of aircraft carriers.

worker cadre we seek to organize and lead the ghetto masses in a forward march against the main enemy—the capitalist exploiters. The task of revolutionary activity is to rally the broad mass of society, the widest layers, around the only revolutionary class, the working class. And by doing so isolate the capitalists, expose them as social parasites, challenge their position of power and finally remove them from the same.”

The October Revolution of 1917, led by the Bolshevik Party of V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky, was the greatest act of social liberation in all history. In placing the multinational working class of Russia in power, it opened the door to the emancipation of women, the many oppressed nationalities and the long-suffering Jewish people. In doing so, it served as a beacon to the exploited and oppressed around the world. “Everything new on the Negro question came from Moscow,” wrote American Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon, “after the Russian Revolution began to thunder its demand throughout the world for freedom and equality for all national minorities, all subject peoples and all races—for all the despised and rejected of the earth.”

To lead that revolution to fruition, the Bolsheviks had to forge a party free of any manifestation of the backwardness and bigotry infecting the proletariat. Following the revolution, the workers government could begin to lift the entire population out of the material poverty and corresponding cultural mire brought on by the old order of reaction and oppression. Unlike in the former Russian tsarist empire, a prison house of nations into which non-Russian nationalities were forcibly assimilated, in the U.S.

the segregation of black people greases the wheels for the enslavement of the proletariat as a whole. America is a racist nightmare for black people, to which the sordid history of the “N” word is testament.

But the racial barriers erected by the capitalist rulers to keep black people “in their place” and to divide black and white workers can be surmounted—in the course of class struggle. In the mass united-front anti-Klan mobilizations we have built over the years drawing on the social power of the trade unions, we

have sought to bring to life the connection between labor’s fight and the fight for black freedom. When some ten thousand trade unionists, youth, black people and other minorities came out to ride the KKK race-terrorists out of New York City in October 1999, it was a powerful display of the social power of the working class standing at the head of all the oppressed.

We seek to build a Bolshevik party in the United States—a multiracial party that fights for the liberation of the proletariat and all the oppressed. Black workers, specially oppressed in racist America and correspondingly harboring fewer illusions in bourgeois “democracy,” will play a central role in this vanguard party and serve to link the anger of the downtrodden ghetto masses to the cause of the proletariat. Only a party of the Bolshevik type can lead the working class to power, smashing the social basis for racial oppression and ushering in a world in which the “N” word and all the other legacies of slavery are consigned to the scrap heap of history. As we wrote in the International Communist League “Declaration of Principles and Some Elements of Program” (*Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 54, Spring 1998): “The victory of the proletariat on a world scale would place unimagined material abundance at the service of human needs, lay the basis for the elimination of classes and the eradication of social inequality based on sex and the very abolition of the social significance of race, nation and ethnicity.” ■



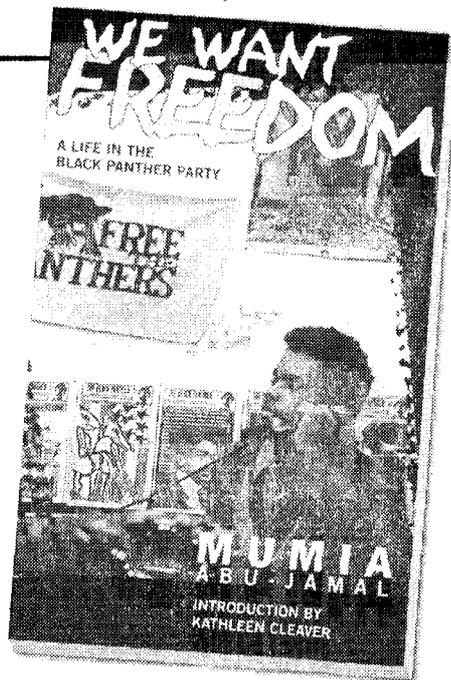
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October 1999: Trade unionists were backbone of our NYC mobilization to stop KKK race-terrorists, giving taste of social power needed to shatter capitalist system of exploitation and racist oppression.

# WE WANT FREEDOM

## A Life in the Black Panther Party

A Book by Mumia Abu-Jamal



### A Review by Paul Cone

"FOR ME, POLITICAL life began with the Black Panther Party.

"When an older sister named Audrea handed me a copy of *The Black Panther* newspaper around the spring of 1968 my mind was promptly blown. It was as if my dreams had awakened and strolled into my reality.

"I read and reread the issue, tenderly fingering each page as if it were the onion-skinned, tissue-like leaf of a holy book. My eyes drank in the images of young Black men and women, their slim and splendid bodies clothed in black leather, their breasts bedecked with buttons proclaiming rebellion, resistance, and revolution.



COC Productions

Mumia Abu-Jamal

"I almost couldn't believe my eyes as I scanned photos of armed Black folks proclaiming their determination to fight or die for the Black Revolution.

"It would be some months before I would formally join something called the Black Panther Party, but, in truth, I joined it months before, when I saw my first *Black Panther* newspaper.

"I joined it in my heart.

"I was all of fourteen years old."

*We Want Freedom* is a firsthand account of life in the Black Panther Party (BPP) by death row political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. The story Jamal tells is that of the Panthers' foot soldiers, the very young men and women, like himself, who devoted their lives to the cause of revolutionary struggle against black oppression. Jamal dedicates this book in part "To those young idealistic souls who wore the black and the blue. To those who sold papers in the dead of night, in smoky bars, and in the freezing grips of the wind (especially in the East). To those loving women and sensitive men who rose from their beds at five a.m. to prepare hot breakfasts for schoolchildren from coast to coast."

Jamal's book captures the finest qualities that are embodied in militant fighters for the oppressed and exploited. Mumia recalls:

"The days were long.

"The risks were substantial.

"The rewards were few.

"Yet the freedom was hypnotic. We could think freely, write freely, and act freely in the world.

"We knew that we were working for our people's freedom, and we loved it.

"It was the one place in the world that it seemed right to be."

Thanks to this book, the many young black men and women whom the FBI warned about "succumbing to revolutionary teachings" are no longer "nameless" and "faceless" as the racist exploiters have tried to make them.

*We Want Freedom* tells the story of the Black Panther Party's origins and subsequent destruction less than a decade later through the vicious COINTELPRO (Counter-Intelligence Program) campaign, inflamed by internal factionalism. Jamal gives personal reminiscences of the Philadelphia chapter, of which he was a founding member and Lieutenant of Information. Jamal describes with pride and passion the free breakfast and other community programs with which the Panthers sought to "serve the people." He tells of how the Black Panthers defied the racist rulers by expressing solidarity with the Vietnamese and Cuban Revolutions, including their bold offer to send troops to fight alongside the Vietnamese against bloody U.S. imperialism.

Most compelling in this powerful book

## Free Mumia! Abolish the Racist Death Penalty!

are Jamal's accounts of the young men and especially women, born of poverty in the hellish American ghettos, who joined the fight for black freedom. There was Regina Jennings, a drug-addicted 16-year-old who after hopping a plane in Philadelphia stormed into the Oakland office demanding to join the party—which took her in a few days later and helped her kick her habit. Jamal quotes Naima Major, who as a 17-year-old National Negro Scholar shunned college to travel to Oakland to join the Panthers. "Devoted to the black revolution and the ten point program, I commenced with baby in sling to doing the hard community work required of all Panthers, organizing poor women like myself, planning and supporting free schools, writing letters for people who couldn't write, demanding decent housing for people who were afraid of the landlord, helping get the newspaper out, health cadres, food cadres, you name it. Did some dangerous work too, and studied Hegel, Marx, Lenin, Fanon, Mao like a religious zealot."

*We Want Freedom* provides a riveting account of the campaign of terror leveled at Jamal and his comrades by the FBI and cops, who were determined to destroy the Panthers by any means necessary. Mumia devotes a chapter to the FBI's deadly COINTELPRO, noting, "The Bureau used its enormous power, influence, and contacts to intimidate politicians. It used the omnipresent press to hound people out of their jobs. It sabotaged allegedly free elections. It destroyed marriages. It shattered families. It fomented violence between political and social adversaries."

With characteristic modesty Jamal says not a word about his own fight for life and freedom against the racist frame-up that keeps him in the shadow of death on Pennsylvania's death row. Yet on every page of *We Want Freedom* the reader can see why the government has targeted this man for so long. Jamal was convicted in 1982 on frame-up charges of killing Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner on 9 December 1981. From the moment of his arrest, the prosecution sought to hang Jamal with his BPP background. The cover photograph of *We Want Freedom* comes from a January 1970 *Philadelphia Inquirer* interview with Jamal, then a 15-year-old Black Panther Party spokesman. The interview was used by the prosecution as exhibit number one for Jamal's execution. As Jamal recalled in the 1990 Partisan Defense Committee video, *From Death Row, This Is Mumia Abu-Jamal*, "The word Black Panther means different things to different people, depending on their perspective, depend-

**1969: Chicago police and FBI brutally killed Panther leaders Fred Hampton (inset) and Mark Clark. Blood-soaked mattress on which Hampton was sleeping (right).**



ing on their history, depending on their political orientation. The prosecutor knew that exceedingly well.... I saw when it hit the jury, it was like a bolt of electricity."

To secure the death sentence for Jamal, prosecutor Joseph McGill inflamed the nearly all-white jury with the grotesque lie that Jamal's membership in the Panthers as a teenager proved he was a committed cop killer who had been planning to kill a cop for 12 years. As readers of this book will see, and as confirmed by Mumia's own COINTELPRO files, it was the kill-crazy Feds and Philly cops who planned to get Jamal "all the way back then"—i.e., from 1 May 1969, when he and his comrades made their first public appearance in a rally outside the State Building in Philadelphia to demand freedom for imprisoned Panther leader Huey P. Newton.

### The Frame-Up of Jamal

*Mumia Abu-Jamal is an innocent man!* His case is a textbook example of a classic racist political frame-up. For three years both Pennsylvania state courts and federal courts have refused to even consider testimony from Arnold Beverly that he, not Jamal, shot and killed officer Faulkner, as well as a mountain of supporting evidence. They have also rejected evidence discovered over two years ago: the sworn account of court stenographer Terri Maurer-Carter of a conversation she overheard in the courthouse where Mumia was tried. In that conversation, judge Albert Sabo, who sentenced Jamal to death, declared in regard to Jamal's case, "I'm going to help 'em fry the n----r."

With this vulgar promise, "king of death row" Sabo speaks not just for himself but for this country's racist rulers, who waged a bloody war of disruption, frame-up and extermination against the Panthers and other radical black activists. A directive from FBI headquarters ad-

vised its agents that since the "purpose ... is to disrupt... it is immaterial whether facts exist to substantiate the charge." In 1968, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover vowed, "The Negro youth and moderate[s] must be made to understand that if they succumb to revolutionary teachings, they will be dead revolutionaries." Under the ruthless COINTELPRO vendetta 38 Panthers were killed and hundreds more railroaded to scores of years in prison hellholes.

The young men and women Mumia describes lived with the awareness that every day could be their last. After Fred Hampton and Mark Clark were assassinated in a hail of bullets in the early morning hours of 4 December 1969, Mumia was one of a contingent of Philadelphia Panthers who drove to Chicago for the commemoration. Jamal recalls: "When we arrived at the office, we were walked over to the apartment and saw the holes making the walls look like Swiss cheese. We saw the mattress, caked with blood, where Fred and his fiancée lay that fateful night, the bullet holes lining the walls, tactile markers of government hate."

Four days later the cops raided BPP headquarters in Los Angeles, bombarding the Panthers with thousands of rounds of ammunition over five hours. The cops especially wanted to kill Geronimo ji Jaga (Pratt). A decorated Vietnam vet, Geronimo's military knowledge had saved his life and his comrades—and the FBI and California rulers would make him pay. Before his release in 1997, Geronimo spent 27 years in prison on the lying testimony of a cop informant, Julius Butler, for a killing in Santa Monica, California that the cops and FBI knew Geronimo didn't commit. FBI wiretap logs showed Geronimo was 400 miles away from the scene of the shooting, at a



Ligato/Philadelphia Bulletin

**Philadelphia: Black Panthers dragged onto the street, forced to strip and searched at gunpoint in 1970 raid under notorious police commissioner, later mayor, Frank Rizzo.**

Black Panther Party leadership meeting in Oakland. From the prosecutors' office, to the august judges' chambers up to the governor's mansion, many high-ranking California officials in the 1970s-80s built and maintained their careers on the war against the Panthers and the frame-up of Geronimo, who was then America's foremost class-war prisoner.

Jamal quotes Philadelphia Panther leader Reggie Schell describing one of the cop raids on the Philly Panther offices. Mumia recalls his arrest and days in jail for jaywalking on his way to sell the *Black Panther* newspaper in the streets of Oakland; how the Feds were waiting for him as he was about to board a plane for California, only to be frustrated when their search revealed he had nothing that could even be claimed to be a weapon. (Jamal was once reprimanded by a Panther cadre for falling asleep during guard duty.) Mumia also cites an account by L.A. Panther Flores Forbes of frequent "faux attacks" by the LAPD, complete with hovering police helicopters designed to shatter the nerves of individual Panthers: "The house started to rattle. The trees in our yard and across the street started to swirl." And, as Jamal describes, the cops had their own special targets. One of those in L.A. was Paul Redd, a talented artist whose highly praised work graced the pages of the *Black Panther* newspaper. When the LAPD realized who he was upon arrest, they broke the fingers of his right hand.

Without doubt Jamal, identified in the FBI files as one of the top three leaders in the Philadelphia BPP, was a prime target of Frank Rizzo's racist thugs in blue. The Feds decided to open a dossier on Jamal when he participated in the 1 May 1969 "Free Huey" demonstration. From that day on a steady stream of memoranda, letters, "airtels" and "nitels" between FBI headquarters and its field agents tracked Mumia's every political move.

