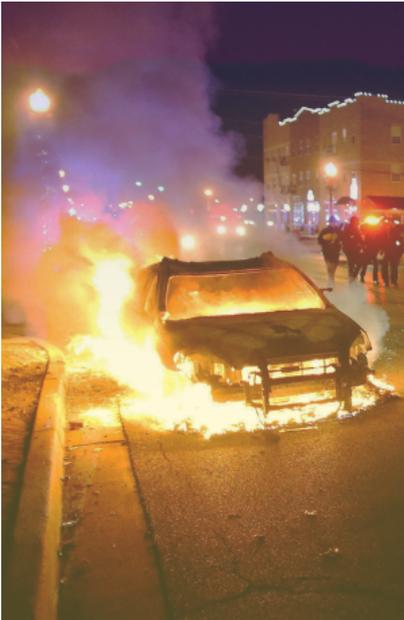


In Further Commemoration of Black August

AUGUST 6, 2018

STRUGGLESSESSIONS



“History, fortunately, dispels all doubts and clears up all ambiguities.” — Jose Carlo Mariategui. [JCM2]

In our previous article, [The Black August Contradiction](#), the history of repression and rebellion within the Black Nation is detailed. In this follow-up, we theorize the centrality of the Black Nation within the overall struggle for national liberation and socialism in the territory occupied by the United States.

The Black Nation is historically constituted within the US in the Black Belt, a region sometimes called the South or the Deep South, which includes Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, and parts of Virginia, Arkansas and parts of Texas. Today the greatest saturation of the Black Nation is still to be found in this area, with the exception of the nearby states Maryland, Florida and Washington D.C. [USCB].

Contrary to those who seek to liquidate the Black National Question, emigration and re-migration trends throughout history have not fundamentally altered the National Question in the Black Belt; that is to say, the existence of a sizable diaspora no more diminishes the right of self-determination for the Black Nation than it does for the Palestinian Nation. In fact, we will argue that the Black Nation is central to the general national liberation struggle in the US prison-house of nations. Much like that of the Palestinian and Irish nations, the struggle of the Black Nation has an internationalist character. We hold that the liberation of all the oppressed nations within the US is contingent on the liberation of the Black Nation, which must therefore lie at the top of the agenda for the US revolutionary movement.

Historically, the Black Nation in the US has gone the furthest and the hardest in its revolutionary program. Moreover, some of the most revolutionary mass work ever attempted by Communists in the US was focused on black sharecroppers, black workers and black tenants in Alabama [HH]. With the end of the Third Period and the beginning of the Popular Front, this militancy was essentially liquidated, in service of what has been revealed to be a *class conciliationist line* and at the expense of the struggle for black liberation and socialism in the US. We bring this up not mainly to dwell on the shortcomings of Communists in this period, but rather because it provides a shining example of the revolutionary energy of the Black Nation, and simultaneously a historical reference for the ruinous consequences of liquidating the Black National Question.

The Black Nation, past and present, has been on the front lines of all major mass movements, and many of the most militant of these movements were organized around the principal issues facing the Black Nation. We can also track through this entire historical period and into the present the concerted strategy of the Democratic Party and its fronts to liquidate black struggles by “consuming” them, and transforming them into their opposite.

This transformation of black revolution into black conciliation is reflected in the substitution of slogans like “Black Lives Matter” for the older and more revolutionary “Black Power”, in essence destroying the content of the demand and replacing it with the liberal construct of “being seen”. In spite of their success in watering down the slogans of the black mass movement, the bourgeois parties have not succeeded in eliminating the spontaneous drive to set fires, smash cop cars, and even carry out annihilations of individual police (as in Dallas, Texas). Marxists must understand all these things in terms of our most fundamental principle:

It is right to rebel against reactionaries.

