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The Tasks & Challenges Facing the Black Left in the U.S.

BLACK WORKERS LEAGUE STATEMENT

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The spontaneous mass Black and broader support among the U.S. population for the Obama campaign for U.S. president grows out of a long period of a deep anger against the racist system of national oppression and attacks on democratic rights for working class, oppressed people and women, that have intensified over the past nearly 30 years with the advent of the Reagan administration.

It is important to have a context for looking at the massive alienation taking place inside of the U.S., so that Black activists--the broad Black left--understand the significance of the spontaneity around the Obama campaign and the need for their conscious and unified political intervention.

The alienation and various expressions of popular resistance, which are also occurring internationally, stem from the expansion and contradictions of U.S. and global capitalism/imperialism at a more accelerated pace and scope since the collapse of socialism in Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, a countervailing force which had acted somewhat as a brake on imperialism.¹

For the next forty years after WWII, there were important democratic advances made in the struggle against imperialism--the defeat of colonialism throughout Asia,

Africa and Latin America, and the defeat of Jim Crow and apartheid inside the U.S. South and Southern Africa.

These democratic advances brought about some basic improvements especially for the middle classes, even though they did not go deep enough in changing the material conditions of life for the oppressed nationality working-class majorities. The establishment of basic citizenship and organizational rights and democratic institutions, however, provided a framework for fighting for further democratic advances.

Following the collapse of socialism, there was a major capitalist scramble and competition for global markets. We began to witness a trend of government deregulation, privatization, unfair and predatory trade agreements and the dismantling of social programs--often referred to as "neo-liberalism"--that swept the globe.

Globalization--because it reinforces and reproduces economic and other inequalities and furthers the subjugation of the post-colonial societies--undermines the resolution of the national question in a number of ways.²

The crumbling of the infrastructure in cities throughout the country, highlighted

¹ "Labor In The Era Of Capitalist Globalization" by Scott Marshall, CPUSA Labor Commission

² "Globalization is Imperialism", African Communist, First Quarter 2001, p.13

by the break of the levees in New Orleans, which was responsible in part for the major devastation resulting from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, is a major consequence of the domestic neoliberal agenda of U.S. imperialism.

The massive housing foreclosures affecting millions of working people and the government bailout of the banks as a response that favors capital over the human needs of the masses, is another example of how the U.S. system places the burden on the working class for addressing the social and economic crises created by the corporations.

The mass support for Obama represents the yearning of Black people for democracy and power to challenge and end national oppression and the deeply rooted white racism and privilege that exist throughout all of U.S. society. The racism, arrogance, attacks on democratic rights and militarism embodied in and epitomized by the

Bush administration help to make clear to the masses the dangers of imperialism.

Mass Black support for Obama is also a major factor attracting the wider support among progressives and some moderates to support his campaign. For large numbers of progressives, the African-American struggle for democracy and self-determination is understood as being at the core of the wider struggle for U.S. democracy and a major social force to give leadership and direction to the wider struggles.

For others, including some moderates, it is a question of protecting a core constituent base of the Democratic Party, in order to protect the party as a "moderate" vehicle for maintaining and "reforming" capitalism. Thus, they want to distinguish it from the Republican Party on issues related to race, gender and the working class.

For sure, the Obama campaign is exposing contradictions within the Democratic Party and the system of bourgeois democ-



U.S. gov't's racist policy during Hurricane Katrina, Aug./Sept. 2005.

racy, showing how they politically attack and try to undermine African-American self-determination. However, it is not bringing about a radicalization in the mass Black political consciousness. In fact, there are increasing pressures on Obama to move to the right to win the Democratic Party nomination and to be a "viable" candidate in a general election against McCain.

The Obama campaign can therefore take the spontaneous Black masses in very confusing and contradictory directions in terms of shaping political consciousness if there is no presence of a left pole helping to establish organizational forms and consciousness that provide a framework for some degree of political independence from the Democratic Party.

The efforts by the Clinton faction within the Democratic Party and the media to weaken support for Obama by pandering to white racism expose the true political character of the Democratic Party, which has the largest Black voting base of any political party. This strategy sends a poignant message—that if Black people want power at the highest levels, they must denounce everything that identifies them with the struggle against African-American national oppression and solidarity with other oppressed peoples challenging the U.S. government and imperialism.

Obama's speech related to his pastor Reverend Wright's pulpit sermon against

U.S. racism and imperialism forced him to take a stand on race, and has now made the issue of race a serious part of his candidacy, even as he tries to move away from it.