Even with much of the text blacked out

and many documents withheld outright, over 700 pages of FBI files obtained for Jamal by the Partisan Defense Committee make it clear that the FBI and cops were on a mission to use any "dirty trick" to silence the man who would become known as the "voice of the voiceless." Using its wiretaps, its informants and police spies, the government relentlessly pursued him at demonstrations, newspaper sales, political meetings and fundraisers—even at picnics. They knew when he was to leave town and when he was to return, intercepting him as he boarded a flight and engaging in physical observation of returning flights. The Feds interrogated school officials, contacted employers, harassed Jamal's mother.

In one typical four-week period in the summer of 1969, the FBI files include: a memorandum dated August 11 reporting that Jamal spoke at a Hiroshima Day rally in Philadelphia; a Civil Disobedience Unit (CDU) report on the same rally, also dated August 11; two "airtels" to the FBI director, dated August 14; an August 14 "FBI Notice"; an August 19 "Government Memorandum," again on the Hiroshima Day rally; and a September 4 FBI report on a Socialist Workers Party campaign rally where Mumia "spoke against the 'pigs,'" followed by a cover note dated September 5 specifically identifying "Wesley Cook, aka Wes Mumia."

The files are replete with clippings of *Black Panther* articles written by Jamal and reports of his public speeches. It was Jamal's noticeable talent as a young revolutionary journalist and propagandist that attracted so much FBI attention. A 24 October 1969 report on Jamal urged that he be placed under high-level surveillance: "In spite of the subject's age (15 years), Philadelphia feels that his continued participation in BPP activities in the Philadelphia Division, his position in the Philadelphia branch of the BPP, and his past inclination to appear and speak at public gatherings, the subject should be

included on the Security Index."

Jamal was targeted for more than surveillance. His name was placed on two government hit lists: The FBI's Security Index (SI) of those deemed a "threat" to "national security" and the Administrative Index (ADEX) of those to be rounded up and thrown into concentration camps in case of a "national emergency." Many of the documents bear the notation "Smith Act," the notorious "thought crimes" legislation under which first Trotskyists and then Communist Party members were sent to prison for "advocating" revolution.

Despite the FBI's acknowledgement that Jamal "has not displayed a propensity for violence" and was not once found with a gun throughout this period of intense surveillance, the files regularly labeled him "Armed and Dangerous"—a license for the cops and G-men to shoot first and ask questions later. And they finally did shoot him, in the early morning of 9 December 1981. History is not a conspiracy, but there are conspiracies in history. We are not saying that the cops who were at the scene the night of



Temple University

**George Fencel (right), head of Philadelphia Police Department's Civil Disobedience Unit, which assisted FBI COINTELPRO operation against Panthers.**

9 December 1981 knew Jamal was going to be there. But they were there and had the chance they had long awaited. The subsequent trial, conviction and death sentence was a political frame-up pure and simple, the culmination of a decade of efforts to "neutralize" Jamal.

The FBI records are only the tip of the iceberg. During the 1960s and '70s the Philly cops kept their own voluminous files—none of which have been made available—on some 18,000 people! There was extensive collusion between the FBI and Frank Rizzo's Philadelphia Police Department. Document after document in the FBI files lists as its source unidentified

cops from the CDU or Intelligence Division. According to Rizzo's biographer, S.A. Paolantonio, the Philadelphia CDU led by George Fencel "had a steady stream of informers paid by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. In fact, when the FBI began its counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO), the agency used Fencel's CD squad as a model."

Though COINTELPRO supposedly ended in the mid 1970s, the government vendetta against Geronimo, Dhoruba bin Wahad, Assata Shakur, Sundiata Acoli, Mondo we Langa, Ed Poindexter, Mtulu Shakur, Sekou Odinga, Delbert Orr Africa and many others never ended. As much as the prosecutors, Democratic and Republican governors, press corps and judges try to pass off Jamal's case as a simple criminal trial, its real basis is captured in a brief exchange in the trial transcript. Anyone who has sat through a criminal trial is aware that it is highly irregular for the judge to stop the proceedings to answer the phone. In June 1982, when Jamal was on trial for his life, the proceedings were interrupted just as the prosecution's key witness, prostitute Cynthia White, was about to testify:

"THE COURT: Just a minute. Fencel is on the phone.

"MR. MCGILL: Off the record.

"(A discussion was held off the record.)

"THE COURT: Did you work it out?"

"MR. MCGILL: There's no problem."

As the Partisan Defense Committee wrote in a special Jamal campaign issue of *Class-Struggle Defense Notes* (No. 10, April 1989):

"The death sentence for Mumia is the long arm of COINTELPRO terror reaching into the courtroom. This time they got him. Mumia has been sentenced to death because of his political beliefs, because of what he wrote, because of what he said, because of who he 'associated' with—and because of who he is."

The capitalist rulers want to see Mumia dead because they see in this eloquent journalist, MOVE supporter and former Panther spokesman the spectre of black revolution, defiant opposition to their system of racist oppression. They seek to execute Jamal in order to send a chilling message to all those who challenge vicious cop repression in the ghettos, who stand up for labor's rights on the picket lines, who protest imperialist mass murder from the Balkans to Iraq. Trade unionists, opponents of racist oppression and all opponents of the Jim Crow death penalty must mobilize to *Free Mumia Now!*

### The Best of a Generation of Black Militants

"The average young man or woman in the Black Panther Party was between seventeen and twenty-two years old,

lived in a collective home with other Panthers, worked long and hard days (and sometimes nights) doing necessary Party work without pay, and owned nothing.... The average Panther rose at dawn and retired at dusk and did whatever job needed to be done to keep the programs going for the people, from brothers and sisters cooking breakfast for the school kids, to going door-to-door to gather signatures for petitions, to gathering clothes for the free clothing program, to procuring donated supplies from neighboring merchants."

*We Want Freedom* is a must read, not only as a necessary aid in mobilizing support for Jamal's fight for freedom. We pay tribute to this book on the only radical black organization in our times that didn't crawl to the capitalist oppressors. At the same time, we state our fundamentally counterposed proletarian revolutionary program as distinct from even the most "just" nationalism, as V.I. Lenin, leader of the October 1917 Russian Revolution, put it.

The Black Panther Party represented the best of a generation of black militants who courageously stood up to the racist ruling class and its kill-crazy cops. They embodied the hopes and aspirations for black freedom of an entire generation who sought to strip away the sense of powerlessness and hopelessness of the oppressed black masses, particularly in relation to the impunity of the cops in gunning down blacks on the streets of Oakland, and throughout America. But, from its inception, the BPP was based upon a contradiction: on the one hand, a subjective identification with the most oppressed black people (the working poor, the unemployed, welfare recipients, etc.), whose fundamental oppression under capitalism clearly could not be solved or even much alleviated by a few small and reversible liberal reforms; and on the other hand, the ideology of black nationalism, which denied the class basis of society and social struggle and opened the door to the BPP becoming merely another pressure group seeking to play the ethnic politics game of competing for a bigger "slice of the pie" within the status quo.

Black people in the U.S. are not a nation. They are an oppressed race-color caste segregated at the bottom of society, while forming a strategic part of the working class. The fight for black freedom is the strategic question of the American revolution. There will be no social revolution in this country without the united struggle of black and white workers led by their multiracial vanguard party.

As revolutionary Marxists we stand on the perspective of revolutionary integration. Counterposed to liberal integration—the false view that blacks can achieve

social equality within the confines of racist American capitalism—revolutionary integrationism is premised on the understanding that black freedom requires smashing the capitalist system and constructing an egalitarian socialist society. As we elaborated in "Black and Red—Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom," adopted at the founding conference of the Spartacist League in 1966:

"The vast majority of black people—both North and South—are today workers who, along with the rest of the American working class, must sell their labor power in order to secure the necessities of life from those who buy labor power in order to make profit.... Ultimately their road to freedom lies only through struggle with the rest of the working class to abolish capitalism and establish in its place an egalitarian, socialist society.

"Yet the struggle of the black people of this country for freedom, while part of the struggle of the working class as a whole, is more than that struggle. The Negro people are an oppressed race-color caste, in the main comprising the most exploited layer of the American working class.... Because of their position as both the most oppressed and also the most conscious and experienced section, revolutionary black workers are slated to play an exceptional role in the coming American revolution."

—reprinted in *Spartacist* No. 10, May-June 1967

### The Black Panther Party

Formed in 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, the BPP was a direct response to the failure of the liberal, pro-Democratic Party civil rights movement to seriously challenge the nature of black oppression when that movement went North in the mid '60s. It was clear to all that the ghetto uprisings of the mid 1960s

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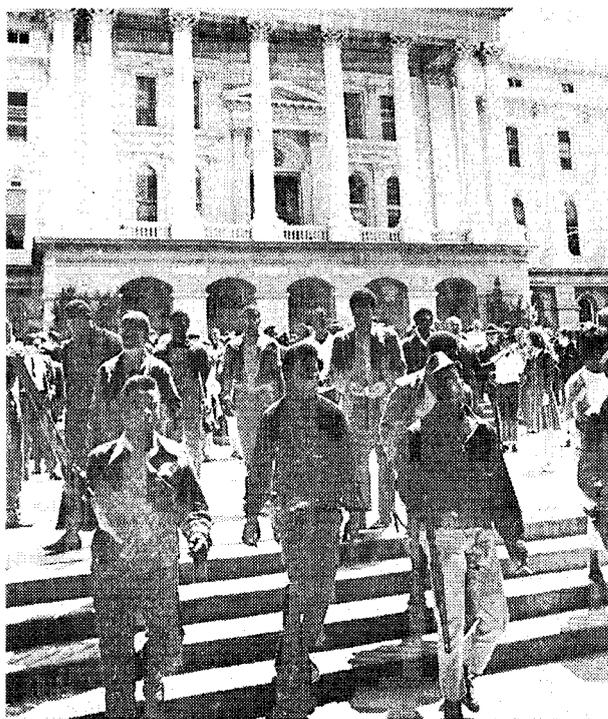
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**Panthers hold armed demonstration against Mulford gun control bill in Sacramento, May 1967.**

marked the end of the old civil rights movement, with the most militant blacks embracing the call for "Black Power" seeking to find a way out of the racist hell of American capitalism. Jamal is explicit: "The Black Panther Party came into existence, not to support or supplement the major civil rights organizations, but to supplant them." He describes "ghetto youth who had simmered under the glare of overtly racist cops. They longed to join the swelling Civil Rights movement, but had not because they could not bear to join any group which would meekly submit to racist violence, as demanded by some civil rights organizations." Many of these militants were inspired by Malcolm X. Although not a Marxist basing himself upon working-class struggle, Malcolm advocated armed black self-defense against racist attacks, and opposed the deceitful, venal and treacherous Democratic and Republican politicians.

The Panthers gained notoriety for their armed police monitoring patrols, in which Panthers bearing loaded weapons, law books, cameras and tape recorders would approach traffic stops to make sure the cops didn't brutalize their black victims and that the latter were informed of their rights. In April 1967, the Panthers held an armed rally in Richmond, California, to protest the killing of 22-year-old Denzil Dowell by a white deputy sheriff and faced the cops down. National attention came later that year when, demonstrating their defiance of the racist bourgeois order, the Panthers showed up armed at the California state capitol in

Sacramento. The Panthers came to protest the Mulford Bill, which was referred to in the local press at the time as the "Panther bill." Before that it was legal in California to carry a loaded weapon in public as long as it wasn't concealed.

Uncertain of how much support the Panthers had in the ghetto, the cops at first demurred. But beginning with the wounding and jailing of Newton in October 1967, and gaining steam with the killing of Bobby Hutton in April 1968, local cops and the FBI, operating in many cases with the assistance of "cultural nationalist" groups (for example, the 1969 murder of Los Angeles Panthers by members of Ron Karenga's US organization), launched a coordinated national campaign to wipe out the Panthers. The FBI's J. Edgar Hoover labeled the Panthers the "greatest threat to the internal security of the U.S." To kill Panthers the FBI revived COINTELPRO, the counterintelligence program that was originally implemented in 1956 against the Communist Party, and unleashed the most savage and systematic campaign of racist state terror in modern American history. Some 233 of 295 COINTELPRO actions against black organizations were against the Panthers.

In comparison to other black nationalist organizations of the 1960s, the Panthers sought to organize independently of the Democrats and Republicans. But as eclectic and contradictory radical nationalists, their outlook was variously influenced by the teachings of Malcolm X, Che Guevara, Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao—a grab bag from which to choose

when it suited their current appetites. They were shaped by a unique historical conjuncture both within the U.S. and internationally—a period that saw African nations winning their formal independence, Castro's peasant guerrilla forces toppling the U.S. puppet Batista regime and the heroic Vietnamese battlefield victories against the American military behemoth.

In their public and internal communications, the Panthers compared themselves to Mao's peasant-based guerrilla army in the Chinese civil war and to the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front. In particular, they looked to the writings of Frantz Fanon, a West Indian intellectual and champion of the Algerian independence struggle. Fanon's emphasis on the cathartic role of violence became for the Panthers the basis of their talk of urban guerrilla warfare. Jamal quotes Kathleen Cleaver: Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* became essential reading for Black revolutionaries in America and profoundly influenced their thinking. Fanon's analysis seemed to explain and to justify the spontaneous violence ravaging Black ghettos across the country, and linked the incipient insurrections to the rise of a revolutionary movement."

Rather than recognizing the ghetto outbursts for what they were—the final spasm of frustration and fury in the wake of a movement that had raised great hopes and activated enormous energy only to accomplish little—wishful-thinking leftists saw in the ghetto-police battles the beginning of mass revolutionary violence which presumably had merely to be organized to be made effective. The notion that the ghetto was a base for urban guerrilla warfare was common not only among black nationalists, but was accepted by most of the left. What distinguished the Panthers was their willingness to face jail and even death for this theory.

The ghetto uprisings did not give the black masses a sense of their own power. They did just the opposite. It was black peoples' own homes that were burned down. The cops went on a killing rampage. These proved that police brutality was not an isolated injustice that could be eliminated through militant action. The cops are an essential part of the armed force of the capitalist state; if defeated locally, they came back with the National Guard or Army. To drive and keep out the cops from the ghettos is equivalent to overthrowing the American state. As long as the majority of white workers remained loyal or only passively hostile to the government, black activism could not liberate the ghetto.