To quell the rage of the people, the imperialist ruling class consumes activists and converts them into agents and intermediaries among the masses for the system of imperialist depredation, transforming insurgency into counterinsurgency. Instances of this conversion of organizers are too numerous to list, but we may distinguish as typical of the current era the cases of Alicia Garza and DeRay Mckesson [RGA1, RGA2]. It’s worth asking, why do we have Mckessons and Garzas today instead of George Jacksons and Fred Hamptons? Where are the Panthers, and where is the Black Liberation Army? We argue that this process is one prong of the historic bourgeois strategy of buying whoever

can be bought, and annihilating whoever cannot; the result is a milieu rife with charlatans of the pig-hand-shaking variety.

Consequently, we must theorize a contradiction within the mass movement between certain elements of the concrete black leadership and the historic role of the black proletarian masses, in which the former is structurally unable (and unwilling) to unleash the torrent of fury which is locked inside the black masses. This has had profound consequences for the multi-national US left, particularly Communists, who have incorrectly decentered the cause of black liberation.

Revolutionaries owe black people everything. It was the black liberation struggle which provided the most acute scientific knowledge of how to fight the bourgeoisie in this prison-house of nations, inspiring other oppressed nations during the New Communist Movement toward the program of national and social revolution. As usual, whatever has been the most successful will also receive the most criticism, criticism which must not be opportunistically used to diffuse the question of Black Liberation — a veritable powder keg which is not any less volatile under the surface than it has ever been. The crimes of history and their continuation under new forms guarantee an explosion in the South.

Grasp Mariategui and Understand the Central Importance of the Black National Question

Jose Carlos Mariategui revolutionized the understanding of Peruvian society by centering the question of the indigenous peoples in the matter of revolution. Unlike the reformists and the revisionists, he insisted that the contradiction would be resolved with the land revolution, rather than through infrastructural and legal adjustments to what he theorized as a semi-feudal system. The same Marxist methods apply to understanding the centrality of black liberation to the struggle for general national liberation and socialism.

“The oldest and most obvious mistake is, unquestionably, that of reducing the protection of the Indian to an ordinary administrative matter. From the days of Spanish colonial legislation, wise and detailed ordinances, worked out after conscientious study, have been quite useless. The republic, since independence, has been prodigal in its decrees, laws, and provisions intended to protect the Indian against exaction and abuse. The gamonal of today, like the encomendero of yesterday, however, has little to fear from administrative theory; he knows that its practice is altogether different.” [JCM2]

We must grasp Mariategui, and see plainly that the imperialist bourgeois of today, like the plantation owner of yesterday, does not fear the logic and reason of the reformers. Under the reformers, the control of the land by the settler bourgeoisie is not under threat, and the limited reformist conception of reparation leaves settler-colonialism completely intact. As long as the colonial borders remain unbroken, the bourgeoisie would not fundamentally oppose the dismantling of historical black codes, and would even accept certain reforms of police, etc.

Many are content to focus on the symptoms of national oppression (e.g. police violence, racist violence, etc.) but are unable to grasp the land question, and more generally the matter of self-determination in a materialist sense. Even in an imaginary US where the police had stopped murdering black people, national liberation would remain a distant horizon so long as the economy of national oppression persisted in reproducing itself.

The Communist Party of the USA in the 1930s did attempt to grasp this contradiction by developing a sharecroppers union that was 12,000 strong in Alabama. This was not on moralistic grounds, but in fact was part of a total revolutionary strategy. This struggle and the political lines that guided it were centered on the land question, which the industrialization and subsequent deindustrialization of the southern US have not at all answered. Black people everywhere in the US will still face oppression until the land question has been resolved, necessarily through armed struggle with an aim toward national liberation and the right of self-determination.

Any efforts at revolution in the continental US which abandon the struggle for liberation of the Black Nation will fall short, succumbing in time to the default bourgeois ideology of “me first”. Revolution is not like a crashing airplane, where you secure your own mask before attending to others: the fact is, victory can follow only from the view of national

liberation as a concentrically constructed revolutionary process, oriented initially around the most acute national oppression.

