

Marxism, Interracialism and the Black Struggle
by Sy Landy

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I. Marxism, Internationalism and Interracialism

A. The Relevance of Authentic Marxism for Black Liberation, and Vice Versa

Communists are vitally interested in the impact of Marxism on the American Black struggle. We believe that only Marxism, the science of the struggle of the exploited and oppressed masses of humanity, can guide the fight for liberation to a successful conclusion. However, the relationship is hardly one-sided. Marxism must develop, progress and transform itself in the light of actual struggles. Otherwise it fails in its task to illuminate the way in which the working class must transcend itself so as to create a truly humane world. Marxism cannot be confined to the library. For example, it was the revolutionary rising of the French masses in the Paris Commune that taught Marx and future generations of revolutionaries the decisive lesson that the capitalist state apparatus has to be smashed, not reformed.

We in the League for the Revolutionary Party recognize the centrality of the Black struggle in the U.S. Its importance is not confined to one single fight for liberation and its implications for socialist revolution in one country. It also has a profound international impact.

Centuries of agonizing oppression, inhuman superexploitation and lynch-mob “justice” have failed to crush the spirit of rebellion that has repeatedly erupted. In particular, the ghetto revolts of the late 1960's and early 1970's inspired young fighting workers of every color around the world to confront their capitalist masters. But the gains achieved by the Black upheavals, as well as the crippling limits put on those gains, were configured by the relationship between the class struggle and the racist division within the working class. Today the world bourgeoisie has learned the full value of racism and chauvinism as a means to put brakes on the class struggle. Without doubt, a Marxism that does not incorporate the lessons of the American Black struggle, with all its ups and downs, is no Marxism at all.

We have lived through an era where Marxism has been bastardized. Instead of being the scientific weapon of the exploited and oppressed for revolutionary self-liberation, it has been transformed into an ideological tool wielded by condescending social engineers and middle-class bureaucrats. In the hands of populist do-gooders, mealy-mouthed social democrats and Stalinist hacks, it became a justification for hitching working-class uprisings to pro-bourgeois demagogues and their so-called practical solutions.

A half century ago, as World War II ended, masses of workers and oppressed rose up across the world. Tragically, even when new regimes were installed, they betrayed the hopes of those masses. Today, as a result of the treacherous pseudo-socialist misleaderships, the formerly Stalinist nations and the “third world” countries have become open hunting grounds for avaricious Western imperialism. The reasons are those of class, not conspiracy — and the results have been devastating. The lands of the colonial revolution have been transformed into neo-colonial concentration camps for cheap labor.

Today even the Western working class is reeling under deepening capitalist austerity drives. These assaults are accompanied by growing racist and anti-immigrant attacks. Not the least of the gains won in past upheavals — and now being gutted — are those of the American Black

struggle for equal rights.

The past worldwide struggles had been curtailed in the name of so-called practicality. But, “practical solutions” — that is, proposals that accept the limits imposed by worldwide capitalism — have proved to be only crackpot realism. Because the struggles did not end the system that demands exploitation and oppression, the current capitalist attack is moving toward eliminating all past gains.

Under vicious assault on their lives and livelihoods, workers around the world have begun to dig in their heels again. Buried by the media but not by reality, the crescendo of increasingly large and frequent demonstrations, strikes, and general strikes on every continent testifies that the masses are once again about to display their world-shaking power. Just over the U.S. borders, Mexico and Canada have been rocked by upheavals; the U.S. itself is certainly not immune.

It remains the task of vanguard revolutionary workers to thoroughly recreate the scientific world view, the weapon so desperately vital for the success of the coming revolt of the masses. Workers of color in the U.S. and around the world will play a crucial role in coming years. Having learned the lessons of their own history, the most advanced of these workers will have a decisive impact upon the restoration of authentic Marxism, the re-creation of its international party — and its final victory, socialist revolution.

B. What Is Internationalism?

1. Imperialism vs. Proletarian Internationalism

Before going into the immediate issues of the American Black struggle, it is necessary that we outline our understanding of the tools that authentic Marxism has given us to deal with that movement for liberation.

