MARXISM-LENINISM--THE KEY TO BLACK LIBERATION

BY EARL OFARI

Many activists ask the question today: "Has the black movement reached a plateau? In the face of mounting repression we see that many of yesterday's radical leaders are gone. Either they are jailed, exiled, dead, or have quietly made their peace with the "system."

It is no mere accident that blacks are now floundering somewhere between reformism and inaction. To date there hasn't been a serious and systematic analysis of American capitalism, imperialism, the class struggle, and importantly, the relation of Marxism-Leninism to the black liberation struggle. The anti-communist thinking in American society has affected blacks and largely obscured these questions.

Many muddled ideas abound. Some call Marxism-Leninism a "white ideology" with no meaning to blacks. Others say some parts of it may apply, but we've still got to get our own thing together. Still others see the best ideology as being no ideology except black survival.

But Marxism-Leninism cannot be approached in any of these ways. It is a science of struggle with universal principles which can apply to every movement. What many fail to understand is that the theory and practice, not the distortions, flexibly conform to the separate character of each national struggle. But while the form may change the content and objective of socialist revolution and construction remains the same.

To see this we must combat built-in bias and closely examine its historic significance to colonial oppressed Third World people.

Marx and Engels never fully developed their analysis of national movements due to three reasons: (1) imperialism in the mid-1800's hadn't gained dominance over world markets; (2) the Third World was composed of many fragmented peasant-based, rural-agrarian societies which were only beginning to feel the effects of Western capitalist production; and (3) the lack of crystallization of nationalist movements because of imperialism's weakness.

With the conditions for nationalist struggle not yet ripened, both concluded that non-white movements had no independent character of their own apart from the European workers' movement. At first, they enthusiastically supported British and French expansion into Asia and Africa. Capitalism, they thought, would re-organize and uplift the "backward" colonial societies.

The brutal nature of imperialism gradually forced them to rethink their positions on colonial oppression. By the 1870's both became strong backers of the rebellions...
of the Turks, Arabs, Indians and Egyptians. The socialist potential in the fights of each of these groups became more than apparent.

In Europe they saw the similarities between the Irish struggle and those of Third World peoples. In demanding independence for Ireland, they were careful to note that the Irish worker and peasant and the English worker were both oppressed by the British capitalists. The success of one struggle depended directly on the other. Marx also observed how the English bourgeoisie attempted to use religion (Catholic vs. Protestant) to divide the workers. He also saw that nationalism could be another barrier to prevent class unity.

After examining the other national movements of the Poles and Slavs, he concluded that workers should support those struggles which lead to independence, while opposing those which further the reactionary designs of imperialism. Marx pointed to the tendency of the native bourgeoisie to lead national movements. He felt that if the working class or progressive sector didn’t advance to the leadership then the movement would inevitably wind up back in the arms of imperialism.

With the deaths of Marx and Engels, European socialists found themselves in an ideological vacuum. The question of colonial struggle having been only partially resolved in the framework of Marxian theory, European socialists embraced the dominant attitudes of chauvinism and imperialism. The congresses of the Second International in 1904 and 1907 barely approved a few weak resolutions condemning imperialism.

This situation was completely reversed by the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Under Lenin, the Bolshevik Party made self-determination and national struggle a central feature of its program. This wasn’t done out of any abstract idealism but rather out of practical necessity.

Russia wasn’t a monolithic “white” nation but a “prison of many nations.” There were over 100 separate nationalities at the time of the Russian revolution, some non-white, and all oppressed by Czarist colonial rule. The Bolsheviks had the task of welding these multi-national groupings, particularly the Muslims and Orientals of South and Eastern Russia, where the level of repression equalled or surpassed that of Afro-Americans, into a unified nation that guaranteed equality and self-determination.

The Bolsheviks wanted to reverse the Czarist policy of pitting one national group against the other thereby making imperial domination easier. All the material and technical resources once horded by the Czarists now went directly from the rich cities to the outlying areas.

The next step was to build up local communist leadership. In the case of the Muslims, the emphasis was on suppressing the bourgeois-feudalist Mullahs who steered the Muslim movement toward narrow nationalism and accommodation with reactionary pro-imperialist forces.