This is not to say that those in the Chicano and Indigenous nations are to neglect their own struggle, or merely tail the black liberation struggle — rather, they must necessarily work in concert with it, uniting all those who can be united with against the main enemy of all oppressed nations and the proletariat: the imperialist ruling class. This is why Maoists in the US argue for the Sunbelt Thesis^[^RGA3] and for Protracted People's War led by a multinational Communist Party, which can organize war strategically and accomplish national liberation concentrically, in step to deal the ultimate death to US imperialism [RGLA].

This position does not forbid specific nations from forming their own parties or attempting to achieve liberation for themselves only; however, Maoists know this to be a losing strategy, and refuse to implement it. Contrary to a multitude of parties, the vanguard Party (singular) can manage strategically centralized action politically with decentralized tactical action militarily, in what we might theorize as *Unified National Liberation*. This unification (like every unity of opposites) is temporary: at any point (preferably after the enemy is crushed), secession and splits are on the table. One will always divide into two — and this does not mean that communists work against unification. The objective is to break the prison-house of nations once and for all and to adopt the winning strategy to get there.

At the risk of being simplistic, imagine the prison-house of nations as if it were an actual prison. Taking “power” over one wing of the jail, while leaving the other wings in control of the prison guards, is not a victory which would merit ceasing war: the war must be exported from the conquered wing to the dominated wings. This is reflected in the difference between dual-power conquered in revolutionary base area during a people's war, and the various conceptions of utopian socialism. Likewise, the potential for black liberation is limited so long as it cannot act in concert with the other oppressed nations, whose convergence lies in the Party form.

Should any of these nations reach such a point of contradiction with this Party that they are forced to split, the revolutionary line would *still* be to develop cooperative action among them. Grasping the possibility of splits in the liberation movement and the correct policy toward national parties which break off from the general movement does

not imply that Communists should advocate for a multitude of oppressed nation parties, cut off from a centralized leadership.

It is not by coincidence or any moral considerations that the Black Nation has constituted the very forefront of the US class struggle: it is due to the reality of US conditions, and the nature of the processes of national oppression and capitalist exploitation. This set of class contradictions has generated within the Black Nation the most advanced class consciousness.

Mariategui articulates the need for colonial solidarity:

“Humanitarian teachings have not halted or hampered European imperialism, nor have they reformed its methods. The struggle against imperialism now relies only on the solidarity and strength of the liberation movement of the colonial masses. This concept governs anti-imperialist action in contemporary Europe, action that is supported by liberals like Albert Einstein and Romain Rolland and, therefore, cannot be considered exclusively Socialist.”

Likewise, we cannot expect humanitarianism to transform the US imperialist project or force it to treat its internal hostages more compassionately; it has to be defeated through war. Those who are steeped in bourgeois ideology are moved only by moral cultural and ethnic considerations, and this makes them systematically avoid the social, economic and political questions. This mystification of reality keeps them trapped in the weeds of postmodernism, identity politics, pork chop nationalism and purely theoretical abstractions. Communists who are detached from the revolutionary project and see it mainly as an intellectual exercise are doomed to follow suit, for instance, by abandoning Communism for things like Third Worldism.

Charting a revolutionary course means to be beset on all sides by opportunism and distortion. To establish a revolutionary line requires demarcation from every kind of opportunism and revisionism and mystification; it is not a surprise that the National Question remains one of the great dividing lines of our time. As a consequence, we must promote and develop unity around the revolutionary line of black liberation.

On the positions expressed in this article, we do not apologize for being partisan. Going deeper among the most profound masses means centering black liberation in the revolutionary project. Our conditions determine that the Black Nation will constitute the most advanced section of mass resistance; in this class struggle, black leaders will

emerge and rise to the task of building the Party, and take leading roles within the height of the Party. This is not to insist on identitarian maneuvers, but rather to grasp a *historical inevitability*. Class struggle creates leaders just as surely as the bourgeoisie create a proletariat, and it is the Black Nation which most firmly grips the shovel which will dig the grave of the current ruling class, a class rife with racial hatred and desperation to appeal to a popular base. If our departure point is anything but the reality of black people and more specifically the black proletariat, then our plans will go awry. It is a historic mistake we cannot afford to repeat.