Trotskyists, today’s authentic communists, have always known that the way forward for the proletarian revolution is internationalist.

Interracialism is inextricably linked to internationalism. The ultimate lesson that past struggles teach is that so long as worldwide capitalism continues to exist, racism must exist. Reformist assaults on the racist walls erected by the system have been tried and re-tried. Black liberation cannot be achieved through anything but internationalist proletarian socialist revolution.

Originally capitalism created nation-states to help overcome feudal restrictions and to protect home markets from foreign competition. Since then, as a result of brutal and rapacious exploitation of human labor, there has been an enormous growth of capital. Industry and trade have spread across the globe. In our era, monopoly capitalism has created an economy that dominates the world; every corner has inextricably been drawn into an interpenetrated, worldwide division of labor. No important industry exists that doesn’t depend on raw materials, technology, investment or labor from multiple countries. Thus national boundaries have become fetters on development rather than assets.

Until now, scarcity has been the fundamental reason for the existence of class society, exploitation and oppression. Capital, by its very nature, must expand its exploitation and accumulate, or it dies. Today, capitalist accumulation has for the first time in history matured the global forces of production so that scarcity no longer has to be a fact of human life. Now capitalism itself stands as the barrier to the actual production of abundance: no scarcity means no profit.

V.I. Lenin pointed out that capitalism's response to the internationalization of its economy was its transformation into imperialism. Once a policy, imperialism became the essence of the system itself. The advanced nations were driven to dominate the global economy and divide it up in their own interests. Each capital, corporate or national, is forced to compete for the proceeds of its class exploitation. Capitalism is fundamentally contradictory. It is constantly compelled to accumulate and yet it must prevent universal abundance. Lenin demonstrated that the epoch of imperialism meant horrific world wars between the imperialist nations. It meant a ravaging destruction of means of production; most importantly the decimation of the chief force of production, the working class itself.

On the other hand, if the expansion and internationalization of capital were in the hands of the proletariat, this would mean the beginning of the end of scarcity and poverty. It could only be accomplished by socialist revolutions which, given the international economy, would have to spread across the world. Thus, in place of a nationally dominated and fractured world imperialist economy, a centralized and cooperative global system of production and distribution would begin to be knit together. Production for use would begin to supplant production for profit.

2. The Imperialist Epoch and the World Transition to Socialism

Lenin showed that in this epoch world capitalism had not only ceased to be progressive, it had become counterrevolutionary. Imperialism had replaced feudalism as the major barrier to human development. Since the proletariat was now capable of wielding state power, this was the epoch of working-class revolution and the transition to socialism, the initial stage of classless communism.

The Russian revolution, led by Lenin's Bolshevik Party, was the work of the overwhelming majority of the working class, supported by the mass of peasants. Through the soviets (councils) the workers created and controlled their own state.

Marxism, as opposed to anarchism, understood that the workers would need their own state for some time after the revolution. As a materialist, Marx knew that a new society of abundance could not come from the manipulations of an elite group of conspiratorial intellectuals, benevolent or otherwise. It could only come from the working class in power, a transitional workers' state laboring over time to create actual abundance and thus put an end to capitalism's economic laws, which dictate scarcity.

Building on Marx's thoughts, Lenin in *State and Revolution* described the workers' state as "a bourgeois state without the bourgeoisie" — a vestige of the capitalist era, still in the process of being negated. The social classes characteristic of capitalism — the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as well — will disappear as the laws of scarce resources are finally overcome by

abundance and planned production.

Anarchists aren't the only middle-class idealists who reject the necessity of the transitional workers' state. The pseudo-Marxists also believe that the dominant capitalist economic laws can be overcome by intellectual expertise and sheer will, prior to the eradication of scarcity. The LRP and its co-thinkers abroad are the only political trend since the days of Lenin and Trotsky to understand the role of the workers' state and view it as part of the present epoch of capitalist decay, a transition to the next real stage in human existence, socialism.