Fanon's writings played a significant

part in the Panthers' belief that the lumpenproletariat, especially street-wise ghetto youth, were the vanguard of the American revolution. We warned at the time that "a political movement which isolates itself in a social milieu hostile to normal work-a-day society must become irresponsible, individualistic, and ultimately cynical and contemptuous of the mass of working people" ("Rise and Fall of the Panthers: End of the Black Power Era," *WV* No. 4, January 1972). In the end, the Panthers were destroyed not only by police terror from without but a murderous internal factionalism inflamed by COINTELPRO provocations.

The Panthers never found the only road leading to the destruction of the racist bourgeois order—the multiracial proletariat. As self-described "revolutionary nationalists" the Panthers shared with the predominantly white New Left a rejection of the centrality and strategic social power of the integrated labor movement in the struggle against brutal racial oppression and imperialist war as well as capitalist exploitation.

There was a palpable basis to link the ghetto to the factories to wage a militant struggle against the killer cops. This required a class-struggle leadership of the labor movement. In 1970 the postal workers had the first national strike against the federal government. Auto plants were seething with rebellions. In 1969, the Panthers briefly formed a caucus at the Fremont, California GM plant and even put out a few issues of a plant newspaper. Panther Chief of Staff David Hilliard had been a longshoreman for a while, and his brother June, a party member, was a city bus driver. The Panthers knew there were white workers at a union oil facility whose heads were being beaten by the scabherding cops, workers who took up the Panthers' characterizations of the cops as "pigs." But, instead, the Panthers turned to "community work"—local programs which seek at best to partially ameliorate some of the deprivations of ghetto life without challenging the material basis for black oppression—a substitute for the fight to win the working class to take up the struggle for black freedom. In doing so, they ceded the terrain to the reformist black misleaders and the labor lieutenants of capital, the trade-union bureaucracy.

The genuine radicalism and personal courage of many Panthers were combined with illusions in the reformability of the racist capitalist system. One example is the 1970 Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention, a meeting in Philadelphia called to bring together a variety of left organizations and activists to adopt a "constitution that serves the people, not



Time

**Frantz Fanon. His book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, had strong influence on Panther leaders.**

the ruling class." Jamal attributes its "failure" to the fact that white radicals weren't prepared to make a revolution. Mumia asks: "Were millions of white youth, no matter what they claimed their political or ideological persuasions, really ready to embark on a revolution, one that did not prize whiteness?" This notion of white skin privilege, which was the common coin for the New Left's rejection of the American proletariat as a revolutionary factor, wears pretty thin after 25 years of attacks on the living standards of all workers in the U.S., ushered in by the firing of the entire PATCO air traffic controllers union in 1981, and exemplified by the imprisonment of steel worker Bob Buck and coal miner Jerry Dale Lowe.

The Panthers' ten-point program of mildly liberal reforms called on the government for reparations, wanted the educational system to teach the "true history" of black and oppressed people in this country, and expressed the Panthers' illusions in the United Nations den of imperialist thieves and their victims. Just a few years after the UN's well-known dirty role in the assassination of Congo nationalist leader Patrice Lumumba, the Panthers' program called for a UN-supervised plebiscite for black people to determine "their national destiny." The Panthers also called for an end to police brutality and petitioned for community control of the police, combining liberal illusions over the nature of the bourgeois state with black nationalist illusions that the oppression of black people can be ended through "control" of ghetto institutions.

Even if it could be accomplished, black "control" of the impoverished ghettos could not put an end to the endemic poverty, joblessness, crime, dilapidated housing, broken-down schools and drug addiction born of despair. This requires a massive reallocation of resources and

wealth, which is only possible with the expropriation of the bloodsucking capitalist class as a whole and the creation of a workers state in which those who labor rule—a workers state where production is based on human need, not profits. This can only be accomplished through a socialist revolution to overthrow the capitalist order and its state, which exists to defend the class dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. And only the multiracial working class has the power to do that. Based on its role in producing the wealth of this society, it is only the industrial proletariat which has both the social interest and power to bring down this rotten capitalist order.

The crackdown on the Panthers did not provoke mass ghetto rebellions, but a rapid lurch to the right. Isolated, with repression bearing down on them, the Panthers shifted their focus to legal defense work in an effort to gain the broadest possible support. The Panther alliances with white radicals were not motivated by the realization that American society could only be revolutionized by an integrated working-class movement, but because they sought support for their defense campaign. In 1968 Eldridge Cleaver ran for president on the liberal Peace and Freedom Party ticket. A key role in the rightward degeneration and demise of the BPP was played by the cynical operators of the Communist Party (CP). Beginning in 1969, the CP influenced the Panther leadership in launching a "united front against fascism," an attempt to create an alliance of everyone to the left of the Nixon-Agnew administration on an essentially civil libertarian basis. A few years later, Newton & Co. were talking about the relevance of the black church and black capitalism. In 1973 Bobby Seale ran for mayor as a Democrat and in 1976 Newton joined the NAACP.

In 1971 the Panthers suffered a split between the more overtly reformist, pro-Democratic majority Newton wing and the urban guerrilla warfare Cleaver wing—a split characterized by murderous internal factionalism, and inflamed by COINTELPRO provocations. Both of the factions sent their supporters onto the streets to murder each other. Jamal's book cites Panthers who went underground for safety not just from the state, but from other Panthers.

### **For a Revolutionary Workers Party to Fight for a Workers Government!**

Though the Panthers self-consciously fashioned themselves as a vanguard party, they were not. The Panthers were New Left sectoralists. Their program was that

blacks would liberate blacks, Hispanics would liberate Hispanics, and so on. As opposed to sectoralism, which is a strategy for dividing the ranks of the future proletarian army fighting for state power, a Leninist vanguard party is a tribune of the people, which fights against all aspects of social oppression on the basis of an internationalist revolutionary program.

Jamal describes the Panthers as a woman's party, and gives compelling portraits of women who played leading roles and were the key to running the party in various capacities in spite of the obstacles in their way. However, just because Newton issued a proclamation of the necessity for women's and gay liberation didn't mean that the Black Panther Party was a tribune of the people. The Panthers were heavily influenced by lumpen ideology. Some women chose to leave the Panthers because the male chauvinism was suffocating. This is not to deny the heroic role played by women who chose to remain in the ranks of the Panthers and function as leaders no matter what.

It is impossible to have a program for the liberation of women divorced from a proletarian revolutionary program to abolish the roots of women's oppression: the system of private property in the means of production. The Bolsheviks of Lenin and Trotsky were intransigent fighters for women's liberation as an indispensable part of the fight for the emancipation of the working class from exploitation. The material basis of women's oppression lies in the institution of the family. Without an energetic and implacable struggle for women's equality the proletarian struggle against the rule of capital cannot succeed.

With their military posturings, the Panthers were easy pickings for the mass murderers of U.S. imperialism. You can-



WV Photo

Philadelphia, 14 July 1990: PDC-initiated united-front rally in defense of Jamal.

not build a revolutionary party on the basis of hero-worship and glorification of a street-gang mentality. It is tragic that the Panthers were destroyed by bloody state repression, and there was no revolutionary party sizable enough to win the best of these radical black youth. We tried. In the late '60s and early '70s the Panthers were so sacrosanct in radical circles that any criticism of them was met with shrill accusations of racism. In the face of the widespread hero-worship of Newton, Eldridge Cleaver and other leaders, the Spartacist League polemicized against the Panthers' notion of lumpen vanguardism and argued that black nationalism, even in its most radical form, was a utopian dead end. We also denounced the physical gangsterism against other leftists and challenged the BPP's rightward plunge into the Demo-

cratic Party. In an "Open Letter to the Ranks of the Black Panther Party on the Oakland Elections" (WV No. 18, April 1973), we wrote that we could not give electoral critical support to the Panthers, asking, "How is it that your party, which once claimed to seek a revolutionary transformation of society, can now support candidates who are members of the Democratic Party—the party of war, racism and repression—and run as Democrats yourselves?" We offered that if the BPP broke with both the parties of capital and its own policies of class collaboration we could offer critical support for their election campaign: "We hope that you comrades will recognize the disastrous right turn of the Black Panther Party and will struggle to replace the present BPP line of support for black Democrats, black churches, black cops and black capitalists with a revolutionary working-class perspective."

Despite our political differences, we defended the Panthers against state repression—including after their left cheerleaders had long jumped ship—and we continue to do so today. The Partisan Defense Committee provides monthly stipends to Mondo we Langa, Ed Poin Dexter and Mumia, for whom we have waged a 17-year campaign for his life and freedom, producing pamphlets and a video and introducing his case to unions around the world. We seek to build the revolutionary party that will lead the working class to power through smashing this decrepit, racist capitalist system. In an American workers state, *We Want Freedom* will be given the highest honor in the people's libraries and classrooms. Read this book. ■

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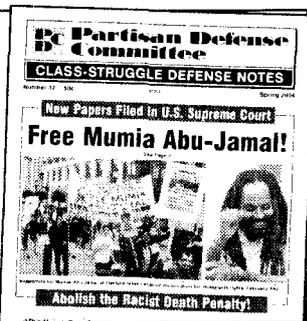
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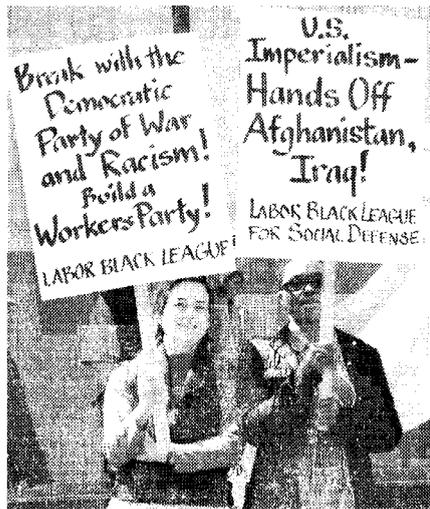
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# Join the Labor Black Leagues!



*The first Labor Black Leagues were formed as a result of the Spartacist League-initiated, 5,000-strong labor/black mobilization that stopped the Ku Klux Klan from marching in Washington, D.C. in November 1982. We stand for mobilizing the masses of minority and working people in militant integrated struggle against the brutal system of racist oppression that is capitalist America. Initiated by and fraternally allied with the Spartacist League, a multiracial revolutionary Marxist organization, the Labor Black Leagues are part of the revolutionary movement of the workers and oppressed against the bosses and for socialism.*



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## If You Stand For—

**1** Full rights for black people and for everyone else in jobs, housing and schools! Defeat the racist assault on affirmative action! For union-run minority job recruitment and training programs! For union hiring halls! Open up the universities to all—for open admissions, free tuition and a full living stipend for all students. Free, quality, integrated public education for all!

**2** A fighting labor movement—picket lines mean don't cross! Defeat police scabberding and strikebreaking through mass pickets and union defense guards! For sit-down strikes against mass layoffs! Fight union-busting; keep the capitalist courts out of the unions! Organize the unorganized, unionize the South! Jobs for all—for a shorter workweek at no loss in pay with full cost-of-living escalator clause! Cops, prison guards and security guards out of the unions!

**3** Fight for women's rights! Defend abortion clinics! Free abortion on demand; free, quality 24-hour childcare! Equal pay for equal work! For free, quality health care for all!

**4** Full citizenship rights for all immigrants; everyone who made it into this country has the right to stay and live decently! Stop deportations! No to racist "English only" laws! Down with anti-Hispanic, anti-Semitic, anti-Arab and anti-Asian bigotry!

**5** Defend the separation of church and state! Full democratic rights for homosexuals! Down with the anti-sex witchhunt—cops and courts out of the bedroom! Down with all laws against consensual activities such as "crimes without victims" like pornography, gambling, drugs and prostitution!

**6** Mass labor/black/Hispanic mobilizations drawing on the power of the unions against the racist terrorists. Stop the Nazis! Stop the KKK!

**7** Abolish the racist death penalty! Free Mumia Abu-Jamal! Free all victims of racist capitalist repression! No faith in the capitalist courts! No to gun control! Defend victims of cop terror and racist police frame-up! No illusions in civilian review boards or community control of the police! Down with the racist and anti-labor "war on drugs"! For decriminalization of drugs! For class-struggle, non-sectarian legal and social defense; support the work of the Partisan Defense Committee!

**8** Unconditional opposition to every attempt to abolish welfare! Down with slave-labor, union-busting "workfare" schemes! Fight any and every attempt of the government to take away or cut back even more social programs such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, public health and aid to education and housing! For a massive program of public works—high-quality integrated housing, schools, libraries, hospitals for the working people and the poor!

**9** Down with the chauvinist poison of protectionism! For international working-class solidarity! Support revolutionary struggles of working people abroad! Defend the deformed workers states—Cuba, Vietnam, China and North Korea—against capitalist restoration and imperialist attack! For proletarian political revolution to oust their Stalinist bureaucracies! For labor action against U.S. imperialist war moves and military adventures! For the right of independence for Puerto Rico! U.S. troops out of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean!

**10** Down with the Democrats and Republicans! For a revolutionary workers party that champions the cause of all the oppressed! Finish the Civil War! Those who labor must rule! For a workers government to take industry away from its racist, incompetent and corrupt owners! Rebuild America on a socialist planned economy!

## —Join the Labor Black Leagues!

Membership pledge is \$3/year unemployed; \$10/year employed.

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Labor Black League for Social Defense  
Box 29497, Oakland, CA 94604

# Racism and Anti-Woman Bigotry

## For Free Abortion on Demand!

We print below a forum given by comrade Karen Cole at Columbia University on March 9, slightly edited for publication.

The right to an abortion is no more than a democratic right to a simple and safe medical procedure. We say it should be free on demand as part of free, quality health care. Providing women with the means for deciding when and if they want to have children is basic to the fight for women's equality. Why is such an issue so explosive in the U.S. today? Allowing women sexual freedom, just like legitimizing homosexual relations and allowing independence to youth in their sexual relations, is a threat to the institution of the family, a bastion of social reaction which, along with organized religion, reinforces authority and conservatism and props up the capitalist system. Any question relating to sex—particularly sex and race—instantly inflames social reaction.