Under Muslim communist leadership separate Muslim councils, congresses, commissions, and federated organizations were allowed to flourish. They soon formed the base for a Muslim Communist Party with its own central committee, but in close working alliance with the Bolshevik Party.

In Asia, autonomous republics were created where the indigenous culture, law, and social systems were recognized as sovereign. In every republic, the workers, under their own communist direction, held power and were striving to end feudalism, eliminate petty-bourgeois domination, and build socialism.

Lenin’s famed “Theses on the National and Colonial Questions” provided the framework for the new Bolshevik approach:

It is the duty of the Communist International to support the revolutionary movement in the colonies and in the backward countries, for the exclusive purpose of uniting the various units of the future proletarian parties—such as are Communist not only in name—in all backward countries and educate them to the consciousness of their specific tasks, i.e.,
to the tasks of the struggle against the bourgeois democratic tendencies within their respective nationalities.¹

Lenin noted the collaborationist role bourgeois nationalists played in aiding imperialism, and the danger this posed to an oppressed people:

As a striking example of the deception practiced upon the working class of a subject country through the combined efforts of allied imperialism and the bourgeoisie of the given nation, we may cite the Palestine affair of the Zionists where, under the pretext of creating a Jewish state in Palestine, in which the Jews were only an insignificant part of the population, Zionism has delivered the native Arabian working population to the exploitation of England.²

The obvious antidote was proletarian internationalism. Social change no matter whether its cultural, economic, or political, couldn't have been realized by the Russian oppressed nationalities without the prior seizure and control of the state by the communists.

Nationalism, like the capitalist bourgeoisie, was viewed as a hindrance to the organization of the working class for the seizure. Marxists were opposed to any division along racial, cultural or religious lines which did not lead to workers' solidarity.

Marxist support for a national movement was conditioned solely to the degree that it promoted this unity and was objectively anti-imperialist. This meant a rigid class analysis of the movement to determine its progressive content.

Following this principle, Lenin regarded Afro-America as an oppressed nation struggling against imperialism. The slave revolts, the 19th century national black conventions, the Southern "Back to Africa" movements of the 1890's, Garveyism, and today's Black Power struggles, show the unbroken imprint of this oppressed national spirit.

The super-exploitation of black sharecroppers, farmers and urban black workers has evolved into a form of semi-colonialism akin to other Third World models. Since all capitalist societies are class societies with a ruling class controlling the means of production like the factories, banks, mines, farms, etc., semi-colonial dominance is maintained partly through the cultivation of a national bourgeoisie.

Lacking a sound industrial base of development, the Afro-American bourgeoisie's growth has been stunted. But this hasn't prevented it from acquiring the ruler's class tendencies and aspirations. This is what ties the small core of black merchants, shopkeepers, professionals and skilled craftsmen to imperialism.

Many analysts, like E. Franklin Frazier, examining the black bourgeoisie have superficially focused on the group's style of dress, occupations, social habits, places of residence, and manners to show that its outlook and tastes parallel those of the ruling class. But little attention has ever been given to the black elite as apologists for imperialism in the black community. This goes beyond mere sentiments. It aims at the conscious pacification and subversion of class organizing and socialist ideas among colonized black workers.

It's no accident that the black movement, no matter whether it's been for civil rights or black power, has been led by this elite; and for petty-bourgeois demands such as more black administrators, foremen and black "capitalists." The Black Power conferences in Newark, Philadelphia, Atlanta and the Black Expo in Chicago were backed to the hilt by some of the largest American corporations. Many of the "militant" Black Power leaders form groups like CORE, SNCC, Operation Breadbasket, are now tailing behind both the Democrats and the Republicans. This is a phenomenon seen in all oppressed nations.

Mao Tse Tung in his essay on "New Democracy" calls attention to this in the Chinese struggle:

Being a bourgeois class in a colonial and semi-colonial country and so being extremely...
flabby economically and politically, the Chinese national bourgeoisie also has another quality, namely, a proneness to conciliation with the enemies of the revolution. Even when it takes part in the revolution, it is unwilling to break with imperialism completely.3

A few sincere black radicals, recognizing this opportunism, have mistakenly put forth the concept of "revolutionary nationalism" as an alternative. But the fact remains that no ideology stands above class. It either works to enrich the class struggle or works against it—toward capitalism or away from it.