Like other basic capitalist institutions, neither the idea nor fact of the "nation" can be dismissed the day after the revolution. This does not mean that the socialist revolution can espouse nationalism. Marx pointed out in *The German Ideology* that that would signify a return to "the old crap." Stalin proved it when he led the Russian bureaucracy to its successful counterrevolution in the USSR under the nationalist banner of "Socialism in One Country." The capitalist nature of Russia today is testimony that this impossible slogan really meant "Capitalism in One Country." And as current events demonstrate in no uncertain terms, in the age of world economic interpenetration and imperialism that too is impossible.

The Bolsheviks established the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics after the revolution. It was an international federation of freely associated and increasingly interdependent national workers' states, in contrast to the old Russian empire, "the prisonhouse of nations." It also stood in sharp contrast to Stalin's reassertion of Great Russian nationalist domination over a large area of Eurasia.

After the revolution, there will still be a long period of *internationalism* before nations cease to exist. They will disappear with the withering away of states, which themselves will disappear with the elimination of classes worldwide.

3. Internationalism: the Method and the Masses

The meaning of the term "internationalism" as Marxists use it is not self-evident today. The classless communist society will know no nations; all coercive states, "nation-states" included, will have ceased to exist. Under such conditions, it is obvious that our species will have every reason to adopt a common means of communication, a language understood by all. In addition, people will speak whatever other languages they wish and enjoy whatever cultural particularities they desire. It is just as clear that a claim to sovereign "ownership" over a discrete territory would be simply unintelligible. Therefore, communism will not be "international" but simply non-national.

However, in the world in which we live, the terrain is that of the imperialist epoch of capitalism. And therefore, as Marx pointed out in the *Communist Manifesto* and elsewhere, the socialist revolution that builds from this terrain will be "national in form."

Objective conditions demand that revolutions beginning on a national basis be conscious of the internationalist goal from the onset. Workers in oppressor as well as oppressed nations have to become aware of their common class interest. Workers in rival imperialist nations have to become aware that their own ruling class is their main enemy. All have to understand that there

is no national solution to capitalist imperialism. For Marxists, the consciousness of the masses is key to the success or failure of socialist revolution. Such lessons can only be learned in the course of the living class struggle. Growing numbers of workers can only achieve class consciousness if the advanced workers organized in the revolutionary party explain the lessons as they go through these struggles together.

Lenin rejected nationalism of any sort as incompatible with revolutionary internationalism. However, precisely because he believed in the equality of nations and peoples, he carefully distinguished between the nationalism of the oppressed and the nationalism of the oppressor, and refused to equate the two. Such an equation would be a denial of the struggle for equality and ultimately a denial of the struggle of the masses of the world for socialist revolution.

Marxists have to be particularly concerned with the deep suspicions held by masses in the dominated countries about workers of the imperialist nations. These fears can only be overcome by experiences of joint struggle over time. One crucial way to promote international working-class solidarity, Lenin stressed, is the recognition of the right to self-determination for oppressed nations. Communists pledge to defend this right in every way, including militarily.

The struggle against imperialism demands that communists fight side by side with their fellow laborers, even when the latter follow the leadership of nationalists who seek to create their own exploitative nation-state. Leninists are committed to united action when such movements actually fight the imperialists, despite the program of their leaders. However, as in all united fronts, we retain the right to criticize and expose the capitulations of these pro-capitalist leaders. The Marxist method is to tell the truth about the realities of modern capitalism and the need for revolutionary internationalism.

Recognition of the right to self-determination helps the vanguard party win the workers and the persecuted masses of the oppressed nations to the side of proletarian internationalism. It proves that revolutionary workers of other nationalities are not part of their problem but part of the solution. In fact, although communists fight for the right of self-determination for oppressed nations under capitalism, we openly proclaim that its only guarantee is the success of the socialist revolution. For example, in contrast to the Provisional Government set up by capitalists and pseudo-Marxist Mensheviks in 1917, it was only the Bolshevik revolution that actually gave the oppressed nations of the former Russian Empire the right to secede.

But the commitment to defend the *right* to national self-determination does not mean that Marxists always *advocate* secession of oppressed nations. Often we do not. Our goal is the widest class unity in the fight against our common enemy. But we defend the right of the oppressed to choose, and we defend their choice even if we disagree with it. The unity we need has to be conscious and real, i.e., freely chosen.