Thoughts on the original Black Panther Party for Self-Defense

Longer theoretical articles on the BPP are required to really get into the process which led to its ultimate degeneration. For the sake of this article, we will focus on two aspects of the rightist deviation which the Party suffered in its later days: co-optation and consumption. At the beginning, the Panthers came out of the box swinging and immediately gained international prestige and inspired generations of rebels, an inspirational effect which is still felt today. While the bourgeois apparatus does everything in its power to erase the Marxist content of the Panthers, more and more youth are getting hip to the fact that they were led by a strong current of Marxism. Sometimes people bend the stick too far in correcting this, and go as far as calling them “Maoists”, ignoring the eclecticism and multitude of political tendencies and even original theories (including incorrect ones, like “intercommunalism”) produced by the Panthers. For now, we will focus primarily on the reasons why the Panthers are so beloved, and defer the task of theorizing their deviations to a later time.

In the late 60s, the Communist Party of the USA was already completely revisionist, its few remaining anti-revisionist factions fleeing the Party, never to return. The Party was a far cry from its zenith in the 1930s, a consequence of the germs of revisionism and prototype rightist lines which had long nestled within it. Chief among these lines was the electoralist line, in conjunction with American exceptionalism embodied in the Browderist line. The official policy of the CPUSA in the late 60s regarding the Panthers

was to denounce them, opposing them wholesale as “ultra-leftists”, a charge still used by all revisionists today to frame the revolutionary as the infantile, irresponsible and impulsive.

The CPUSA was in essence demanding that the premier revolutionary organization of the Black Nation should tail rather than lead the black masses, and simultaneously straitjacket their message and program to appeal to the upper stratum of white society. The vast majority of black people (then and now) do not participate in electoral politics, for good reason.

Failing to achieve any lasting effect with their public denunciations and local quarreling, the CPUSA needed to take up another strategy in order to liquidate the increasing popularity and hegemony of the Black Panther Party. This strategy can be summarized as “If you can’t beat ’em, join em”, and involved embedding black cadre in the Panthers to push slightly modified CPUSA lines internally [BA].

All Maoists grasp that internal contradictions are more determinant than external ones. Many are content to see the end of the Panthers as mainly a consequence of state repression, crediting the incarceration and annihilation of revolutionaries as well as the advance of COINTELPRO for the Panthers’ degeneration. This analysis falls short and remains at the level of superficial materialism. On the contrary, external state repression only made the Panthers stronger because it proved that they were firmly on the revolutionary road. We can tell that the state was less interested in stopping groups like the Weather Underground (even though they were engaged in bombing campaigns) than in neutralizing the Panthers, and this is precisely because of the mass support which the Panthers were achieving.

State attacks tended to prove favorable to the Panthers’ propaganda efforts, and proved to the black masses that they had a revolutionary vanguard. The internal contradictions proved to be far more difficult to navigate, and one aspect of these internal contradictions was embodied in the new membership who, as agents of the CPUSA, had the sole purpose of pushing the electoralist line.

Of course, it is a basic law of materialist social science that in any organization, you have the two-line struggle between the revolutionary proletarian line and the capitulationist bourgeois line. This contradiction proved favorable to the CPUSA, who had changed their stance only in form regarding the Panthers, and not in essence. Poster children of the CPUSA like Angela Davis would vocally take up the defense of the Panthers while

pushing the opposite of the revolutionary line internally, representing the views of the very same “Communist” party which had totally liquidated the black liberation struggle and aligned itself with Khrushchev.