You have to step back and have a historical materialist view to understand how we got here. Otherwise, you are not politically armed to fight against the pseudo-intellectual babble you hear every day in the classroom and from the capitalist media that the cruelties and injustices of society are “inevitable,” that you are inherently at fault for being poor, that competition and war are a given. When you touch the issue of the special oppression of women, you get heavy doses of religious claptrap with words like “morality” and “tradition,” “natural instincts,” and, of course, “family values.” Historical materialism must be studied. Friedrich Engels explained the concept succinctly:

“Marx discovered the law of development of human history: the simple fact, hitherto concealed by an overgrowth of ideology, that mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc.; that therefore the production of the immediate material means of subsistence and consequently the degree of economic development attained by a given people or during a given epoch form the foundation upon which the state institutions, the legal conceptions, art, and even the ideas on religion, of the people



WV Photo

Spartacist contingent at 20 March 2004 demonstration, San Francisco.

concerned have been evolved, and in the light of which they must, therefore, be explained, instead of *vice versa*, as had hitherto been the case.”

—“Speech at the Graveside of Karl Marx” (17 March 1883)

Today, marriage, the family and the social roles defined therein of men, women and children are not *preordained* but must be studied in their *manmade* historical context. Everything about marriage in capitalist class society has to do with “state institutions” and “legal conceptions”—access to health insurance, inheritance, visitation rights, custody rights, Social Security, immigration rights and property ownership rights in general. We live in the epoch of imperialist decay where in America, alongside unprecedented wealth for a few, there is mass unemployment, exploding prison populations, deteriorating health care, evaporating pensions and Social Security and the slashing of social welfare services. Therefore, we welcome any gains that can be won from this cruelly bigoted system.

Almost every day in the news, another front is opened to challenge women’s

basic rights. When in October the House passed the ban on a seldom-used abortion procedure, grotesquely dubbed “partial-birth abortion” by the anti-abortion bigots, there was a dearth of organized demonstrations by the “pro-choice” feminists and liberals. Predictably, the “pro-choice” liberals launched a court suit, playing into the right-wing’s logic by basing the suit solely on the fact that there is no exception made for saving the life of the mother, which was Clinton’s position.

John Ashcroft’s Justice Department took the cue and has ominously subpoenaed hundreds of private medical records of legal abortions from hospitals and Planned Parenthood clinics. Not only do they want records of any second-trimester abortion that may have had medical complications, but they want the names of doctors who have performed *any* type of abortions in order to further the goal of banning *all* abortions—as part of an unremitting campaign to roll back the hard-fought gains of labor, women and black people that sprang not only from the civil rights movement,

Stop Bipartisan Attack on Women’s Rights!

but go back to the union struggles of the 1930s.

Doctors and nurses who have bravely provided abortion services face murderous attacks from the woman-hating bigots all over the country. In Wichita, Kansas, Dr. George Tiller has been providing abortions for 31 years. Tiller is one of just *four or five* physicians in the *entire* U.S. to offer late-term abortions of “viable” fetuses (however brief and malformed their lives might be) if it will save the life or protect the health of the mother. Such late-term abortions are still legal on the books in most states, but even where it is legal, doctors often won’t perform them. Women fly in from all over to see Tiller. In 1986, a pipe bomb exploded at his clinic. In 1993, Tiller was shot through both arms. His life and the lives of his clinic staff have now been chosen as priority targets by the “right to life” bigots of Operation Rescue, and his clinic is ringed by right-wing fanatics who go through the trash to find personal information about his staff so they can stalk, picket and threaten them. While Clinton was president, seven abortion providers and staff members were assassinated.

### The Working Class Must Lead the Fight for Women’s Rights

Not only are abortion rights besieged, but also the remnants of affirmative action, desegregation of schools and access to welfare. The imperialists’ “war on terror,” which has meant the slaughter of thousands of Iraqis, has also been a war on immigrants, blacks, labor and *anybody* standing up against the status quo. Rod Paige, the Secretary of Education, just called the National Education Association teachers union a “terrorist organization” for not going along with the Bush administration’s assault on public education.

This so-called “war on terror” that is wielded to roll back civil liberties has also targeted women. For example, recently there has been a hue and cry raised over “international sex-trafficking.” The anti-immigrant USA-Patriot Act now sets new penalties for those convicted of “trafficking,” augmenting anti-immigrant legislation and expanding punitive measures set by the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000. These laws increase the already massive immigration-control police apparatus in order to go after anybody deemed deviant. The prostitutes rounded up must arduously prove they are really “victims”—otherwise, they face jail and deportation—and must fink on others to attain asylum.



McCracken/Pensacola News-Journal

**Above: Charred remains of Pensacola, Florida clinic bombed in 1984 by deadly “right to lifers.”**  
**Right: Amherst, New York clinic of Dr. Barnett Slepian, murdered in 1998 for his courageous commitment to women’s right to abortion.**



We’re for decriminalizing prostitution because we’re against all “crimes without victims,” like laws against every other form of consensual sex, as well as gambling, drug use and pornography. Our youth group program back in 1971 said: “Laws against gambling and various sexual practices reflect official puritanism allied to organized religion, which acts as an important ideological pillar of capitalism, convincing the masses there can be no happiness this side of the grave.” We say that the government should get out of the bedrooms. As a general framework, people should be allowed to make their own decisions about what they do with their bodies, as long as it is consensual, and we don’t make judgments on their morals for doing so. Just about everything to do with sex is stifled, perverted and degraded in the name of bourgeois morality and religion.

Democratic rights are indivisible; you can’t defend one without defending them all. But such rights are always limited, temporary and reversible under capitalism and can only be secured through determined class struggle and, finally, through working-class state power. By appealing to and relying on the reactionary bourgeois state in the name of the

Democratic Party, the liberals and feminists and the various reformists who claim to support legal abortion, in fact, have paved the way to defeat after defeat. Every struggle for democratic rights, if it is to lead to the liberation of all the oppressed, must be linked to the struggle for *full independence of the working class from the capitalist state* and the destruction of capitalist class rule. This means we fight for every genuine reform possible by using the methods of class struggle that will transform the working class into a class conscious of its historic mission to liberate humanity.

I want to make this point about the centrality of the working class very concrete. For the last five months, upwards of 60,000 members of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union were on strike or locked out in Southern California, fighting to defend their benefits and wages and against multi-tier pay schemes. The right to health care was a central issue in this strike and one of the reasons this strike was popular and supported by broad sectors of the population.

Women, men, black, white, Latino and Asian workers were determined to hold out and walked picket lines together, fought off scabs and sacrificed their



Reuters

personal well-being to struggle for a decent life. Standing side by side on a picket line in joint action lays the basis for transcending the divisions and prejudices that the ruling class foments every day. The workers were not lacking in determination. Nonetheless, a losing contract was shoved down their throats a couple of weeks ago by the treacherous, pro-capitalist union leadership which played by the bosses' rules.

In fear of the class struggle that would sweep them away in its wake, the union leadership in this country has, for the last several decades, derailed militant strikes with "corporate campaigns" and lawsuits. The workers are disarmed by their misleaders' acceptance of the capitalist system of profit, their acceptance of the labor laws issued by the bosses' government and courts and by their program of class collaboration with the capitalists, expressed chiefly through political support for the Democratic Party. If the UFCW strike had been won by the workers exercising their power to shut down all business as usual, and if broad sections of the multiracial working class had been mobilized to come out in solidarity, then that victory would have done more for the fight for health care, for abortion rights, for gay rights, black and immigrant workers' rights and women's rights than a dozen Democratic Party-dominated rallies in Washington.

Our task is to build the revolutionary anti-capitalist leadership that is so desperately needed. In 1902 the Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin explained in *What Is To Be Done?* that a revolutionary party that can lead the working class to victory must be "the tribune of the people...able to re-

**Democratic president Bill Clinton signs bill gutting welfare in 1996, starving millions of single mothers and their children.**



Lehman/SABA

act to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects...able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth *before all* his socialist convictions and his democratic demands, in order to clarify for *all* and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat."

### **Racism, Class Oppression and "Family Values"**

Let's go back to the time of the passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. It did not come out of the blue. The upsurge in social struggle in America in the 1950s and '60s cracked the reactionary domestic climate of the 1940s and '50s. In the Cold War period, Jim Crow segregation reigned in the South, while hardened segregation in jobs, housing and education existed North and South. Women were forced out of the wartime factories back into a very romanticized, but in reality isolated, existence of home and housework. "Rosie the Riveter," the icon of the women drawn into the wartime factories, received a lot of backlash even during the war. As an example one magazine wrote at that time that working women "are rejecting their feminine roles. They wish to control their own fertility in marriage, and say they never wanted the children they had." Black women continued to work as they always had in the lowest-paid menial jobs.

The workers and youth who made up the foot soldiers of the civil rights movement challenged legal segregation at the same time that the U.S. imperialists were trying to put on a "free world" face to counter the influence of the Soviet Union and to posture before the rest of the world to cover for the racist oppression of American capitalism. The ruling-class rhetoric against "godless communism" was also used to label the proverbial unwed mother as "immoral" and black pregnancy as "uncivilized."

Rickie Solinger, a feminist historian, makes the point in *Wake Up Little Susie* that the Supreme Court of 1973 that ruled on *Roe v. Wade* (which at the time was two-thirds Republican appointees) was already predisposed to legalizing abortion because of the fabricated hysteria about "the population bomb," which really translated into fear of overpopulation of the non-white peoples of the globe. After the uprising in Watts in Los Angeles in August 1965, government hearings claimed that supposed overpopulation would "worsen the United States unemployment problem, greatly increase the magnitude of juvenile delinquency, exacerbate already dangerous race tensions...and further subvert the traditional American governmental system."

Solinger also makes the point that the liberals' appeal for abortion rights based solely on the harm done by "back-alley butchers" fed into the established notion that women are helpless victims who must be saved by the benevolent state. So from the get-go, the official leadership of the mass struggle for the basic democratic right of abortion posed their demand in the context of begging the state to be the protector.

In many ways, access to a safe abortion was most often an economic issue, not a legal issue. One abortion provider wrote about that period: "It had to do with economics...those who could afford it would be off to London or Puerto Rico or Mexico, although even there they'd sometimes run into shabby practices.... Or sometimes another out would be finding and paying psychiatrists to swear she was suicidal; she would jump out the window if the pregnancy continued. And of course in some instances that was absolutely true, and in some instances it wasn't...it was very soon obvious to me that the fundamental issue here about abortion was never legality or illegality but basically whom you knew and how much you could pay" (quoted in Shirley L. Radl, *Over Our Live Bodies*, 1989).

What the liberals have never and will never raise is that the real butcher then and today is the capitalist state. That's what kills poor women. Transforming the fight for abortion rights into a sanitized "pro-choice" movement with the catch phrase "Who decides?" represented a denial of the class and race oppression that makes "choice" meaningless for the masses of impoverished women and youth. NARAL Pro-Choice America, at one time known as the National Abortion Rights Action League, has gone through multiple name changes over the years, and they have consciously deep-sixed the word "abortion" to appease the right-wingers, operating on their terrain and seeking to be as acceptable as possible.

William Saletan's recent book, *Bearing Right*, documents how the liberals and bourgeois feminists of NARAL, NOW [National Organization for Women] and Planned Parenthood have spent 20 years accommodating and backtracking on full abortion rights, lobbying and campaigning, paving the way for one defeat after another. The book, however, buries among the details of failed campaigns the fact that from the beginning the liberals and reformists narrowed their demand to solely *legalizing* abortion in order to preserve access to abortion for *white, middle-class women*. They dumped poor women, and the immediate fruit of this was the 1976 Hyde amendment, supported by Democrats, that denied federal funds for abortions.

Planned Parenthood appealed to the anti-abortion and anti-welfare bigots by raising the argument that it was more expensive for the state to raise an unwanted child than to pay for an abortion. They still lost. Their slavish accommodation to the right wing parallels an equally despicable and racist argument that you see in liberal anti-death penalty literature: that it is more expensive to ex-

ecute a criminal than to give him a life sentence. In America, where racism underpins capitalist rule, the death penalty is a legacy of slavery and represents a genocidal impulse toward the black population. In liberal pro-choice parlance, an "unwanted child" is a code word for "future black criminal."

Since the legalization of abortion, the religious fanatics have only been emboldened by the liberals' embrace of reactionary "family values." In 1992, the media welcomed the ruling in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* because it *didn't* overturn *Roe v. Wade*. What it did do is legalize waiting periods and parental consent laws and opened the floodgates to restricting abortion rights. Rehnquist said: "*Roe* continues to exist, but only in the way a storefront on a western movie set exists: a mere façade to give the illusion of reality.... *Roe v. Wade* stands as a sort of judicial Potemkin Village." We wrote at the time (Saletan mentions this as well) that Planned Parenthood and the ACLU criminally launched the *Casey* suit as a political maneuver calculated to bring on a reactionary decision. The liberals hoped this would heat up the abortion issue and help elect a Democrat. The winner that time was Death Penalty Clinton.

Saletan documents the defeats of the strategy of attempting to elect supposedly "pro-choice" candidates—the fruitless lobbying using PR consultants as if they could somehow hoodwink the right-wing bigots into supporting women's rights. However, he can only posit that the problem with liberals has something to do with bad tactical choices. *Socialist Worker*, the paper of the International Socialist Organization, reviewed the book (27 February), and their main conclusions regarding the feminists are that "we have to stop apologizing for abortion rights and take our movement into the streets." First of all, who's been apol-

ogizing? Only the liberal feminists who hold the same guilt-ridden religious ideology as the right-wingers of blame and sin. What is clouded over is that the liberals and their reformist hangers-on all embrace a common viewpoint—that whether lobbying in Congress or marching in the streets, they can win the capitalist state over to the side of the oppressed.