A revolutionary internationalist is not a utopian reformist who calls for “one world” today. Calling for the impossible is often a facade for accepting a world dominated by imperialism. That means accepting not only the domination of the weaker nations by the stronger but also the pervasive inequalities and horrors that will only worsen as the system decays further.

Our confidence in revolutionary internationalism is not based on the fact that it is a useful tactic

but rather that it explains the inevitable direction of our class under the objective conditions of the revolutionary epoch. Internationalization of the world economy makes nation-states a reactionary anachronism; the achievement of a truly united and humane world, including the end of nations and states, can only come with the eradication of every last vestige of capitalism. Then we will have reached our goal of one world, a world of freedom and abundance.

C. What Is Interracialism?

1. Non-nationalism and Internationalism; Non-racialism and Interracialism

A theory that is not developing and is not constantly checked and updated is not Marxist. The redevelopment of authentic Marxism for our time involves of necessity an understanding of interracialism today as a decisive aspect of internationalism. The fight against racism has always been important, but now we can see it clearly in all its worldwide ramifications. Today, no proletarian internationalism is possible without elaborating the nature of the global anti-racist struggle. The socialist revolution everywhere must consciously be both internationalist and interracialist if it is to be successful.

The Leninist method on national questions should hardly be thrown out the window when a group of oppressed people are not really a “nation” but a racial grouping. Marxists must align with both kinds of struggles. However, confusion between the two will lead to disarming our class and certain defeat. There are important differences between the specific struggle for national self-determination and the struggle against racial oppression.

The nation remains the ultimate bastion of capitalism; that is why “multinational” or “transnational” corporations maintain fundamental roots in one national state despite their far-flung economic empires. The division of capital according to nations is vital to the system. In the epoch of imperialism and capitalist decay, racial division has emerged as a means through which capitalism maintains nations — and therefore itself. It is no longer merely a vicious policy backing up early imperialist ventures, the slave trade or economic gains for a few advanced nations. Race or race-like divisions are now a major way in which all nations lower wages and production costs to stay afloat in the global market. Racism also acts decisively to prevent proletarian consciousness and class unity — and therefore socialist revolution.

The “nation” has always been ingrained in capitalism. Under modern imperialism, “race” has now been institutionalized as an added bastion of the system. Its deeply imposed divisions and prejudices cannot be wiped out or wished away overnight. However, in fighting racism we also make clear that our goal is to eliminate even the concept of separate races when capitalism is finally overthrown. This wretched concept inevitably defends oppression; it must be exposed now so that the inequality and massacre it breeds will disappear forever when humanity finally achieves the classless communist world. In that future time, the word “race” will exist only as an historic reference or a term denoting the entire human species. As with the final abandonment of the nation, communism will not be “interracial”; it will be non-racial, simply human.

Therefore when we say we are interracialists it means that our goal is the complete abolition of racial divisions as well as racism in a communist world. Further, just as we recognize the

significance of the nation as a reactionary fact as long as imperialism exists, we recognize that race is now also an integral part of the system. Just as we support an oppressed nation when it demands its right to equality with other nations, so too we support an oppressed racial group that demands equal treatment as a race. In neither case do we allow our non-nationalism and non-racialism to be a facade for equating the oppressed with the oppressors.

The interracialist goal of a world indifferent to skin color and national origin places our view in counterposition not only to “Black nationalism” but to “integrationism” (or “assimilationism,” as it used to be called) as well. The middle-class proponents of integration falsely identify their ideology with desegregation. Communists oppose every form of *de jure* and *de facto* segregation and favor every genuine step toward racial equality. However, integrationism in this reactionary epoch is a utopian snare and a deathtrap. The idea that American imperialism will allow full and equal inclusion of Black and Latino people into its national ranks is a lie designed to lure rebellious movements into a social blind alley.

Since we are committed to raising the consciousness of the proletariat by telling the truth, proletarian interracialists warn that the only way a genuine and lasting color-blind and egalitarian society can come into being is through the revolutionary overthrow of this society. As we fight side by side with those who still believe that equality or liberation can be obtained under capitalism, we never cease to point out that they can only really be achieved through socialist revolution.