Nowhere in the world has "revolutionary nationalism" solidified working class power, overthrown imperialism, or begun the process of building socialism. Without a struggle to transform nationalist consciousness into class consciousness, "revolutionary nationalism" is just one more illusion to blind blacks to the necessity of socialist internationalism.

Similarly, those who loosely style themselves as Pan-Africanists make identical errors in their failure to grasp the class essence of the African revolution. The African bourgeoisie, not the masses, have led all the independence struggles on the continent.

The native bourgeoisie represented by Kenyatta in Kenya, Nasser in Egypt, Nkrumah in Ghana sought to wrest a larger share of their country's wealth and resources away from imperialism thereby strengthening its own class position. The independence struggles came directly on the heels of the near collapse of British and French imperialism in the immediate post-World War II period.

Forced to abandon their colonial presence, both nations opted for a neo-colonial relation which required the propping up and manipulation of a local ruling elite while giving the appearance of independence to the masses.

Algeria is an excellent example. Here the national bourgeoisie joined with the workers and peasants to drive out the French exploiters. When this was done the revolution was quickly halted before the masses took real power. With the national bourgeoisie in control, the way was paved for the entrance of French neo-colonialism.

Today the Algerian economy is more tightly controlled by the French than before the "revolution." The 10,000 French technicians exercise a virtual monopoly over the country's administrative apparatus. Banking is controlled from Paris by Credit Lyonnaise and Societe General. Forty-five percent of oil production is in the hands of ELF-ERAP and Eurafrep, two French holding companies. The rest is divided among CFP (25%; another French company), Shell (10%), and Mobil Oil, Getty Oil and Atlantic-Richfield with smaller shares.

The French own Renault assembly plants, data processing factories, fish canneries, textile mills, brick making plants, tourist settlements, the TV station, and the wine making industry. Fully 80% of Algeria's oil exports go to France.

This has meant greater misery for the Algerian masses while the "revolutionary" nationalist leadership grows richer off its deals with imperialism.

The same picture is repeated in the Congo (Brazzaville). Much touted recently by the Algiers Panthers as a "revolutionary People's government," the country's leadership in 1969 announced an anti-imperialist, Marxist-Leninist policy. But since the bourgeoisie remained in control, imperialism never was truly broken.

The country's four banks are completely owned by Société General of Paris, Bankers Trust of New York, Banque National de Paris, Deutsche Bank of Berlin, and First National City Bank of New York. Fifty-one percent of the country's imports come from France, 13% from West Germany, and another 9% from Italy, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Seventy percent of its exports go to Europe.

Predictably, the "Marxist-Leninist" national bourgeoisie responding to the imperialists' call recently jailed many of its
party's cadres, disbanded the people's militia, and smashed the workers' organizations.

If this is the current situation in the two "advanced" African nations then it takes little imagination to see that the rest of the continent is trapped even deeper in the swamp of neo-colonialism.

Fortunately, the continued brutal oppression of the people through their own sell-out black rulers is beginning to crack the facade of nationalist unity. Genuine African communists know that as the class struggle among the workers and peasants gathers steam there will be revolutionary upsurges in the "independent" nations aimed at the eventual overthrow of the African bourgeoisie. The masses will also rid themselves of all the phony ideas, like "new" communalism, négritude, unique brand of African socialism, and the myth of the "classless" African society, pushed by the elites as covers for their exploitation.

Only then will the way be opened for the African masses to give real political and material aid to the guerilla war against the racist settler regimes in Southern and West Africa.

The Afro-American movement has followed a similar course as the African freedom struggle. The three main objectives have been self-determination, political power, and land for economic control. Each has presented possibilities and pitfalls which must be looked at from a class perspective.

While black self-determination can never be won under capitalism, the fight for it will create in part the objective conditions and consciousness for socialist revolution. The Bolsheviks were very much aware of this. After the revolution, Finland, an internal colony of Czarist Russia, was allowed to secede from the new Soviet nation and form its own capitalist state.