This has caused distrust and a loss of confidence among many Black people about the Democratic Party's commitment to equal rights for Black people. It has also created an opening in the general presidential climate that should be used to widen and deepen the discussion and actions throughout the national Black community aimed at developing the beginnings of a Black agenda for democracy.

Promoting support for Obama should be viewed by the Black left as a tactical alliance dictated by the mass spontaneity and the fragmentation of the Black liberation movement. Building a national Black united front around a transitional program for democracy and power for this period is critical to advancing the struggle for African-American self-determination out of a long period of decline and stagnation.

The Struggle for Democracy

Despite the serious weaknesses in Obama's political platform, the racist tactics against his candidacy have now made his candidacy for African Americans increasingly more an issue of anti-racist democracy and not merely a choice between the lesser of evils.

The struggle against African-American

national oppression is at the core of the struggles for democracy inside the U.S., as national oppression intensifies and concentrates for Black people all of the main categories of social, economic and political oppression and exploitation experienced by oppressed nationalities and the working class inside the U.S. It



Supporting the Memphis sanitation workers.

is both a struggle for democracy and for self-determination, a struggle within and against the system.

We must understand the relationship between the struggle for democracy and the struggle for power. This is especially important for oppressed nationalities inside of the U.S. imperialist state. The struggle for democracy challenges the norms, policies and structures of racism and national oppression to create greater democratic space to fight for reforms within the capitalist imperialist system. There will be temporary alliances of various types within the struggle for democracy.

The struggle for Black power grows out of the struggle for democracy. It seeks to organize and position Black people to use reforms and to build and consolidate areas of mass-based transformative power that alter power relations and tilt the balance of power in favor of African-American self-determination and the movements and struggles of other oppressed people and the working class throughout U.S. society.

The struggle against women's oppression must have a clear and organized identity as part of the struggle against Black national oppression. This historical weakness is part of the dilemma and confusion for some around supporting the candidacies of Obama and Hillary Clinton.

The struggles for democracy and power within the U.S. imperialist state also have international significance. Imperialist globalization led by the U.S. has in some ways drawn all of the countries throughout the world into its economic orbit under terms and conditions that favor the advanced capitalist countries at the expense of the developing countries.¹

The Obama candidacy helps to expose the Democratic Party's role and complicity with the U.S. imperialist state in denying



Dr. Martin Luther King with the Memphis sanitation workers, 1968

the right of African-American self-determination, consistent with U.S. domination of oppressed nations and peoples throughout the world. Making this link is an important aspect of the work needing to be done in developing anti-imperialist consciousness as a key part of the struggle for democracy. This can help to raise the importance of Black mass opposition to the U.S. direct and supported wars in Iraq, throughout the Middle East and in other countries.

Race and Black National Oppression

However, dealing with the issue of race without addressing the question of Black national oppression does not go deep enough in defining the struggle for democracy and African-American self-determination against U.S. imperialism. This shortcoming has been a major part of the weakness in defining the African-American National Question.

The appointments and elections of Blacks to high positions in U.S. government can give a misleading and false sense about democracy and power as it relates to addressing core conditions of Black national oppression. Clearly the Republican appointments

¹ "Globalization is Imperialism," African Communist, First Quarter 2001, p.8

of Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice to the high level position of U.S. Secretary of State resulted in the highest political positions ever achieved by Blacks in the history of the U.S. This is also the case with the presidential candidacy of Obama and the appointments of Black CEOs and members of boards of Fortune 500 corporations.

The Obama candidacy must be used to bring out concrete issues, demands and struggles against national oppression and for democratic changes and power. Otherwise, his candidacy can become a call for all, including Black people, to move "beyond" issues and demands related to racial justice.

The struggle for democracy related to the Obama campaign must have a frame of reference that enables the Black masses to identify with this campaign without abandoning core principles--the program advanced by Dr. King which has shaped the basic moral and ideological vision of democracy for the Black masses over the past 40 years.

The Black left must unite to help the masses to defend, act on and advance this basic vision of democracy promoted by Dr. King as a minimum program as it seeks to rebuild the Black liberation movement with a more organized and stronger Black

working-class mass base and national, class and internationalist consciousness.

As part of promoting this minimum "Dr. King" program for democracy, it is important that the Black left stress the importance of building social movements that engage millions of the masses in the bottom-up process of mobilizing mass-based power as an essential component for bringing about transformative changes against a system that is dominated by a powerful ruling class and state power, even if the president has liberal leanings and intentions.

There must also be a key battleground struggle and national demand that enables the Black masses to see in a concentrated way the brutality and oppression of the U.S. system against Black people, and that demands that all elected officials and social, economic and political institutions and parties address these issues as a core democratic measurement of their commitment to democracy.