Saletan's story of the legal battles around abortion in 1990 in Louisiana captures the racism of American liberalism. In the midst of a furious controversy over proposed laws to ban abortion, the state executed Dalton Prejean, a black youth who had spent ten years on death row for killing two people when he was 17 years old. He was brain-damaged and retarded. The barbaric death penalty in the U.S. certainly gives the lie to all the "sanctity of human life" rhetoric that comes up around abortion. Since 1985 half of those executed for killings committed when they were minors have been black.

Saletan makes the point that what resounded on both sides of the abortion issue was the image of Dalton Prejean—the black criminal. Here the bourgeois feminists' resort to reactionary stereotypes of women as helpless victims to sell abortion rights sharply intersected the right-wing anti-abortion forces' defense of "sacred Southern womanhood." "Pro-choice" advocates' focus on the "vulnerable, desperate victims of rape and incest" fed into the racist argument by saying that abortion was the only way to "restore the honor" of women made pregnant by rape.

Everyone knew that raising rape in the South was always used to resurrect the racist myth of the white woman defiled by the black rapist. Saletan writes that even the abortion proponents "detected... the odor of the Scottsboro Boys." While the hardcore "pro-life" fanatics who sought a total ban responded that the so-called "rape" of abortion was as bad or worse than rape by a man, other anti-abortion forces balked at forcing raped women to bear the "stain of their defilement." Governor Buddy Roemer vetoed one bill against abortion because it made no exception for rape and incest and another because it did not adequately "protect" raped women. Nevertheless, feminists portrayed Roemer as a hero for holding out on the rape exception.

### For Free Abortion on Demand!

From the inception of our organization, leading up to the *Roe v. Wade* decision and since then, the Spartacist League has actively campaigned for free abortion on demand; free, quality health care for all;



January 2004 rally in support of UFCW grocery workers strike, Inglewood, California. Defense of health benefits was central goal of five-month strike.

equal pay for equal work; 24-hour child-care and for women's liberation through socialist revolution. We have also fought against forced sterilizations. At the same time, we have insisted on the necessity for the working class through the unions to take up the fight for women's rights. We said that legal abortion was not enough to address the oppression of poor working women.

In the early '70s before the passage of *Roe*, the Socialist Workers Party was the main left group trying to keep the protests for abortion rights within the limits of bourgeois capitalism. Operating through their front group WONAAC (Women's National Abortion Action Coalition), they limited their demands and anybody else's who wanted to work with them to a single slogan, "repeal of all abortion laws." The SWP physically excluded us communists from their self-described non-exclusionary mass actions because to them, the word "unity" really meant an alliance with bourgeois feminists, i.e., the Democratic Party. We fought for a revolutionary working-class program that spoke to the deeply felt *objective* needs of the most oppressed women.

The SWP, like the International Socialist Organization of today (and the ISO's predecessors then, too), had occasional socialist speechifying, while on the ground they built "broad coalitions" (another buzzword for "Welcome all Democrats") so as not to frighten away the state Senators and Congressional representatives—but who was fooling whom? Or, as the saying goes, who is the horse and who is the rider? By 1976, the SWP's women leaders had become organizers for NOW.

Throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, we actively participated in defense of abortion clinics that were under attack by the fascist shock troops of the ruling class. As we locked arms with other pro-abortion defenders around the clinics and sometimes took arrests for simply defending a clinic's right to exist, we argued that you have to organize the social force of labor to defeat the entrenched reactionaries—and all their institutions—from the church to the American Medical Association.

The feminists' strategy of begging the capitalist state has *demobilized* mass militant actions in favor of mass *crawls* to Washington to beg the Democrats for crumbs. To this day, if you can find a clinic, you still have to run the gauntlet of religious hate literature thrown at you. It's always been a sign of the degradation of women's rights that clinics performing abortions, a medical procedure, exist as separate physical facilities apart from

Portland newspaper trumpets 1951 police raids against abortion providers.



hospitals—like having separate clinics for hernia operations. The number of abortion providers in the nation has declined steeply in the last two decades, and the number of hospitals providing abortions has plummeted. Fewer than 2,000 physicians offer abortions; nearly 90 percent of counties in the U.S. have no provider.

### Black Women Workers Fight Triple Oppression

I want to make another point about being a tribune of the people. We are not sectoralists who think every oppressed group should organize independently, as if only women should fight for women's issues or whatever group you may name. As a result of the SL-initiated, 5,000-strong labor/black mobilization that stopped the KKK from marching in Washington, D.C. in 1982, we initiated a transitional organization linked to our revolutionary organization, the Labor Black Leagues. There will be no socialist revolution in America unless the working class takes up the rights of black people, and our task is to build a bridge from the organized working class to the ghettos.

The program of the Labor Black Leagues includes our demands for free abortion, defense of abortion clinics, down with all anti-gay laws, full citizenship rights for all immigrants, as well as defense of the remaining deformed workers states—China, Vietnam, Cuba and North Korea—against capitalist restoration and imperialist attack. The LBLs organize to stop racist cop brutality, like the cop killings of Alberta Spruill and Timothy Stansbury Jr. and are in the forefront of fighting for the freedom of death row political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. We participate in and bring to protests a revolutionary program for *all* the oppressed.

It's no surprise that black women would be wary of any kind of feminist-dominated birth control movement given the liberal feminists' confidence in the

racist capitalist state. The conservative black church, which provides fake comfort in a brutal racist world, also weighs heavily in steering black women away from birth control. The history of racist eugenics theories intertwining with the early birth control movement of Margaret Sanger, continuing through forced sterilizations in the '60s and '70s (horrifyingly known as "Mississippi appendectomies") demonstrates that the experience for poor women, particularly black women, has been a history of all-sided repression.

Scientific research has been applied to increasing the ease and safety of birth control methods, but who benefits from these advances also tells another story about medical technology and capitalism. By 1939 Tennessee, North and South Carolina were funding birth control clinics geared toward coercing poor black women to not have children, while Northern states were still banning contraceptives. In the U.S. in 1990 Norplant was introduced, which is a long-term, surgically implanted contraceptive—certainly more convenient than pills. As soon as it was approved by the FDA, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* published an editorial, "Poverty and Norplant: Can Contraception Reduce the Underclass?" Immediately judges were demanding that Norplant be inserted as a condition for parole for poor women who had been convicted of child abuse. Funds were made available to insert Norplant at public hospitals, but funds for removal were limited.

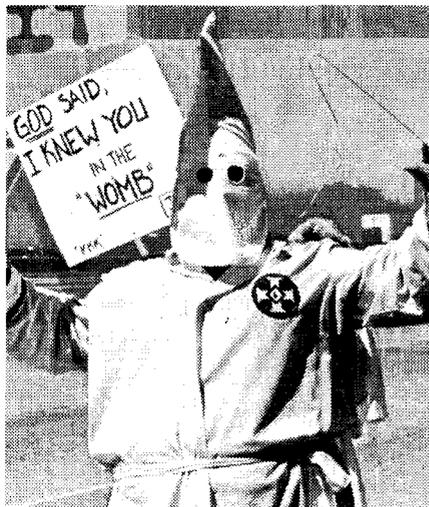
Depo-Provera injections, another more short-term form of birth control that was often forced on black women in apartheid South Africa as a condition for employment, has also been forced on poor women here. These coerced birth control measures have been introduced for black women at the same time that welfare caps have been initiated—denying benefits for any additional children born while receiving welfare. Mind you, there's a five-year time limit for welfare benefits already.

In America, black people are a race-color caste, forcibly segregated at the bottom of society, last to be hired and first to be fired. At the same time, black workers are strategically placed in the working class, but with the de-industrialization of America, more and more they are viewed as an excess population. It is in the interests of the capitalist class to split and weaken the working class by pitting sections against each other, using black people as scapegoats for all the miseries of capitalism. The history of the regulation of so-called "choice" for black women regarding reproduction illustrates what we mean by a race-color caste. Either the state says you *can't* have a child or health care, or the state says you *have no choice* but to have a child, but you *still* can't get health care.

### Religion and Reaction

One front in the attacks against abortion rights has been the issue of "fetal rights." The "Unborn Victims of Violence Act" is awaiting Senate approval granting embryos, fetuses, zygotes, etc. legal status. And although you will be hearing a lot about "Laci's law" in the next period, "fetal rights" laws not only are aimed at overturning the right to abortion but already have been used to charge poor women with homicide. Women are harassed for smoking cigarettes or drinking during pregnancy, while desperately poor women are jailed for using cocaine and their children are seized—in Chicago 95 percent of children in foster care are black. Although women from all classes have always consumed a broad variety of substances, crack cocaine is the drug of *poverty*.

"Crack babies" became the centerpiece of the racist "war on drugs" which esca-



Victoria Hellman

**KKK terrorist brandishes coat hanger outside Dallas abortion clinic.**

**Spartacists at 1992 May Day march in Warsaw, Poland called for workers to fight anti-Semitism and attacks on abortion rights.**



Platforma Spartakusowcow

lated under Clinton. In fact, much of the evidence around crack's effects on fetuses, including stories about "impaired human interaction," have more to do with racist stereotypes of criminals than any scientific evidence. It might seem obvious that threatening a woman who uses drugs with seizing her children and jailing her will keep her from seeking the prenatal care which might improve her and her child's health. Working-class women are denied the means to a decent life, and then criminalized. The population of black women in prison has skyrocketed over the last decade.

I just want to touch on one other aspect of "fetal rights" that exposes how capitalism in its decay can truly be a brake on the development of science and progress in general. That is the controversy around stem cell research, a promising area of medical research which has been denied federal funding and has actually caused scientists to leave the country. Bush's sinister Bioethics Council just put out a report that says that medical research that contributes to lengthening life actually endangers the institution of marriage because people will think twice about saying "till death do us part" if they have to live 100 years.

Religion is not only a set of backward ideas to comfort people in a cruel world and encourage ignorance, but a ruling-class ideology which kills people. AIDS research was set back for years because of anti-gay prejudices, and this contributed to the worldwide explosion of AIDS. We are for the separation of church and state. We reject *any* notion—and they *all* ultimately derive from religion or spiritualism—that a fetus is a human with a "soul."

Unmarried young people are sexually active for many more years today than were previous generations. Youth trying to obtain abortions are already saddled with parental consent laws. The pending federal "Child Custody Protection Act"

makes it criminal for anyone except a parent or legal guardian to take a child across state borders for an abortion. The FDA has now postponed its decision regarding offering the morning-after pill until May because supposedly it needs more data about 16- and 17-year-olds who have used the pills—even though this pill has been available for over two decades elsewhere.

You might expect in rural backwaters of the country where evolution, the foundation of modern biology, can only be taught as an "option" that youth would be forcibly made ignorant. But here in New York City, where the rate of HIV infection has recently been compared to Third World rates, the schools' sex education courses have not been updated for 20 years and the AIDS curriculum has not been updated in 10 years. The same people who oppose funding public health care, welfare and education simply want to tell youth that sex equals death. The AIDS curriculum still states that gay, white men account for the "overwhelming majority" of AIDS cases, despite the fact that blacks and Latinos account for **82 percent** of new HIV/AIDS cases among teenagers. The sex education curriculum was frozen after the hysterical reaction to the "Rainbow" curriculum that included the book, *Heather Has Two Mommies*.

New estimates show that 15- to 24-year-olds account for half of newly diagnosed sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)—more than nine million cases—in 2000. Although the latest figures show a dip, the U.S. has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates of the advanced industrial countries. Since the 1996 "welfare reform" bill was passed under the Democratic Clinton administration, federal funding is granted *exclusively* for abstinence-only-until-marriage "education." Programs that use federal funds must teach that sexual activity outside of marriage "is likely to have harmful

psychological and physical effects." Planned Parenthood bows to the Christian right by accepting that abstinence should be taught at least as an "option."

In 2002 Judith Levine finally got her book *Harmful to Minors* published after years of rejections. Her simple premise is that sex for minors is not only normal but also positive; that there is a manufactured panic about pedophilia, kidnapping and child abuse and that the state's attempts to protect youth from sex are actually harmful. She points out that "family planning" and "birth control" used to be polite, euphemistic terms referring to making available means to prevent unplanned pregnancies. For the last couple of decades, the terminology has been transformed into prevention of sex *altogether* for youth. There have been tremendous strides in research into less burdensome and safer birth control techniques. At the same time, the government has distributed warnings about condoms' "failure rates" and total fabrications linking abortion to breast cancer. So who will ever see these improvements in an era of virginity pledges?

**For Women's Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!**

The programmatic statement of the Spartacist League/U.S. points out that American feminism was born as a consciously separate movement and split from post-Civil War abolitionists. Its founders embraced white supremacy and campaigned against voting rights for black freedmen. Feminism and all forms of sectoralism share the outlook that the capitalist state can be pressured and shaped to fit the interests of the oppressed; that it's just a matter of reorganizing priorities, or getting more women elected into office. But it's the bourgeois feminists' ruling-class viewpoint that seeks to make capitalism, a brutal system of exploitation, work for them and their privileged position.

The emancipation of women requires a socialist revolution to begin to use the science and technology that has been developed in the most advanced capitalist countries to institute a worldwide planned economy that can change the material conditions of humanity so that production will be for human needs. The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution proved that a successful socialist revolution can conquer through establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, smashing capitalist class rule and laying the basis for the withering away of the state.

The Bolsheviks abolished all laws against homosexuality and abortion and all laws regulating people's private sexual

lives. They made marriage and divorce simple civil acts, and abolished the concept of illegitimacy. They opened the private hospitals to the masses and built public kitchens and laundries. They created residential kindergartens and "children's colonies, where the children either live permanently, or for a considerable period, away from the parents." This last advance is described in *The ABC of Communism*, which was used by the Bolsheviks as a primer for workers and peasants. As they wrote, "Hundreds and thousands, millions of mothers will thereby be freed for productive work and for self-culture. They will be freed from the soul-destroying routine of housework, and from the endless round of petty duties which are involved in the education of children in their own homes."

They had this vision in a largely backward priest-ridden peasant country. The Bolshevik Party under Lenin and Trotsky knew that the only way forward to raising the material conditions of the masses was by extending the revolution internationally so that the most advanced industry could alleviate poverty and liberate mankind. The ensuing isolation of the first workers republic paved the way for the rise of the conservative and repressive Stalinist bureaucracy, which reversed many of the liberating advances the October Revolution had achieved for women and reinforced the backward ideal of the family to inculcate subservience to authority and social conformity.