Many Bolshevik party members challenged this, arguing that an unrestricted policy of self-determination would only create more capitalist states hostile to the Soviet Union, and subservient to imperialism. It would further strengthen the power of the local bourgeoisie enabling it to oppress even more its own workers.

The Third All-Russian Congress of the Soviets in 1918 clarified the Bolshevik position on the matter. Stalin, then Commissar of Nationalities, with Lenin's approval had the motion passed stating that self-determination "ought to be understood as the right of self-determination not of the bourgeoisie but of the toiling masses of a given nation. The principle of self determination ought to be used as a means in the struggle for socialism and it ought to be subordinated to the principles of socialism." The congress also affirmed Lenin's concept of federalism which opposed the formation of unlimited numbers of small states based on each separate nationality.

The Chinese Communist Party was in substantial agreement with the Soviets on self-determination. They held that only after state economic and political power was seized by communists could a workers' government be established to truly safeguard self-determination of national minority peoples.

Previous to the revolution, the ruling classes in China usually came from the...
Han majority. Like America's white ruling class, they pushed their brand of racism, called "Great Han Chauvinism," in dealings with the national minorities which number some 40 million and make up 6 per cent of the Chinese population.

After the revolutionary triumph of 1949, the Chinese Communist Party quickly set about the job of changing the status of the country's nationalities. Josef Kolmas in a study of minority nationalities states:

Minorities officially gained equal status, the right of local self-government, and freedom to develop their languages and life... Regional autonomy is the basic policy which the government has adopted in its approach to the national problem. According to the Chinese constitution, autonomy is to be exercised in areas where minorities live in compact communities. In all other cases the electoral system is so arranged that they have suitable representation in local governments. Today, there are five autonomous, self-governing regions in China, and sixty-five smaller groupings known as autonomous counties.

The Chinese didn't rely on phony civil rights bills, Fair Housing Acts, Equal Employment Commissions, reams of studies, or countless conferences; they took forthright action making full use of workers state power to end the centuries of national oppression.

Growing numbers of blacks, recognizing the critical importance of political power, have projected the idea of an independent black party. Although the desire to break away from the capitalist-controlled Democratic and Republican parties is both necessary and on the surface progressive, certain questions must still be asked. The most immediate being, "Whose interests would it serve?"

The problems with a separate party could be summarized as follows: (1) the black elite with superior resources and organization would probably be in control; (2) it would lead to further splits in the working class; (3) a party program centered on nationalist demands of the elite, like calls for black administrators and black capitalists, would hinder the growth of radical consciousness; (4) it would prevent black workers from gaining control of community leadership, organizations, and programs, (5) it would promote the false notion of black "all-class" unity.

A black political party under these conditions would, in fact, be totally acceptable to the ruling class. The future might even see the Ford Foundation funding such an "independent" party directed by "militant" front leaders as another pacification tool masking the sell-out practices of black "spokesmen" in places like Oakland, Chicago, and Newark.

If the recent Black Political Convention in Gary is any indication, the best guess for the present is that the separate party idea will remain an idea thrown out by the black Democrats only to gain more personal concessions from the Democratic Party.

The practical need is for a multi-national workers party, capable of uniting all workers, led by a black working class vanguard, around the banner of socialist internationalism.

In direct relation to discussions on black political power is the demand for land and economic control. Marxists in the context of advanced capitalist society generally consider the land question as only one part of the struggle by workers for the means of production.

The Republic of New Africa with its appeals for five states in the South, and other black groups who speak of land as the solution, completely miss this point. Blacks have owned land for decades in the South. The peak was reached in 1910 when there were 220,000 individual black land owners. The numbers dwindled as mechanization and corporate enterprise increasingly dominated agricultural production. Blacks left the land in droves during the migrations which began in full force in the 1920's and moved to the North and West in search of better economic opportunities and living conditions.
Harry Haywood, early black communist organizer, in *Negro Liberation*, describes the process of corporate monopolization of Southern land which extended even into slavery:

The American plantation was never self-sustaining, for it was a hybrid of two systems, classic slave economy and modern capitalism, combining the worst features of both. It was sired by a capitalist commodity-producing society, developed under its wing and subjected to its market relationships. Then, as now, the nature of the planter’s crop, its price and his returns were determined by the capitalist market. His supplies and finances came from outside. During slavery, the plantation was financed by big banking and commercial institutions in the North as well as in England. But the really big invasion of the South and its agriculture by northern capital could come only with northern victory in the Civil War.5