The demand for voting rights, Black power and the organization of the Poor People's March established the battleground demands and a point of convergence for the democratic struggles that were critical to forcing basic democratic concessions and helping to bring about an end to the Vietnam War.



New Orleans, December 2005.

OLDFHM



Raleigh city workers receive self-determination award from Nathanette Mayo, April 2007.

Without a clear demand and battle-ground struggle to serve as a mantra for the struggle for African- American self-determination, the work to influence and organize the spontaneity in an independent political direction becomes almost impossible in any significant way.

The Need for Unity among the Black Left

The fragmentation of the Black liberation movement--reflecting the lack of a basic united front framework that engages the many organizations and activists in developing a program, coalitions, campaigns and key demands and slogans that unite and give focus to the struggles of the Black masses--has weakened the intervention of the Black left in spontaneous challenges to U.S. national oppression and imperialism over the past 20 years.

The various sections of the Black liberation movement--the Reparations, Pan-African, Women's, Youth and Students, Workers' and Environmental Racism movements, among others, have no strategic demand, program and focus that unite them practically as a national liberation movement.

The implementation of the various left and progressive positions related to align-

ment with and support for the Obama candidacy and for political action independent of the Democratic and Republican Parties, is weakened by the fragmentation of the Black and broader left-led political and social movements.

The inability to unite to help mount a national campaign in response to U.S. government oppression related to the Gulf Coast disaster in more than 2 years since the tragedy reflects the deep level of political fragmentation among the Black left and progressive forces.

As a result, the demand for Reconstruction in the Gulf Coast has not emerged as a major national demand among Black people as one of the main reasons for their support for Obama. Thus, it has not become a major part of the Obama political message about benchmarks for "the new America" he promotes.

What is more revealing about the state of the Black liberation movement and the Black left, is that there have been no serious efforts to convene a national meeting of Black activists to discuss the meaning of the Gulf Coast disaster for Black people and to develop a united fight back program that makes Reconstruction in the Gulf Coast a national demand for Black people.

Likewise, the difficulties in building and navigating the unity of forces in New Orleans in particular--the epicenter of the struggle for Reconstruction--did not have the benefit of a national Black united front or a more united Black left to help address problems.

The fragmentation stems partly from the history of U.S. government repression and errors of left sectarianism and narrow nationalism. It is also the result of the current organizational positions of much of the Black left, after the demise of the main revolutionary nationalist organizations and national Black united fronts, the alienation by white chauvinism within many of the multiracial left parties and organizations, and by demoralization resulting from the "defeat" of socialism.

Many are in hundreds of nonprofit organizations competing with each other for funding from liberal and progressive foundations, many of which are reluctant to fund organizations that embrace Black political and organizational forms and demands associated with Black Nationalism.

Many Black leftists in these groups are leaders of important social movements. While taking strong stands against racism, women's oppression and working-class exploitation, including training new fighters for social justice, especially women and people of color, promoting the intersection of the social movements and international solidarity; some have been reluctant to be part of national Black organizations that identify as part of the African-American liberation movement. As a result the struggles against racism by their groups are not linked to a united front movement and program for African-American self-determination.

The Black liberation movement needs new blood, new energy and some new ideas



coming out of the social movements led by a new and emerging part of the Black left. Without these new ideas and strengthened with the experience and lessons of the past, the Black left will not be able to rebuild a national Black liberation movement that can provide leadership and

a direction for self-determination and social transformation for the 21st century.

The Black Left: Organizing the Black Working Class

The Black left must become more deeply rooted and organized within vital sectors of the Black working class as its main mass base. These mass bases must be able to strengthen the impact of the Black liberation struggle on the capitalist/imperialist economy and the political system, independent of the dictates and control by the bourgeois parties and funding sources. This base and power must be organized in a deliberate manner with a plan of concentration, not only periodic agitation. This must become a main task and part of the process of forging Black-left unity.

There are major organizations that involve large numbers of Black and working-class people that have formally endorsed the Obama campaign--trade unions, social movements around housing and the environment, faith based organizations, and the hip hop and entertainment networks that relate to large numbers of Black and working class youth. Victories for Obama in the Southern states in particular resulted from the large turnout and support from the Black masses.

As the U.S. South remains the region where the majority of Black people live, and that has a special meaning in shaping the national character and consciousness of

Black people as an oppressed nation, this massive political turnout can have special significance for rebuilding a strong mass base of the Black liberation movement in the South.

The Black left must develop a program and plan for organizing the Black working class within these organizations, networks and the U.S. South to push forward the demands and challenges against Black national, working-class and women's oppression and exploitation throughout the whole of US society.