The 1991-92 capitalist counterrevolution threw back living conditions in the former Soviet Union to a level comparable to the time of the tsars. In Eastern Europe, one of the first measures of the restoration of capitalism was the rein-

statement of anti-abortion laws. I was in East Berlin just before the capitalist reunification of Germany where the International Communist League was fighting to defend the workers state, and I saw banners protesting the closing of public kindergartens. Today the Russian population is devastated, infant mortality has soared and life expectancy rates have plummeted, and women who used to be technicians and teachers now have nothing. Today we defend the gains of the 1949 Chinese Revolution which ended the hideous practice of binding women's feet. The Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky led the October 1917 Revolution and inspired the world working class, and our task is to fight for new October Revolutions here and everywhere.

I started with a quote on the significance of having a historical materialist worldview. It's not just a tool for historical analysis, but it was developed as a weapon for action, to arm the working class to take power. In 1899 Lenin wrote at the beginning of "Our Programme," referring to the lessons of Marx and Engels:

"It taught us how to discern, beneath the pall of rooted customs, political intrigues, abstruse laws, and intricate doctrines—the class struggle, the struggle between the propertied classes in all their variety and the propertyless mass, the *proletariat*, which is at the head of all the propertyless. It made clear the real task of a revolutionary socialist party: not to draw up plans for refashioning society, not to preach to the capitalists and their hangers-on about improving the lot of the workers, not to hatch conspiracies, *but to organise the class struggle of the proletariat and to lead this struggle, the ultimate aim of which is the conquest of political power by the proletariat and the organisation of a socialist society.*" ■

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**Women and Revolution**  
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# Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!

# Down With Capitalist Rulers' War Against Blacks, Immigrants!

The labor/black mobilization that rode the KKK out of New York City on October 23 brought to bear the social power of the working class, acting in its own interests and independently of the government and the Democratic and Republican parties of capital, in defense of all the oppressed. As we wrote then, "That same power, those same forces which stopped the Klan from riding can organize the unorganized and unemployed, can mobilize in defense of the masses in the ghettos and barrios, can crack the 'open shop' South—itsself a product of KKK anti-union terror" (WV No. 722, 29 October).

Initiated by the Partisan Defense Committee, the class-struggle legal and social defense organization associated with the Spartacist League, this united-front mobilization provided a glimpse of the kind of fighting workers party needed to lead the working class in struggle against the attacks of the capitalist rulers and against the very system of capitalist exploitation. It brought to life the connection between labor's fight and the fight for black freedom. Black oppression is the cornerstone of racist American capitalism. There is no road to eliminating the special oppression of black people other than the working-class conquest of power, and there will be no proletarian revolution to end class exploitation unless the working class actively takes up the fight for black rights.

Just as they use anti-black racism to divide the working class, the capitalist rulers, aided and abetted by the labor bureaucracy, foster anti-immigrant chauvinism to pit native-born workers—black as well as white—against immigrants. This was clear last week when racist NYC mayor Rudolph Giuliani seized on the despicable refusal by some cabbies to pick up black passengers to launch a police vendetta against the city's largely South Asian and black African taxi drivers and fuel anti-immigrant big-



WV Photo

**New York City, 23 October 1999: Labor's power can and must be mobilized in struggle against black oppression, anti-immigrant chauvinism. For a revolutionary workers party that champions the cause of all the exploited and oppressed!**

otry among black people. Such chauvinism is poison to the struggles of all the oppressed.

A workers party would fight against every manifestation of injustice, racist discrimination and chauvinist bigotry, particularly in defense of the millions of immigrant workers who are denied legal rights, making them prey to anti-union terror and superexploitation. In "Operation Vanguard" the Immigration and Naturalization Service has targeted thousands of meatpacking workers in the Midwest. Similar raids against hotel and janitorial workers in the Southwest resulted in the firing of some 500 members of Service Employees International Union Local 1877, including many involved in leading a campaign for the first national master janitorial contract (*Nation*, 25 October). In going after immigrant workers, the capitalists aim to drive down the living standards and

undermine the organizations of all workers. Labor must demand: *No deportations! Full citizenship rights for all workers, "legal" or "illegal"!*

We publish below a presentation on the fight against anti-immigrant racism by Spartacist League Central Committee member Joseph Seymour at SL forums in New York City and the San Francisco Bay Area this fall.

\* \* \*

In March 1991, four white Los Angeles cops brutally beat a black motorist named Rodney King, whom they had stopped for a traffic violation. They repeatedly kicked him and hit him with a baton as he lay writhing on the ground. This was in no way an unusual LAPD practice. And certainly no one would have predicted it would lead to events of some historic importance. But it did.

A bystander happened to take a videotape of the beating. And when it was

shown to millions on television throughout the U.S. and, indeed, around the world, the public response was one of shock and outrage. The L.A. authorities were sufficiently embarrassed by this that they prosecuted the cops for assault. However, a judge decided that the cops could not get a fair trial before a jury of their peers in L.A.—there were too many blacks, Latinos and Asians. So the trial was held in an affluent, very white suburb called Simi Valley 40 miles north of central L.A.

Some black people from L.A. attended the trial hoping to see that justice was done. But justice was not done. When the “not guilty” verdict was announced, a middle-aged black woman who was there said: “I am not given to riot. But just you watch, something’s going to break.” And break it did. Blacks in the South Central L.A. ghetto took to the streets in what would be officially called the largest “civil disturbance” in recent U.S. history. At its end, 45 people were dead, mostly blacks killed by the cops, and billions of dollars in property was destroyed.

At the heart of South Central is the neighborhood of Watts. Almost three decades earlier, in 1965, the arrest of a black motorist in Watts triggered one of the first of the ghetto rebellions which shook America in that turbulent period. Watts became a symbol, a synonym as it were, for the angry black ghetto. Now, once again, South Central had become an angry black ghetto. But it had become something else, too: an angry Latino barrio.

Large-scale immigration had radically changed the ethnic make-up of South Central and adjacent neighborhoods. The residents of these newly formed barrios took to the streets along with black peo-

ple. In fact, more Latinos were arrested than blacks, though most of those killed were blacks. Of the Latinos arrested, 80 percent were foreign-born; 25 percent had been in the U.S. less than two years. A white journalist of far from liberal views described them as “desperately poor young immigrants who had fled poverty or political repression in Central America and Mexico, lived in conditions of hideous overcrowding, and worked for subminimum wages under constant fear of deportation. Mothers did not hesitate to take food, clothing and diapers from half-looted and unguarded stores” (Lou Cannon, *Official Negligence: How Rodney King and the Riots Changed Los Angeles and the LAPD* [1997]).

For the moment, a shared hatred for the cops and more generally the “white power structure,” as it was called in the 1960s, overcame the traditional antagonisms between rival black and Latino street gangs. Spray-painted on the wall of a building in South Central was the slogan: “Crips Bloods Mexicans together forever tonite 4/30/92.” The Crips and Bloods are L.A.-based black gangs.

### Capitalist Exploiters Foster Racist Divisions

The recent immigration into Southern California had another impact, a very ugly one. Black and Latino looters especially targeted shops owned by Korean immigrants. They couldn’t burn down the Parker Center—the LAPD headquarters. It was too well guarded. They couldn’t burn down the Bank of America or Wells Fargo headquarters. So in their anger and frustration, they turned against local shopkeepers whom they saw as outsiders, of an alien nationality and economically better off than themselves.

Moreover, the sense of unity between blacks and Latino immigrants against the white racist powers that be did not long survive the suppression of the riots by the police, the National Guard and the U.S. armed forces. Self-declared spokesmen for the black and Hispanic communities engaged in hostile competition over government money earmarked for rebuilding South Central and the other damaged neighborhoods. And in doing so, they used the same kind of demagoguery as white racists.

A black real estate operator, Danny Bakewell, headed up an outfit called Brotherhood Crusade Black United Front, which was crusading for more black-owned businesses. At one point Bakewell confronted some Latino construction workers cleaning up South Central. He physically pulled one of them off a tractor and baited them in pidgin Spanish: “*Vámanos a la casa. No trabajo. Andale.*” In English: “Let’s go home. No work. Get going.”

Bakewell’s opposite number was a Mexican American businessman, Fernando Oaxaca, who boasted that Latinos “are people who still believe in themselves and still believe in the American dream. They deserve help in building a new L.A. because they will take the ball and run with it. They have not thrown up their hands and said, ‘Feed me,’ the way so many blacks have.”

So just a few months after the black and Latino poor took to the streets expressing their solidarity as oppressed peoples against their oppressor, self-styled black and Latino leaders sought to pit blacks and Latinos against one another over a handful of government-funded jobs. And two years later, half of all black voters supported California Proposition



Gropp/Sipa



WV Photo

INS immigration cops round up Latino immigrants. Labor Black League calls for labor to fight racist deportations and fight for full citizenship rights for immigrants in San Francisco, April 1996.

187, a reactionary measure to deprive "illegal" immigrants of public health and their children of public education.

This is a clear example of a basic contradiction in all capitalist societies and especially this American capitalist society. The structure and operation of the capitalist system at times impel workers to overcome racial, national and religious divisions and engage in common struggle against their exploiters. But, of course, the exploiters don't want that to happen. So the ruling class—through the educational system, the media, the churches, their political parties, Democratic and Republican, as well as the labor bureaucracy—foments divisions within the working class along racial, national and religious lines.

White and also black working people are told that there will be more and better jobs available for them if "illegal" immigration is halted and immigrants who are here illegally deported. White working people are told that their taxes can be cut 10, 20, 30 percent if the government ends welfare for the black poor.

In many labor strikes you will see black, white and Hispanic workers walking the picket lines together. In some cases, they'll stand shoulder to shoulder confronting the cops who are trying to bring scabs through the picket lines. They'll go out to a bar together and get drunk and curse the bosses, curse the cops, curse the local government officials.

Yet six months later some of these same white workers will vote for capitalist politicians—Republican or Democrat—who openly appeal to anti-black racism, who run on a platform of "welfare reform" and "getting tough on crime." "Welfare reform" is a code word for kicking poor black women and their children into the streets. "Getting tough on crime" means putting ever larger numbers of young black men behind bars. And many black workers will support black Democrats who call for "getting tough" on "illegal" immigration.

Which tendency—that toward working-class unity in the struggle against capitalist exploitation or toward antagonistic divisions along racial and ethnic lines—will prevail in the historic long run? For class unity to prevail it is necessary to build a revolutionary vanguard party modeled on the Bolshevik Party which Lenin built in the Russian tsarist empire at the beginning of this century.

Liberals tend to condemn the concept of a vanguard party as elitism. But we are not alien to the working class, seeking to impose our goals from the outside. Rather we represent in a conscious and consistent way the powerful *inner* tendency of



WV Photos

**Protests against California anti-immigrant Prop. 187 in Los Angeles, November 1994. Sign at head of convoy of Latino truckers at Port of L.A. reads: "Long Live the Immigrant Workers' Struggle—United Against Racism and Discrimination."**

the working class toward united struggle against capitalist exploitation, ultimately for socialist revolution. For this to succeed, we have to fight the powerful forces seeking to divide the working class along racial and national lines.

Here is how Marx defined the difference between communists and other tendencies in the workers movement in the *Communist Manifesto*:

"The Communists are distinguished from other working-class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole."

These Marxist principles are reflected in the slogan "Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!" on one of the Spartacist League signs in this room.

### Debsian Socialism and Black Oppression

In the United States today, it is generally held that race, not class, is the most fundamental division in American society. This view is expressed on the left by the term "people of color," which has become fashionable among left-liberals and radicals over the past decade or so. This is not simply a neutral description of those ethnic groups which are or are deemed to be nonwhite.

Behind the term "people of color" is a political outlook and implicit program. First, it says something about the people

of no color, namely, whites. It says that no significant section of the white population, including white workers, can be expected to fight the racist oppression of people of color. Secondly, it holds that all people in the U.S. considered to be nonwhite have or should have common interests and a strong sense of solidarity with one another—to put it crudely, that a black auto worker or a Mexican agricultural laborer has fundamentally more in common with a Chinese American real estate mogul or Indian immigrant doctor than with a construction worker of Irish or Italian lineage.

Interestingly, there was a time when exactly the opposite view was prevalent on the American left. In the early years of this century, before World War I and the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, most American leftists held that the working class should have a colorblind proletarian socialist consciousness. The best-known exponent of this view was Eugene V. Debs, the most prominent and widely respected socialist leader of the day.

I'm going to discuss Debs' position on race and class in the U.S. not because I think any of you subscribe to a similar view. I'm sure you don't. But because the old Debsian position was the polar opposite of the current "people of color" notion, it illuminates the basic fallacy of the latter.

Unlike many of the right-wing Socialist leaders of his time, Debs was in no way a racist. In fact, he fought against the exclusion of black workers from the trade unions, which was then a common practice. Debs believed the racist oppression of black people could be eliminated

only after the socialist transformation of American society. And if black workers were to contribute to that transformation, they had to think and act solely in their role as workers, disregarding that they were also members of an oppressed racial caste.

In 1903, Debs put forward a motion to a Socialist Party convention, which stated:

"We declare to the Negro worker the identity of his interests and struggles with the interests and struggles of the workers of all lands, without regard to race or color or sectional lines; that the causes which have made him the victim of social and political inequality are the effects of the long exploitation of his labor power; that all social and race prejudices spring from the ancient economic causes which still endure, to the misery of the whole human family, that the only line of division which exists in fact is that between the producers and the owners of the world—between capitalism and labor."

In explaining and motivating this position, he used the following argument:

"What social distinction is there between a white and a black deckhand on a Mississippi steamboat? Is it visible even with the aid of a microscope? They are both slaves, work side by side, sometimes a bunch of black slaves under a white 'boss' and at other times a herd of white slaves under a black 'boss'."

