

Unity in the Black Left is Crucial to a Process of Re-foundation of the African American Liberation Movement

Across the United States, hundreds of local struggles are being led by working-class African American community and social movements against economic and social conditions that are compounded by national oppression. And yet, on the national level, the African American liberation movement is fragmented.

This fragmentation has weakened the national consciousness and confidence of the African American masses as a vital social force in the struggles for democracy, self-determination and social transformation. It has made the African American masses more vulnerable to opportunist misleadership and the influence of right-wing and chauvinist views that scapegoat other oppressed sectors within the U.S. and internationally as the basis of the social, economic and political problems we face.

Concerns are raised about the lack of major participation from the African American community in the anti-war mobilizations, and about the lack of a militant national response to the U.S. government's role in turning a natural disaster triggered by hurricanes Katrina and Rita into a social and political attack on the Black majority in New Orleans and throughout the Gulf Coast.

There are calls for the unity of people of color, for multinational unity and international solidarity. These are important and necessary for building a powerful struggle against U.S.-led imperialism. Yet the serious efforts needed to build the national political unity of Black organizations and struggles into a conscious African American liberation movement fighting for self-determination seems not to be defined as one of the main tasks of the Black left and the U.S. anti-imperialist movement.

The need for national Black unity is emphasized mainly during major political election years and when the Black middle class wants to force concessions from the Democratic Party, corporate America and the U.S. government.

The important national mobilizations since the mid-1990s have for the most part been organized by short-term coalitions committed to the mobilizations for various class and political reasons and not by a national Black united front committed to a strategic and transitional program of action for building mass struggles and bases of Black power as zones of the struggle for African American self-determination and social transformation.

When Black radicals began to unite in the late 1990s, most had limited roots and connections to the mass-based African American people's struggles. Instead of being a conscious force working to connect the local struggles at the regional and national levels and give them a political direction as streams and flanks of a common national movement for African American self-determination, they sent an inadvertent message that Black radicalism was separate and apart from the mass struggles. Black radicalism was projected more as a counter pole to the uneven and unconsolidated efforts to rebuild the Black liberation movement that were being expressed in the form of the Million Man, Million Women, Million Youth and Millions for Reparations marches.

There are obvious class and gender weaknesses and contradictions within the African American liberation movement's re-emerging national character. The question of patriarchy as a fundamental pillar of capitalist

and imperialist power must be more sharply defined in the revolutionary theory, analysis and organization of the African American liberation movement.

The struggle against these contradictions and for a sharper revolutionary perspective of the struggle for African American self-determination requires the unity and active presence of a revolutionary Black left within the national coalitions organizing these popular mobilizations as part of the process of forging the national Black united and liberation front.

Unfortunately, there has been an impatience and unwillingness among much of the Black left in dealing with the contradictions of building African American national unity. Many seem to have a greater patience and sensitivity in dealing with similar problems in trying to forge unity within the broader social movements and the revolutionary anti-imperialist left.

A fear of Black Nationalism has been a major factor throughout the broad U.S. progressive movement, including among the radical left elements. This fear contributes to a kind of social chauvinism against the African American liberation movement's development of genuine national Black united and liberation fronts. The Black left must struggle against this national chauvinism as strongly as some have and continue to struggle against "narrow Black nationalism."

Black left unity must be viewed as an essential part of the process of widening, deepening and transforming the class, gender, democratic and political character of the African American liberation movement.

Many in the Black left describe the African American struggle as a struggle against racism or against racialized capitalism without including the demand for self-determination or engaging in concrete and long-term work to build a conscious framework for the African American liberation movement. While these formulations are correct in defining how the African American liberation struggle contributes to the wider struggles for democracy, they don't necessarily help the national Black community understand how the African American liberation movement contributes to the revolutionary process of altering the balance of power for the larger revolutionary struggle for national liberation and social transformation.

The demand for African American self-determination up to and including the right of political secession means that the African American liberation movement must have a transitional program with strategic demands, organizational forms and mass bases/zones of Black power. Self-determination is an independent national democratic right of the African American people. However, this right must also be understood and struggled for as a key factor in shaping and defining the revolutionary balance of power between the forces of imperialism and world revolution.