These bases of the Black working class must become leading sectors of a national Black united front that help to shape the direction of the struggle and demands for African-American self-determination and that build power and influence that impact the direction and consciousnesses of the broader U.S. multi-national working class.

**Reconstruction in the Gulf Coast:
Critical to the Unity of the Black Left**

The demand for Reconstruction in the Gulf Coast is one of the strongest African-American-centered issues about race,

democracy and human rights that could be promoted as a national Black mandate for democracy, not only in the short term, for the Obama campaign, but as an ongoing strategic and partial demand of the struggle for African-American self-determination.

It ties together all of the main questions characterizing African-American national oppression--underdevelopment of the infrastructure, including the lack of an evacuation plan; depressed wages; low unionization; failure of all levels of government to make a timely rescue effort; forced dispersion and gentrification; criminalization of the Black masses; increased homelessness; price gouging; the suspension of laws for worker protections and affirmative action; political disenfranchisement; denial of international aid; state repression and increased incarceration; the dismantling of public institutions; busting of unions; billions for unjust imperialist wars; the special impacts on women, children and the elderly; and the denial of the right of return.

The struggle of the Jena 6 is directly connected to the racist climate centered on the Black majority dislocated and dis-



Jena. La. Sept. 20, 2007.

persed within and without from the Gulf Coast. White working-class communities throughout the Gulf Coast and nationally are being encouraged to view the demand for government financial accountability to the needs of the working-class Black majority of the Gulf Coast as a new kind of welfare that threatens their social progress and privilege.

However, this connection to the demand for Reconstruction in the Gulf Coast was not developed as part of the Jena 6 struggle. As a result, the thousands of young Black people that were mobilized around this struggle were left without a clear direction for organizing and engaging in the struggle against national oppression.

There is an international sentiment in support of Gulf Coast Reconstruction; an international tribunal was formed involving Black, Native American and progressive national and international forces to conduct an investigation and findings on the U.S. violations related to crimes against humanity. Formal international bodies connected to the United Nations Human Rights Commission have been approached and issued preliminary findings.

Organizations among other oppressed peoples inside the U.S., particularly in the Latin@ immigrant rights movement, continue to express support for the demand for Reconstruction, because it speaks directly to issues of immigrant rights that have been abused by the U.S. government's actions and inactions regarding worker and human rights and protections in the Gulf Coast.

Elements of the Black left are active in helping to forge Black and Brown unity related to the struggle in the Gulf Coast and as a necessary strategic alliance against U.S. imperialism. Such an alliance would constitute a significant political block to push bourgeois democracy to its limits on questions of national oppression, immigration and U.S. policies in Latin America.

Thousands of Black people, workers, students, academics, faith-based organizations, entertainers and many others throughout the country have been engaged in some way in responding to the disaster and needs of the survivors in and dispersed from the Gulf Coast.

The thousands of Black survivors still dispersed in major cities across the country, have made the right of return a major demand of the Black liberation movement—a demand that helps to build Black consciousness about and solidarity with the Palestinian people's struggle for self-determination and national liberation against the U.S.-supported Zionist and imperialist state of Israel.

The demand and struggle for Reconstruction in the Gulf Coast as a national demand has the potential for bringing together various sections, tendencies and alignments within and related to the Black liberation movement, like the Reparations movement, forces using the international human rights framework and Black worker caucuses and networks within the trade unions.

Like the struggle to end Jim Crow in the South, the struggle for Reconstruction in the Gulf Coast must become a key battleground and demand of the African-American struggle for self-determination. It must become a mantra and rallying call to action.

There exists a basis for building a broad popular movement for Reconstruction as the new strategic and transitional demand for African-American self-determination. It would be anchored by the struggle in the Gulf Coast, part of the U.S. South, where the majority of the African-American people still live in conditions of national oppression and underdevelopment not far removed from the period of the 1960s.

The Black left must find a way to give a popular expression to the demand and movement for Reconstruction that the

masses are able to identify with. A We Charge Genocide Campaign can become an important aspect of the demand for Reconstruction. Initiatives like the Green Ribbon Campaign as an expression of the We Charge Genocide Campaign can serve as popular forms of people's vigils, promoting and reminding ourselves, the whole of the U.S. and the international community, that African-American national oppression magnified by the Gulf Coast disaster constitutes a crime against humanity.