We see the results of that invasion today not only in the South, but the entire nation. In 1969, 5% of the U.S. farms (90,000) made over half of farm sales. One percent of American feedlots handle 52% of the beef, and five companies buy 90% of all broiler chickens. In California, the largest agricultural state, one-tenth of one percent of the farms own 40% of the cropland. The 4 million dollars in government crop subsidies in 1970 went to the corporate farmers.

This corporate dominance has forced nearly 2,000 small farmers a month out of business. IT&T, Gulf Oil, Kraft, Southern Pacific, and Tenneco are the corporations in the forefront of the land grab.

The operations of Tenneco show clearly what is meant by land being only part of the means of production. The corporation plows its own land, uses sprays and chemicals from its own chemical plant, runs the tractors on gas and oil from its own refineries and oil wells, and finally processes, packages, and distributes the food through Tenneco subsidiaries.6

To talk about land in isolation and as an end, as nationalists do, is the height of naivete, and reveals the blurred misunderstanding of class forces. Until imperialism is destroyed there can be no independent farm, let alone an “independent” black nation. The present South where the masses of displaced black and white tenant farmers live in depressed, near semi-feudal conditions proves this.

Corporate capitalism has hit the small businessman in the same way as the small farmer. Free enterprise has long since been a thing of the past. The top 500 corporations in America in 1969 received over 75% of all industrial profits; the top ten received almost one-fourth of these profits. General Motors employs as many workers as there are in Greece, Norway, Denmark, and Finland combined.

Against this, there is no black capitalism. Black-owned businesses, primarily small marginal shops and markets, account for less than 3% of the country’s total businesses; black banking assets combined are less than one-half of one percent of the Bank of America’s.

While many are aware that “black capitalism” is nothing more than a neo-colonial fraud, the class implications haven’t entirely been drawn out. Talk of “capital gains,” “business growth,” “investment potentials,” etc., almost exclusively belongs to the vocabulary of the tiny black elite. Black workers, in turn, are concerned with job related issues, such as insurance, health and retirement benefits, layoffs, salaries, and the wage-price freeze, not owning.

This is the starting point for comprehending the crucial place of black labor at the head of the class struggle. The black movement, despite being led by the black elite, traditionally has been powered by black workers. Their demands, ignored during both the civil rights and black power phase, achieved forceful expression in the massive working class rebellions in Watts, Newark, Detroit and dozens of other cities...
The old argument that most blacks aren't production workers, have no influence in the economy and are therefore obsolete, has no validity. In the key long-shore, auto, steel and transportation industries blacks make up 25-40% of the work force. In Detroit's Chrysler factories blacks are the majority workers (70%); they're also in the majority in transit operations in cities like New York, Chicago, Detroit, Atlanta and Philadelphia.

The independent actions of black Detroit auto workers (initiated by the League of Revolutionary Black Workers), black dockworkers in New Orleans and Baltimore refusing to unload Rhodesian chrome, striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Poultry and Pulp workers in Mississippi, have demonstrated the potential for bottling up sections of the American economy.

Black women workers have provided some of the most militant leadership in these actions. They are at the middle of production in the garment trades, and are a large bloc in the auto, aircraft, and service industries as well as the nation’s educational system. The triple oppression they suffer as workers, blacks, and women will rapidly move them into the vanguard of the vanguard of the worker’s movement. No amount of black male chauvinist nonsense about “staying behind the man,” and “role is in the home having babies,” will change this.

This isn't to say that black unemployment isn't severe. It's always been several times greater than the average because as Marx noted, capitalism requires a large reserve supply of cheap labor to lower the wages of other workers, and serve in times of crisis as strike-breakers and scabs. But it is precisely this feature that gives the black community its overwhelming proletarian character. A worker, unemployed or not, still maintains working class consciousness, thus tying the individual into the industrial mainstream. This applies as much to the welfare mother as to the 20 year factory laborer.