Like most revisionist parties, the CPUSA was desperate for attention and hoped to swell its dwindling ranks. In a short time, and not solely due to CPUSA cadres, the Panthers would face splits and end up going down the road of reformism and electoralism. Self-defense was taken off the agenda and community service was pushed to the forefront — not just community service, but programs which liquidated the revolutionary content of the organization. These same grocery programs, ambulance services, etc. belonged to the David Hilliard line, which was a right opportunist pole very early on. The programs did not stop at providing goods and services stripped of revolutionary politics, but instead were used as a platform to campaign for office: this is characteristic of the Elaine Brown, Bobby Seal, Huey Newton line. Whether or not it had much to do with the agency of the CPUSA, the fact remains that the CPUSA line won out [MLP].

Right liquidationism is the main enemy

This is all to highlight that for revolutionaries in the US and particular for Black Nation revolutionaries, right opportunist liquidation is the greater enemy to our movements. The machine of this plantation is well-oiled, prepared to consume even the most militant and dreaded revolutionary formations. The Panther programs were a boon to the NGO complex and had the effect of driving black voters into the bloody arms of the Democratic Party. The CPUSA itself was also driven into these arms, and became the leashed dogs of the Democrats. This only helped to tighten their grip on the whip, and every time there is a popular black struggle, the Democrats are not far behind to exploit it for their own political and financial program.

The Democratic Party should be seen as a vampire by all black people, desperate and thirsty for their struggles. Time and time again it serves white supremacy and national oppression. Time and time again it betrays the people. When it is too obvious in its dealing it will work through its third party apparatus, including groups like the CPUSA, the Green Party, the Democratic Socialists of America, etc. — all of whom function to divert struggles into the Democratic Party graveyard.

Revisionists of all varieties seek to traffic in the struggles of black people, as do the NGOs. Black struggles are prized among them, and they want whatever scraps the Democrats leave behind as they tear apart these struggles. Any black organization which has not steeled itself in revolutionary militancy will quickly be fetishized and approached for consumption. They will use pandering, flattery and treachery to do it. Like a meal to a famished army, they will devour it exclusively to their benefit. This makes the organizing of the black masses a more difficult endeavor. More recently with the increased influence of identity politics, nearly all militant black leaders get accused of being “brainwashed”, “tricked by white people”; the identity opportunist will even make wild claims that all Communist thought is “European” and “white”, while at the same time promoting and espousing the ideas of New French Philosophy and postmodernism as if it is somehow expunged of its status as a product of white Europe.

Concluding remarks

The above section only highlights the reality that work among the masses is not flattened, that the masses themselves are a contested terrain of conflicting and dispersed ideas where revolutionary politics must contend against a variety of opportunist, reformist and revisionist politics. Of course, consequently there is a stiff tendency to wholesale liquidate the national question, to reroute the need for national liberation into the bourgeois democratic process, which offers nothing of use to the people. Within the Marxist left this often manifests in either outright avoidance, or a knee-jerk impulse to push mechanistic secessionist lines.

The latter tend not to be engaged with the mass struggles in any organized or meaningful way. It is up to communists to re-grasp this question, to debate, develop, uphold and apply a revolutionary line for national liberation and socialist revolution which centers the Black Nation. This centering requires an understanding of the concepts put forth by Lenin regarding the weakest link in the imperialist system, as well as applying the Maoist practice of identifying the storm centers of world revolution.

In the US it is undeniable that the Black Nation is the storm center: the contradictions between imperialism and the Black Nation produce the most outrage and constitute the

weakest link of imperialism's rule here. To persist in willful ignorance of these conditions will only set the clock backward and delay the inevitable. To paraphrase Mao Zedong, *Black people will rise like a mighty storm and will shake off the old order, claiming their liberation in blood and flesh.* We Communists can either lead them, tail them, or stand in their way: every Communist must make this choice.

Article by Kavga

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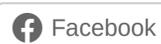
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