Building Peoples' Assemblies: Independence & Unity in the United Front

Political independence and self-determination start with the Black left acting collectively as a conscious element in organizing the national Black masses. The Black left must help to develop a mass trend toward national Black unity that begins to manifest itself during the election period. It can take the form of a National Black Assembly movement leading to the convening of a National Black Assembly, if not before, then sometime following the Democratic National Convention regardless of who wins the nomination.

For the millions of Black and working people to develop their political consciousness and understanding of the struggle for African-American self-determination in this period, it is necessary for them to have their own experience in the struggles for democracy and social progress. This means that the main activity of the Black left has to be at the level on which the masses are currently prepared to struggle most, reflected by their spontaneity and in the arenas where it is being primarily expressed.

With the concerns and fears among many Black people about the possibility of the Democratic Party disenfranchising their popular votes by using the superdelegates to decide the presidential nominee at the Democratic National Convention, it

offers a real opportunity for the Black left to agitate for the holding of Black and Poor People's Assemblies.

By building Black political assemblies at the local and state levels, the Black left can begin a movement that brings together leaders and activists of the mass struggles and organizations throughout the country, to consciously engage in developing a Black political agenda that reflects their demands, that helps them to view their support for Obama from a perspective of the struggle for democracy and self-determination, including making Reconstruction in the Gulf Coast as a national demand.

The Black Assemblies cannot be merely the gathering of the big names. Key Black and working-class struggles must be identified in each area that begins to engage the masses and their organizations to establish a trend of fight back that calls on all candidates to come to the various points of mass struggle--the strikes of workers, struggles against gentrification, police brutality, education not incarceration, for the right to organize in the South and in opposition to the U.S. imperialist wars.

A Reconstruction Party

A Reconstruction Party would be an important component of the struggle for African-American self-determination. It could be a vehicle that while anchored in the Black working class, unites oppressed nationality and working class social movements in contesting for political representation at the local, state and national government levels.

Within the Gulf Coast, especially in New Orleans, there should be serious efforts to build a Reconstruction Party, as the struggle for Black working-class led political power must be an essential part of the Reconstruction Movement.

Unfortunately, the fragmentation of the Black liberation movement does not

yet make the formation of a national Reconstruction Party the basis for building the broadest unity necessary for forging a national Black united front in this period.

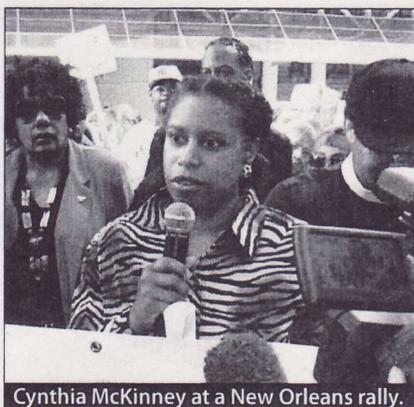
The current national Reconstruction Party building initiative, despite some unclaritys, weaknesses and disagreements, should be viewed as a positive development and a part of a process of forging Black-left unity toward a broader national Black united front.

The Cynthia McKinney Candidacy

A stronger base of Black mass support for the candidacy of Cynthia McKinney, a proven fighter for the rights and needs of the oppressed domestically and internationally, suffers from the fragmentation of the Black liberation movement as well as the weaknesses of base and program of the Green Party in the Black community.

The McKinney candidacy, however, can help to raise consciousness about the need for a real alternative to the Democratic, Republican and all political parties that fail to take up the struggle against national oppression as a fundamental demand for democracy and social change, especially as the racist pillars of the Democratic Party continue to be exposed.

A showdown at the Democratic National Convention around using the "superdelegates" to usurp and politically disenfranchise the Black and popular vote from the Democratic primaries, could win some Black people, especially linked to the social movements and Black left, to support a McKinney candidacy as a protest vote. This



HTTP://CODEPINKFORITLAND.ORG/NEWORLEANS.FTML

Cynthia McKinney at a New Orleans rally.

could begin to lay a foundation and direction among the Black masses toward forming a broad national independent mass-based political party.

McKinney should be invited to participate in forums and activities that speak to the need for political independence from the establishment parties and that mobilize mass-based challenges against the various aspects of Black national oppression. She should also be invited to seek support for her candidacy at these events.

Yes, there are differences among the Black left. However, they should be viewed as secondary and non-antagonist to the need for Black-left unity to intervene in the spontaneous motion of the Black masses and to rebuild the national Black liberation movement.

The process will take time, patience, consistent work among the Black working-class masses and comradely struggle. What other choices do we have?

**For African-American Self-Determination: a Cornerstone of the Struggle
against U.S. imperialism for national liberation, women's emancipation,
workers' power and revolutionary social transformation.**

BLACK WORKERS LEAGUE

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