Even if this were not the case, Marxists know that workers' strength is never measured by numbers, but rather by strategic location, influence, and function. In China, the industrial workers were regarded as the leaders of the revolutionary movement though they numbered only 2 million, or a minute fraction of the overall half-billion Chinese population. They realized that workers at the point of production are rigidly shaped with a discipline and stability to sustain the revolutionary struggle to its climax.

Another common tendency among some blacks who seek to discredit Marxism-Leninism and working class unity is to label the black community “lumpenproletariat.” The Cleaver-led Algiers Panthers have, unfortunately, given some credibility to this distortion too.

In the Marxian sense, the lumpenproletariat consists of hustlers, pimps, prostitutes, thieves, etc.; a sub-class, totally divorced from the work force, possessing no working class consciousness, and it lives by preying on the working class. The lumpen is a relatively small and powerless group in relation to the general black community.

The question is further confused by Fanon’s erroneous writings, in the Wretched of the Earth, on the lumpen:

In the colonial countries the working class has everything to lose; in reality it represents that fraction of the colonised nation which is necessary and irreplaceable if the colonial machine is to run smoothly; it includes tram conductors, taxi drivers, miners, dockers, interpreters, nurses and so on. It is these ele-

** Characteristically, the Black Political Convention could come up with only one recommendation dealing with black labor. And this was a meek call for enforcement of federal laws against discrimination in the construction industry.

***A study by Scientific American Magazine found that 70% of the “rioters” in Detroit and Newark held jobs. Sixty-one percent of the self-reported “rioters” in Newark were unemployed for only one month during the previous year. When asked about their employment they said that they wanted “a job with more income and responsibility.”
ments which constitute also the 'bourgeois' fraction of the colonised people.7

Nothing could be further from the African reality. Under colonialism, the African worker had no job security, benefits, and received, according to the 1958 African Labor Survey, pay "near the minimum level of existence." The numerous boycotts, rallies, demonstrations, and strikes by the "bought off" urban workers in Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and Guinea during the 1940's and 50's set the groundwork for the rise of the independence movement. The first demands for nationalization of industry came not from the lumpen or the peasants but by Nigerian tin miners, Ghanaian gold miners, and Zambian copper miners.8

Far more prevalent is the notion that white workers are reactionary and backward and will never be willing to unite with blacks. To a degree it is true that white workers are reactionary. But Marx didn't say that advanced workers were a natural revolutionary force, only that they held the best potential because of their proximity to the forces of production. The workers movement goes through stages of development and growth gradually taking on genuine class consciousness as capitalism ripens. Paul Sweezy, Marxian scholar, points to this in his Modern Capitalism:

There is nothing in the mere mechanics of the expanded reproduction process to bring about a qualitatively transformation of the proletariat. At this point it is therefore of first importance to recognize that in Marx's view the proletariat was not a revolutionary force from its birth but on the contrary acquired this quality in the course of its capitalist development.9

Engels and Lenin both showed how the capitalist class bribes a small section of labor's leadership ("labor aristocracy"; e.g. Meany's, Woodcocks, etc.) to tranquilize labor's demands and struggles and smother revolutionary class awareness. Imperialism makes it possible to support this privileged labor elite. The uneven development of capitalism and the millions of super-profits yearly extracted from poor Third World nations enable the imperialists to perpetuate the illusion of a prosperous white working class.

Theoretician James Boggs who, in Racism and the Class Struggle, writes "side by side with the development of the black revolutionary force grows the white workers' counter-revolutionary force," helps feed this illusion.10

A Department of Labor study in 1966 revealed that 65% of working class families fell below the department's "modest" living standard for a family of four of $9,000. Among professionals 43% were below the standard. Labor's dissatisfaction grows larger daily as the current capitalist economic crisis deepens. The increased number of wildcat strikes by teamsters, dockworkers, autoworkers, miners, coupled with the mass outcry over the wage-price freeze (even the hardhat construction workers who attacked blacks two years ago in New York fought pitched battles with police recently in several cities) prove that the rank and file can reject its bureaucrat misleaders and conduct independent actions.

In more than a few of these labor fights, black and white workers united in the struggle. A dramatic example was the strike against Masonite of the pulp workers in Mississippi where white workers (some former Klansmen) maintained solidarity with the black workers for several months against the company.