The reparations movement as it developed in the 1990s represents an attempt to realign and rebuild the African American liberation movement. It is an important movement with great potential to organize the African Diaspora as a conscious section of the global anti-imperialist movement. In addition to being a demand of redress for the historical crimes against humanity committed by European and U.S. capitalism and imperialism against Africa and peoples of African descent throughout the world, it must also be understood as a demand and struggle for the redistribution of the accumulated wealth, resources and power of global imperialism.

Like the demand and struggle for African American self-determination, the demand for reparations must also be transitional and not static. Demands for institutional and infrastructural development which have lagged or been denied to the Black community as part of the history of African American national oppression must be seen as part of the struggle for reparations tied to a self-determination that empowers the Black working class as the largest and potentially most revolutionary sector of the African American nation and wider U.S. working class.

The African American liberation movement must identify strategic zones and arenas of struggle where it can seek to organize areas of contending power against the institutions and forces of corporate power and the U.S. imperialist state. These zones must develop their political independence from the corporate and imperialist state dominated political parties. They must build new independent and mass based Reconstruction Parties that are rooted in constituent based assemblies and a strong labor movement that organizes the power of the masses to have more direct control over the social, economic and political institutions and policies of those zones – thereby creating a degree of political autonomy as an aspect of self-determination.

The African American liberation movement must identify and forge alliances with primary strategic allies that are positioned to build strategic zones of power in areas where Black or other oppressed people constitute a majority or critical mass of the working class and are regionally situated so that the alliance could constitute a wider regional political and economic anti-imperialist zone. These zones need to establish relations with progressive organizations and governments throughout the U.S. and internationally. They should use international frameworks, conventions and standards where possible, as a way of placing African American national demands within an international context.

The history of the struggles for self-determination within the U.S. have their roots in the struggles of African Americans and Chicanos in the South and Southwest. These are the regions where the concentrated national oppression and exploitation of the masses of African Americans and Latinos are the most pronounced. These have been the areas where the restructuring of U.S. capitalism has used to undermine the power of the U.S. labor movement. These are the areas where political disenfranchisement has been used to strengthen capital's rule over democracy.

Broader Black working-class-led alliances are also needed to maximize mass-based power and to develop the broad democratic character of these zones that can begin to prefigure the transition of the African American national liberation struggle into a conscious struggle for socialism that addresses many new gender, social, climate and developmental questions that the earlier socialist revolutions and countries did not adequately address.

The Gulf Coast Reconstruction Movement: Strategic Flank of the Struggle for African American Self-determination

Reconstruction should become the new popular demand for African American self-determination not only in the Gulf Coast, but throughout the U.S. in the major cities where African Americans constitute a critical mass. It must be a demand to reconstruct new social, economic and political power relationships that empower the masses to challenge the capitalist attacks and restructuring that eliminates the social safety net and basic democratic institutions.

Re-foundation requires a strategic focus that points out a sense of urgency for building a national Black united front against U.S. Imperialism. The struggle for Reconstruction in the Gulf Coast led by the Black working class majority must be defined as a main strategic zone of the struggle for African American self-determination. This must be seen as a struggle to challenge and defeat the corporate and political direction of ethnic cleansing and political disenfranchisement that is expressing itself throughout the U.S.

The development of a Reconstruction Movement in the Gulf Coast as an African American working-class-led united democratic-front and struggle for self-determination can be a connecting point for the re-alignment of the wider African American national liberation movement throughout the U.S. Like the struggle against apartheid once established in the South, the struggle for Reconstruction in the Gulf Coast must become a major demand of the national African American oppressed nationality and liberation movement and of the entire anti-imperialist movement.

By focusing the discussions and process of forging unity in the Black left on the question of developing the Reconstruction Movement in the Gulf Coast, we can begin to align the Black left and concentrate some of its resources and experience in helping to address the growing pains and contradictions which have contributed to the difficulties in developing the political unity and character of the Reconstruction Movement.

A main task of Black left unity in addition to playing a major role in helping to build a national Black united front must be to build organization and leadership among workers and women as a major and leading section of the Black united front and Reconstruction Movement in the Gulf Coast and throughout the U.S.

The African American liberation movement cannot be defined simply by the spontaneous struggles. It must be built by conscious efforts that work to organize and give political and theoretical leadership to the spontaneous struggles that help to unite them into a conscious national liberation and anti imperialist revolutionary movement. The spontaneous struggles, no matter how large the demonstrations, cannot effectively defend against the sustained and structural attacks of by US imperialism. Katrina makes clear, that the time is now to rebuild the African American liberation movement.

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