—Jean Y. Tussey, ed., *Debs Speaks* (1970)

The kindest thing one can say about this was that Debs was abysmally ignorant of the social and racial realities of the American South. There were *no* black bosses in the South at that time, or in the North for that matter, ordering white workers about. But Debsian socialists and other leftists were blinded to social reality by their dogmatic belief that the workers could not unite to overthrow capitalism unless they had an identical political consciousness, unless they thought of themselves only as workers. So they viewed what would today be called ethnic or race consciousness as a purely negative

factor, as something that had to be overcome and transcended on the road to a socialist transformation.

There was no understanding that black workers or Mexican workers had fewer illusions in and ties to the existing bourgeois order. For example, many Irish workers had brothers, uncles or cousins who were cops. But this was not true of black or Mexican workers at the time. More generally, there was no understanding that workers of an oppressed people were more likely to support the overthrow of the existing social system not only to end their exploitation as workers but also to end their oppression as a distinct people.

### Leninism on the Black Question

Underlying the Debsian concept of a colorblind socialist consciousness was an idealization of working-class consciousness in a more general sense. The basic aim of a socialist party was seen as imbuing the large majority of the working class with a high level of socialist consciousness, a level which in reality is only possible in a socialist society, in fact, several generations into a socialist society.

This is a central difference between Debsian socialism and Leninism. Leninists understand that the very structure of capitalism produces different levels of social and political consciousness within the working class, ranging from communist consciousness to the most reactionary forms of racist and chauvinist bigotry and religious obscurantism, with all gradations and variations in between. And one of the most important factors determining more advanced or more backward consciousness is whether a worker is a member of an oppressed nationality or people or of an oppressor nationality. (For more on the difference between Debsian socialism and Leninism in this regard, you can read American Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon's "The Russian

Revolution and the American Negro Movement" in his *The First Ten Years of American Communism*.)

We often describe ourselves as the party of the Russian Revolution, the first and to date only successful proletarian revolution in history. While this revolution was made in Russia, it was not made solely for Russia nor solely by Russians. Non-Russians, members of the many oppressed peoples of the tsarist empire—Jews, Georgians, Poles, Latvians—played an exceptional role in the leadership of the largely ethnically Russian working class and other toilers. Leon Trotsky, who with Lenin was co-leader of the Bolshevik Revolution, addressed this question in his *History of the Russian Revolution*:

"Since the intelligentsia of the oppressed nationalities—concentrated as they were for the most part in cities—had flowed copiously into the revolutionary ranks, it is not surprising that among the old generation of revolutionaries the number of non-Russians was especially large. Their experience, although not always of a high quality, made them irreplaceable when it came to inaugurating new social forms.... At a moment of deep historic change, the bulk of a nation always presses into its service those elements which were yesterday most oppressed, and therefore most ready to give expression to the new tasks. It is not that aliens lead the revolution, but that the revolution makes use of the aliens."

In working, from his enforced exile in Mexico in the 1930s, with his American supporters to build a revolutionary vanguard party in the U.S. as part of the struggle for a new Fourth International, Trotsky applied the same conceptual approach to blacks in the U.S. as the Bolsheviks had to non-Russian peoples in the tsarist empire. He recognized that blacks were slated to play an exceptional role in an American proletarian revolution. Thus in 1939 he stated in discussions with his American comrades:

"If the workers' aristocracy is the basis of opportunism, one of the sources of adaptation to capitalist society, then the most oppressed and discriminated are the most dynamic milieu of the working class.

"We must say to the conscious elements of the Negroes that they are convoked by the historic development to become a vanguard of the working class."

### The Notion of "People of Color"

The mass black struggles beginning with the Southern civil rights movement in the late 1950s and culminating in the ghetto rebellions in the Northern cities in the 1960s in *one sense* vindicated Trotsky's view that blacks were the most dynamic, the most radicalized section of American society, the most hostile to the existing bourgeois order. However, these



Steve Appleford

**Racist cop roundup, Los Angeles, 1992, as black and Latino poor joined in explosion of outrage over acquittal of cops who beat black motorist Rodney King.**

struggles were led not by communists but by petty-bourgeois elements espousing either liberal or nationalist politics. And they took place outside of, and in some cases were counterposed to, the organized labor movement.

These struggles led to a significant change in the prevalent ideology of American liberalism and also of much of the American left, which tends to mirror in a more radical form liberal ideology and politics. Liberals could not, of course, recognize that the oppression and impoverishment of the black masses was fundamentally rooted in the structure of American capitalism. Instead they blamed it on the racism of the white population of all social classes and maintained that this racism reflected the economically privileged position of the white population.

This view received official sanction from the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, headed by the liberal Republican governor of Illinois, Otto Kerner, which was set up in the late 1960s to study the underlying causes of the ghetto rebellions. Its basic conclusion was: "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal." This view of American society was restated in the early 1990s by white liberal intellectual Andrew Hacker in *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal*.

In one sense, such a "two nations" view of American society logically leads to quite pessimistic conclusions as far as blacks are concerned. After all, black people make up only 10 or 12 percent of the population. If the dominant white "nation" supports racist oppression and, moreover, economically benefits from it, then what hope is there for blacks? They can either emigrate or they can accept and adapt to a society that is separate, hostile to them and unequal. The right-wing nationalism of Louis Farrakhan is a logical conclusion of a "two nations" view of American society. In practice, Farrakhan's program consists in driving Asian shopkeepers out of the ghettos and replacing them with blacks. This is called "black capitalism" or "black economic empowerment."

However, the large majority of blacks do not support Farrakhanite right-wing nationalism, nor do white liberals and leftists. They want a progressive solution to the oppression of blacks and other nonwhites, but within an ideological framework which sees *race not class* as the basic division in American society. And here, I think, is the origin of the concept of "people of color."

Even in the 1960s, before the big influx

**Right: Evicted Southern sharecroppers, as 1930s Depression made millions homeless and jobless. Below: Workers organized by Communist Party prepare for demonstration outside White House, 1930.**



Underwood & Underwood



of immigration from Latin America and East Asia, the U.S. population did not consist solely of European-derived whites and African-derived blacks. There were also Asians. There were Latinos, most of whom were physically distinguishable from European-derived whites—in the case of Puerto Ricans by African ancestry, in the case of Mexicans by American Indian ancestry. And there were Native Americans. So if the concept of a "black nation" is expanded into a "nonwhite nation," then the balance of demographic and presumably political forces becomes more equal. Thus it's become commonplace to say that California has become or is about to become a "majority minority state," with the total number of Latinos, blacks, Asians and Native Americans exceeding non-Hispanic whites.

Basically, the concept of "people of color" is an ideological construct designed to get around the perceived ingrained racism of whites. Implicit and sometimes explicit in this concept is the view that the class differences within the

white population are not such that white workers will oppose the racist oppression of nonwhite peoples. But this concept has no more correspondence to American social reality than the old Debsian notion that there were no significant differences between white and black workers in the American South.

I live in the Oakland-Berkeley region of the San Francisco Bay Area, an area in which all major components of "people of color" are well represented. I have a part-time job as a bookkeeper in a methadone clinic in the North Oakland-South Berkeley ghetto, where most of the clients are black people who work at marginal, minimum-wage jobs or are hustlers, prostitutes, people who are in and out of prison. My dentist is a second-generation Japanese American, and there are a lot of Asian Americans and Asian immigrants in the medical profession in California.

The clinic where I work and my dentist's office are only three or four miles apart. But they constitute totally

different and separate social worlds. There is no sense of common identity and solidarity between a Japanese American medical professional and a black ghetto youth. Likewise, there is no sense of identity between a Puerto Rican welfare mother in the South Bronx and an Indian immigrant computer programmer.

### Latinos: Race and Class Divisions

The fallacy of amalgamating blacks, Latinos and Asians as "people of color" can be seen clearly if we look at rates of intermarriage. Intermarriage is both the best index of the *hardness* of racial, national and religious divisions at the base of society and the principal social mechanism for integration across those divisions. And here the difference between blacks on the one hand and Latinos and Asians on the other is striking, even among the younger generation who might be expected to be more liberal about marriage.

In 1990, only 6 percent of black men between the ages of 25 and 34 had non-Hispanic white wives and 2 percent of black women had white husbands. By contrast, 31 percent of U.S.-born Latinos in this age group—both men and women—had non-Hispanic white spouses, 36 percent of Asian American men had white wives and 45 percent of Asian American women had white husbands. It is true that Asians and Latinos are considered not white in this society and suffer accordingly. But they are deemed a lot less "not white" than blacks.

Moreover, the difference in intermarriage between blacks and Hispanics is not only quantitative but also *qualitative* in its economic effects on the children of such

marriages. In 1990, the average annual income of Mexican American men in the Los Angeles area was \$31,000 compared to \$48,000 for non-Hispanic white males. Thus a Chicana married to a non-Hispanic white will have a husband who earns *50 percent more* on average than a Mexican American. Her white in-laws are likely to have accumulated three or four times more wealth than a Latino family. Her children, consequently, are far more likely to have the financial means for a college education. And in the present-day U.S., a college education is the main social mechanism for advancement from the working class into more affluent petty-bourgeois strata (professionals, corporate managers, government bureaucrats). Also, in the large majority of cases such children will *not* be raised in Spanish-speaking or bilingual households and thus will *not share* the main common feature of the otherwise highly diverse Hispanic population in the U.S. Culturally, they will be like non-Hispanic whites.

The *opposite* is the case for the children of mixed black-white marriages. There is no distinction between mulattos and blacks in the U.S. as there is in the Caribbean and South America. As one left-wing Puerto Rican intellectual put it, on the mainland unlike the island, "one drop of black blood makes you black." The children of interracial couples, however light-skinned, will be viewed and treated in this society as black.

This points to the fallacy of the very notion of a cohesive pan-Hispanic minority, much less of a "people of color," in this country. Since many Puerto Ricans (and Dominicans) are manifestly of black African origin, they directly encounter the hard racial divide in American soci-

ety. Economically, they tend to be far worse off than many other Hispanics in the U.S. Politically, because all Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens they tend to be less concerned with American immigration policies and more concerned with the future of the island colony's relations with the U.S. At the other extreme politically and economically are the Cubans, centered on rich and middle-class émigrés from the 1959 Cuban Revolution who have been welcomed here by the anti-Communist U.S. rulers.

Even among the Mexican-derived Latinos who now make up about 65 percent of the Hispanic population in the U.S., there is a clear and politically important division between third- and fourth-generation Mexican Americans (Chicanos) and Mexican immigrants (Mexicanos). Many of the descendants of the first wave of Mexican immigrants, who arrived between 1900 and 1930, do not even speak Spanish and have few personal ties to the millions of post-1965 immigrants. A Mexican immigrant in Southern California or Texas is far more likely to encounter a Chicano as a sweatshop boss than as a protective relative.

### Immigration and Nativist Reaction in American History

Closely related to the concept of "people of color" is the idea that large-scale immigration, especially from Latin America, is going to radically alter this country's ethnic make-up and consequent political balance of forces. A liberal Latino intellectual, Roberto Suro, recently came out with a book, *Strangers Among Us: How Latino Immigration Is Transforming America*, in which he argues that Latino immigrants and their children will provide the demographic basis for the renewed dominance of liberalism in American political life. Along similar lines, the editor of the bilingual journal *Latina* says that while the slogan of the civil rights movement was "We shall overcome," the slogan of Latinos should be "We shall overwhelm."

This attitude is based on and bolstered by projections that over the next few generations, the Hispanic population will become an ever larger percentage of the total population. For example, a study by the semi-official National Research Council projects that by the middle of the next century, 26 percent of the U.S. population will be Hispanic, 14 percent black, 8 percent Asian and only slightly over half white.

How are these figures arrived at? The key assumption is that the present high level of immigration, running about 800,000 annually, will continue. In a



SouthWest Organizing Project

Los Angeles, 1931: Mass deportation of Mexican workers amid intense anti-Mexican racism fueled by widespread unemployment.

pamphlet in the mid-1990s, Suro presented immigration from Latin America as a kind of unstoppable demographic tide:

"Immigration to the United States now represents a huge and well-established demographic force with its own dynamic.... Having encouraged the development of this human flow over the past thirty years, the United States will be hard-pressed to change its direction with a one-shot overhaul of immigration laws."

—*Watching America's Door: The Immigration Backlash and the New Policy Debate* (1996)

This is radically false. Immigration is not a demographic force with its own dynamic; it is a matter of government policy which is changeable and reversible and has often been changed and reversed over the course of American history. For example, in two periods in modern American history—in the early 1930s and again in the mid-1950s—the U.S. government effected the massive repatriation of Mexican immigrants along with their American-born children. Immigration policy is usually determined by the interplay of different factions and interest groups within the ruling class. But it can also be affected by mass working-class struggle against the capitalists and their state.

Immigration poses a basic contradiction for the American ruling class. On the one hand, large-scale immigration, by expanding the pool of exploitable labor, especially at the low end of the wage spectrum, enables capitalists to maximize their profits. At the same time, large-scale

immigration is seen by America's rulers as a potential threat—if not in the present then in future—to their political and ethnic-cultural dominance.

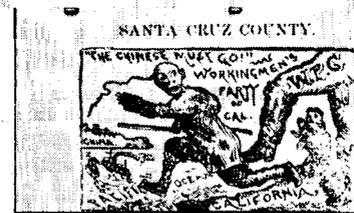
In 1990, the average annual income of Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrant males in the Los Angeles area was \$11,000 compared to \$48,000 for non-Hispanic whites, a difference in the rate of exploitation of roughly 5 to 1. Throughout the rest of the U.S. as well, Latino immigrants do the hardest, dirtiest, most menial jobs for minimum or subminimum wages. A town supervisor in Huntington, Long Island, a suburb of New York City, stated: "If we didn't have this population, the dishes and silverware in our diners probably wouldn't be clean" (*New York Times*, 21 May).

But Latino immigrants are not automatic dishwashing machines in human form. They can and do fight back against their capitalist exploiters. They organize unions and battle the cops on picket lines. In Southern California, immigrants from Mexico and Central America have been in the forefront of labor militancy, and they also joined with blacks in the 1992 L.A. upheaval. So the American ruling class is worried, and rightly so, that Latino immigrants and especially their American-born children can make a lot of trouble for them.