Not since the 1930's has the potential, present today, existed for black-white workers unity in every industry to oppose capitalism. The British Marxist, George Thomson, underscores this:

If the relatively high standard of living enjoyed by the workers of these countries was won on the basis of colonial exploitation, then, with the collapse of that basis, they will be compelled to shed their reformist illusions and so will recover their revolutionary consciousness.11

While many blacks have been slow to
see this, the rulers have not. The Masonite strike received no publicity from the mass media. Any time black and white workers join together around class demands the capitalist media will do everything to keep it from public view.

Black bourgeois art contributes to this too. The poems, plays, literature of the "militant" black artists are hailed by ruling class organs like Time, Newsweek, the New York Times, movie industry, etc. None of it shows class struggle. It glorifies feudal African traditions, reactionary kings, and empires, male chauvinism, individualism, and every lumpen element in the black community from the hustler to the drifter. The enemy is "whitey," "the Jew," "the pig," but never the real enemy: capitalism and imperialism. These "new" black cultural forms never treat the daily existence of black workers, nor do they deal with Marxism-Leninism except as a put-down.

"Experts" such as Cruse, with their concepts of "ethnic pluralism," "cultural revolution," and "black aesthetic" are held up as the final answer. But there has never been a separate ruling class for blacks, browns, Native-Americans, and whites. The ruling class oppresses all as workers. Working class culture, not national culture, cuts across all ethnic lines. Lenin observed:

The elements of democratic and socialist culture are present, if only in rudimentary form, in every national culture, since in every nation there are toiling and exploited masses, whose conditions of life inevitably give rise to the ideology of democracy and socialism.

He went on to caution:

But every nation also possesses a bourgeois culture (and most nations a reactionary and clerical culture as well) in the form, not merely of 'elements' but of the dominant culture. Therefore, the general 'national culture' is the culture of the landlords, the clergy and the bourgeoisie.12

The same parallels are found in black culture dominated by the black elite, but possessing a solid working class core (the blues, black-eyed peas, dance). This applies to history as well. Largely distorted and hidden by white and black bourgeois historians is the part played by white in the slave rebellions, the role of black workers in the late 19th and early 20th century labor and socialist organizations, and the later CIO, black communist leadership in the unemployment councils and marches in the 1930's, and the mass black opposition to the imperialist wars against Mexico (1848), Spain (1898), and World War I.

The biggest single roadblock to worker's unity still remains racism. Marxists start with the premise that racism cannot be detached from its material base: capitalism. Racism is pushed openly through every social and cultural medium by the ruling class from above to split the working class. The material base of racism lies in the estimated $22 billion in super-profits taken in off of black labor. Racism is sustained because it means both profit and control.

Many blacks often counter this by holding up the racism of white workers as proof that racism can exist "apart" from capitalist control. Certainly after 300 years racism has become embedded in the American superstructure of ideas. But nothing exists in a vacuum. All ideas flow from, and conform to, society's class and economic structure.

For instance, the cruder forms of Southern racism manifested in lynchings, rigid segregation, etc., began breaking down long before the first sit-ins, or freedom marches. Peasant labor gave way to mechanization, the economy became more diversified, and heavy industry supplanted cotton as the area's prime economic concern. With this came the black migration to urban centers, North and South. Harold Barron, in his essay, "The Demand for Black Labor: Historical Notes on the Political Economy of Racism," explains:

Elimination of the Southern black peasantry was decisive in changing the forms of racism throughout the entire region, for it
meant the disappearance of the economic foundation on which the elaborate superstructure of legal Jim Crow and segregation had originally been erected. Not only did this exploited agrarian group almost vanish, but the power of the large landholders who expropriated the surplus it had produced diminished in relation to the growing urban and industrial efforts. While the civil rights movement and the heroic efforts associated with it were necessary to break the official legality of segregation, it should be recognized that in a sense this particular form of racism was already obsolete, as its base in an exploitive system of production had drastically changed.13

Southern racism, today, more and more resembles the Northern model with the emphasis on code and custom rather than law.

If racism can be transformed through economic change, it can be eliminated through class struggle, and the defeat of capitalism. History shows this. The Industrial Workers of the World unified black and white workers against the timber barons in Louisiana and Texas in 1910 during the famed lumber strikes. The Communist Party in the early 1930’s, the United Mineworkers, and the Southern Tenant Farmers Union saw black-white co-operation. Racism was also beaten in the courtroom fights of Angela Davis, the Soledad Brothers, and the prison-workers rebellion at Attica. Only the absence of a multi-national communist party to provide ideology and leadership has prevented the gains made in the struggle against racism from being permanent.

Everything depends ultimately on the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the past decade, the black movement has seen a steady pageant of “revolutionary” super-leaders, created largely by mass media, and “new” ideologies come and go while the condition of the black masses deteriorates. The lesson from this is that there isn’t any shortcut to progressive change except through patient organizing—away from the rulers’ media—and class struggle. We can learn much from the Chinese, Russian and Cuban revolutions, but in the end black liberation can only come through socialist revolution in America.

ROMANTIC NOTIONS about assassinations, black guerrilla war, and terrorism, are only fantasies which can never substitute for mass-based working class consciousness united against capitalism.

Three solid consciousness-raising tactics which could presently be used to build this are: the running of independent candidates in local elections to agitate for working class needs and spread radical ideas to a broader base of people; the formation of unemployment councils to fight for jobs, increased social security welfare, and workmen’s compensation benefits; and a working class united front around inflation, layoffs, the wage-price freeze, and other related issues.

Such a united front would definitely include the more progressive sections of the black elite on tactical matters like police repression which affects all blacks. But the united front here should be based on the Leninist principles of “struggle with, struggle against,” and with black workers always firmly holding control of the leadership. The organization’s structure should be rooted in democratic centralism, collective decision-making, and taking ideas “from the masses to the masses.”

This kind of united front differs sharply from the kind projected by Stokely Carmichael where black ministers, politicians, and businessmen dominated. It would also be the opposite of other non-class, no-struggle “united” approaches, such as Shirley Chisholm’s phony “revolutionary” humanism, Ron Dellums’ “we’re all new niggers,” the Communist Party’s anti-monopoly front which relies on the liberal petty-bourgeoisie.

Where white workers are involved in the united front, the obvious way to beat down racism is for black workers to educate through leadership and practice while...
keeping paramount a class perspective. Simply saying that whites should organize whites offers no guarantee that this will end racism (it probably only reinforces it).

A significant part of the class struggle is the winning of reforms (not as end-reformism) but as stepping stones to increasing the consciousness of the masses and widening the contradictions between the imperialists and the workers. Reformism, alone, poses the danger of channeling the mass movement away from socialism.

Black studies, for instance, though never a working class objective, at one point was a progressive campus reform which mobilized large segments of black students. But it wasn’t transformed into a full challenge of the biased class nature of American education. This enabled the ruling class to move in and co-opt. Now Black Studies is merely a “respectable” training ground for the “militant” black elite. On many of the campuses, the Ford Foundation has gladly underwritten this kind of program.

The type of demands that contribute most to the sharpening of the class struggle include: self-determination; end to racism and women’s oppression; the formation of multi-national, rank-and-file union caucuses; a 30 hour work week; end to speed-ups, layoffs, compulsory overtime, inadequate medical care and safety conditions in the plant, the wage-price freeze; implementation of total social and welfare employment benefits; guaranteed annual income; free health centers and day care centers, decent low-cost housing and education; peoples’ control of the media and cultural forms, the halt of pollution; end to narcotics traffic; support of the farmworker’s boycotts; freedom of all political prisoners (which means all black, poor, and oppressed workers who make up the jails); support of national liberation movements in Africa and the Third World; complete withdrawal of U.S. military, CIA, FBI, and all other similar domestic counter-insurgency agencies.

Already groups like the Black Workers Congress, the Communist League, the Puerto Rican Workers Organization as well as the growing number of black and brown caucuses springing up within unions, have come forth with viable tactics and strategies based on demands similar to these.

Anything less will only lead up the blind alley of liberalism and reformism and in the end wind up back in the arms of the ruling class.

FOOTNOTES
2. Ibid., p. 43