There's a recurring pattern in American history that periods of large-scale immigration are followed by periods of nativist reaction. The beginnings of industrial capitalism in this country in the 1840s saw mass immigration by Irish Catholics and Germans. And this provoked a strong nativist reaction the following decade. A major party called the American Party, generally known as the Know-Nothing Party, emerged demanding not only a radical reduction in immigration but an extension of the residency period required for immigrants to become citizens from five to fourteen years.

This nativist reaction was politically defeated by liberal elements in the ruling class represented by Abraham Lincoln. Significantly, the man who assassinated Lincoln, John Wilkes Booth, had been a supporter of the Know-Nothing Party before he became a supporter of the slaveholding Southern Confederacy. Because the anti-immigrant nativism of the 1850s was politically defeated, there are a lot of descendants of Irish and German immigrants in the U.S. today.

But the next time around, the outcome was very different. After gold was discovered in California in the late 1840s, there was a sudden massive increase in the demand for labor. And California's newly wealthy capitalists met that demand by importing labor from China. Chinese im-



Brown Brothers, Public Affairs Press

**Chauvinist labor lieutenants of capital: AFL leader Samuel Gompers (right) excluded black workers from unions, while California Workingmen's Party formed in 1870s demanded: "The Chinese Must Go!"**

migrants accounted for 80 percent of the workers who built the Western branch of the transcontinental railroad after the Civil War. This was very hard, dangerous work in which over 1,200 Chinese laborers were killed.

However, after the railroad was built whites from the rest of the country poured into California and other Western states, and a massive and violent anti-Chinese reaction set in. Mobs attacked Chinese communities, wantonly killing men, women and children. And in 1882 Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, cutting off further immigration of laborers from China. The same pattern was then repeated with regard to immigration from Japan.

Between the 1880s and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the United States became the strongest industrial power in the world, surpassing Britain and Germany. This required a huge increase in the supply of labor, which was met by Southern and East European immigrants who were traditionally Catholic. After World War I, a strong nativist reaction spearheaded by the Ku Klux Klan developed against this new immigrant population. Most people think of

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the Klan as a Southern-based organization which targets black people. But in the 1920s, the Klan grew most rapidly in the Midwest, in states like Ohio and Indiana, agitating against South and East Europeans as well as blacks.

In 1924, a new immigration law established so-called "national origin" quotas. In the following year, the number of immigrants fell from slightly over 700,000 to slightly under 300,000, a *60 percent drop*, and further immigration from East and South Europe was effectively reduced to a trickle.

The onset of the Great Depression in the early 1930s saw an intense wave of anti-Mexican agitation in the Western states. Racist demagogues attacked Mexicans for "stealing" jobs. In this period, almost half a million Mexicans were repatriated by local and state authorities and the federal government. For example, the county of Los Angeles organized special trains to take so-called *repatriados* back to Mexico. And their American-born children, who were legally U.S. citizens, of course, had to go with them.

After World War II, the U.S. continued to pursue a highly restrictive immigration policy. The 1952 McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act perpetuated the racist "national origin" quotas. The only exception was refugees from Communist countries, which is how the anti-Castro Cuban counterrevolutionaries got in.

At the same time, the U.S. government was very tough on illegal immigration in this period. In the mid-1950s, there was a military-style campaign called Operation Wetback, headed by a retired army general. In two years, 1.3 million Mexicans were rounded up and deported.

### The New Immigration: Causes and Effects

In the 1960s, the political conditions affecting immigration policy changed and, more importantly, in the '70s the economic conditions changed. The openly racist character of American immigration law, along with legalized racial segregation in the South, was an embarrassment for U.S. imperialism in its Cold War against the Soviet Union, especially in the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa. The American ambassador to India, for example, found it hard to explain why Indians could not become citizens in the bastion of the "free world" while anyone from Britain, India's former colonial ruler, could become a naturalized American citizen easily. So in the mid-1960s, around the same time that federal civil rights legislation was enacted, immigration law was changed to eliminate the

**Immigrants arrive at Ellis Island, 1913. As need for immigrant labor dried up, capitalists stopped flow of immigration from East and South Europe in mid-1920s.**



"national origin" quotas. However, the overall quota remained fairly low.

The liberalization of immigration law occurred as American manufacturers began to face stiff competition from Japan and Germany and U.S. economic growth slowed. In the mid-1970s, there was a short but quite sharp world economic downturn. Profits fell, the stock market fell.

In response, American capitalists launched a concerted effort to intensify the rate of exploitation of labor. They demanded and got from the union bureaucrats "giveback" contracts with lower wages and benefits. They established two-tier wage systems with young workers earning less for doing the same job as older workers. They shifted production from the unionized North and Midwest to the non-union South and to low-wage countries in East Asia and Latin America.

From the standpoint of the American ruling class, these policies were very successful. A few weeks ago, the *New York Times* (5 September) ran an article, "Gap Between Rich and Poor Found Substantially Wider." In 1977, the average after-tax income of the poorest 20 percent of American households was about \$10,000. Today, adjusting for inflation, it's only \$8,880, a 12 percent decline. The real income of the next poorest 20 percent of American households has fallen by almost 10 percent. By contrast, the income of the top 20 percent has increased by almost 40 percent and that of the top 1 percent by almost 120 percent!

One of the factors behind these figures has been the massive exploitation of immigrant labor, legal and "illegal." In the early 1980s, there was a difference on immigration policy within the right-wing Republican administration of Ronald Reagan. One group favored large-scale immigration as a means of driving down labor costs. Another group opposed it on racist grounds, for diluting the "white"

majority of the American nation. At the time, the first group had the upper hand. Reagan personally shot down a proposal for tamper-proof identity cards for all citizens and legal residents—kind of like the old South African pass system. He also opposed stiff penalties for employers who knowingly hire undocumented immigrants. That's not surprising since the biggest employer of undocumented Mexican immigrants is California agribusiness, which was a major Reagan financial backer.

There's a hackneyed saying that politics makes strange bedfellows. Well, in the 1980s immigration politics really did make strange bedfellows. Latino rights groups led by leftist radicals, who enthused over Castro's Cuba and Sandinista Nicaragua, worked hand in hand with Reaganite business lobbyists to oppose anti-immigrant legislation promoted by the AFL-CIO labor bureaucracy and black liberal Democrats like the late Texas Congresswoman Barbara Jordan.

However, since the early '90s the pendulum of bourgeois politics has been swinging ever more strongly toward anti-immigrant nativism. Thus in 1996 Congress passed and Clinton signed into law the Illegal Immigrant and Immigrant Responsibility Act, which beefed up the repressive forces of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and signaled a new get-tough policy. In the next two years, almost 300,000 immigrants were deported, more than twice as many as in the prior two years, including many who had been living and working in the U.S. for years. Also subject to deportation under the new laws are legal residents convicted of crimes, even misdemeanors like driving under the influence of alcohol.

Earlier this year, INS agents in Yakima, Washington—a city in the central agricultural region of the state—forced the owners of food-processing plants and

warehouses to fire nearly 600 Mexican workers who did not have the proper legal documents. These men and women, many with small children, suddenly lost their livelihoods and face desperate economic straits. The INS agent in charge of the Yakima operation declared: "We want to send a message south to Mexico that things are not like they used to be" (*U.S. News & World Report*, 15 March).

This is happening under economic conditions of supposedly unprecedented "prosperity." Imagine what will happen when the economy turns down, especially in a deep and prolonged depression. There will be enormous pressures to completely militarize the border with Mexico, to deport or otherwise force the repatriation of the 5.5 million "illegal" immigrants now in the U.S. We're likely to see an increase in violent right-wing and fascist attacks on Latinos and Asians as well as blacks. All of this underlines that there is no scientific basis for long-term or even medium-term projections of the Hispanic population, because this is critically dependent on the level of immigration (or repatriation), which will be determined through *future political struggle*.

### For Class Struggle Against Anti-Immigrant Racism

To paraphrase Marx, our task is not just to understand the world and predict

the course of future development, but to *change* the world and the course of developments. The Illegal Immigrant and Immigrant Responsibility Act—just like anti-union laws such as the Taft-Hartley Act—does *not* represent the democratic will of the American people. These laws represent the will of the capitalist class and are used against the working people, even if most workers in the U.S. do not now understand that.

We seek to mobilize the working class, centrally through the trade unions, to defend immigrants against both government and fascist attacks. No less important is to fight against the super-exploitation of immigrant labor—both legal and "illegal"—through the unionization of these increasingly important sections of the American proletariat. This program obviously means confronting the capitalists and their political agents in the Democratic and Republican parties, the company goons, the cops, the National Guard, the whole repressive apparatus of the American state.

But there is also a powerful force opposing working-class struggle *within* the labor movement—i.e., the pro-capitalist bureaucracy of the AFL-CIO—especially through its ties to the Democratic Party. By way of example, a recent issue of *Workers Vanguard* (No. 719, 17 September) contains an article, "Chinese Immigrant Workers in Racist America,"

which details how the leadership of the UNITE textile and clothing workers union has connived with the employers to perpetuate sweatshop labor in New York City and Los Angeles. An effective struggle against the capitalist class and its state also requires a political struggle to oust the incumbent trade-union bureaucracy and replace it with a leadership committed to fighting for the interests of the working class and all sections of the oppressed.

But our program is not limited to defending the working class and the black and Latino poor against the efforts to make their conditions even worse than they already are. As long as the capitalists have their state, their army, their police, their FBI and CIA, these will be used against the exploited and oppressed at home and abroad—the incineration of the Waco Branch Davidians by the FBI, the New York cops pumping 41 bullets into the young African immigrant Amadou Diallo, the terror bombing of Serbia by the U.S. Air Force.

So we want to take the state and its armed forces away from them. We're fighting for a socialist revolution which will smash the capitalist state and erect in its place a workers state and an American Red Army. That's our long-term goal. And if that sounds good to you, you should join us. It will be a long, hard fight, but I assure you it will be challenging. ■

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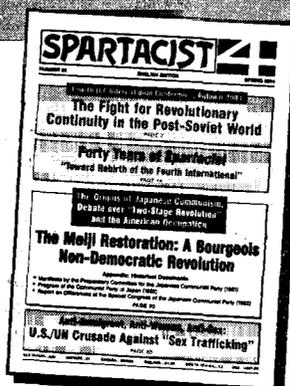
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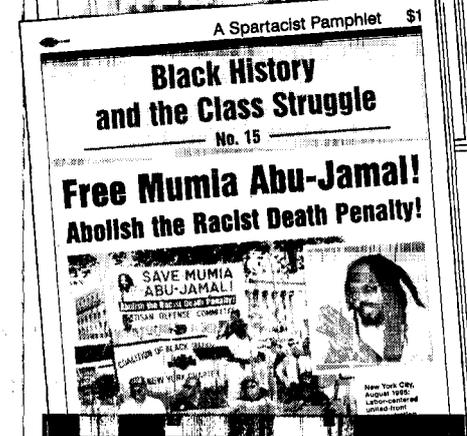
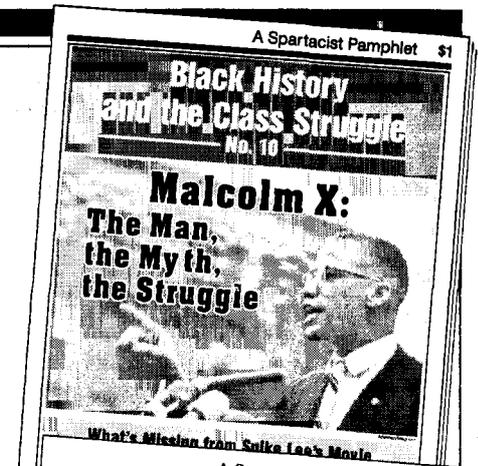
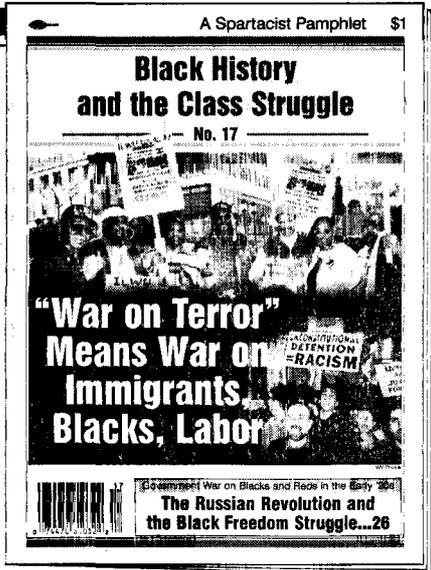
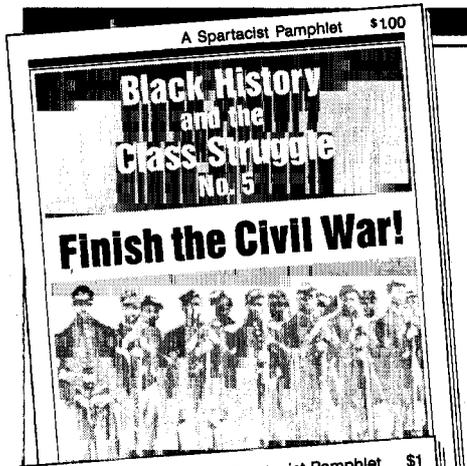
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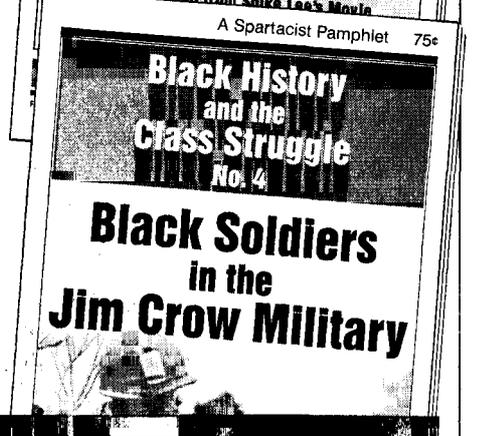
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