2. Race and Capital: the Drives and the Driven

Lenin stressed that imperialism reflected the internationalization of capitalism. Today, after far longer experience in the epoch of capitalism’s decay, we add that it also reflects a greater interpenetration of peoples and races in every corner of the world, to an extent never before even approached.

Capitalism is a highly contradictory system. Its own drives force it to internationalize an economy that is based in outmoded national states. By virtue of the very same inherent laws that dictate its motion, imperialism is forced to bring together and mix the wide variety of human cultures into close association throughout the world.

We have noted that in order to protect private property, imperialism rests on the rule of the dominant nation-states over the world, even as it has created a globally interdependent economy. At the same time and for the same reasons, it fans the flames of national divisiveness to fever pitch. It likewise increases the power of racist institutions and whips up racial hatred to a killing rage. At the very same time it forces the huge migrations and interpenetration of peoples, nationalities and racial groups that are now apparent everywhere.

The historic scarcity of resources not only produces class society, it has produced decadent capitalist society as the last line of defense against abundance. Imperialism induces the squalid war of all against all, as nations, races, peoples, tribes and clans are propelled into a seemingly eternal whirlpool of fratricidal wars in order to claw a livelihood out at each others’ expense. The system’s bloody frenzy intensifies in proportion to its rapidly increasing social and technological

capacity to produce its own death sentence, the end of scarcity.

As Marx pointed out long ago, the contradictions of capitalism undermine the system itself. It has created its own gravedigger, the proletariat. The fundamental interest of the working class is to free the vast network of productive forces that capitalism has created and actually carry out its potential. Abundance would be the material basis for not only the final elimination of class society but of nations and national chauvinism, races and racism.

Marxists are not mechanical materialists. The advent of the material basis for the elimination of classes, races and nations doesn't automatically guarantee their disappearance. For the first time it makes it possible, even highly probable, but it doesn't absolutely affirm that the human race will fulfill its potential to become truly human. That is one major reason why communist workers place such stress on the fight for advanced consciousness. That is one major reason why Trotsky pointed out that the central question was proletarian leadership. That is why we give such urgency to our appeal to all advanced workers to join with us to build the party of the leading vanguard of our class, the party that "says what is" to its class brothers and sisters.

The logic of material forces, released from their reactionary bonds by revolution, will be on the side of interracialism as well as internationalism. That is the only hope for humanity — because if we do not achieve these goals the alternative, barbarism, is guaranteed.

3. Self-determination and Self-organization

Since interracialism is a complement to internationalism, today's Bolsheviks defend the right to self-organization for racially oppressed peoples just as they defend the right to self-determination for nationally oppressed peoples. The goal is the same in either case: to win the oppressed masses to interracialist and internationalist class consciousness while fighting those elements who capitulate to imperialism in any of its varied nationalist and racist forms.

For the purpose of this pamphlet, we will explain the tactic of self-organization only in brief. There is no mechanical comparison between self-determination and self-organization, but the same method and goals are at the heart of both demands. These are principled tactics employed by the party of the working class engaging in a dialogue with other layers of the class within the class struggle. Marxism poses a struggle for rights, not a heaven-ordained moral entitlement. The nature of the dialogue in both struggles reflects the fact that the party is made up of advanced workers who already see the need for the independence of their class and for revolution.

The vanguard party is the expression of the most advanced consciousness of our class. Its program must answer the needs of not just the immediate struggles but of the entire struggle from today to the achievement of communism. It represents both the future and the way to achieve it. Thus the international party is committed to fulfilling the interests of the class as a whole. It seeks to achieve a united proletarian consciousness through democratic centralism and accepts no national, racial or other barriers within its ranks.

That state power is rooted in different nations means that there are national sections within the international party. However, on the most fundamental level, these sections are all bound by the same democratic centralism and are all programmatically bound to recognize that national

interests are strictly subordinate to the internationalist needs of the proletariat as a whole.

In the absence of an internal colonial relationship, the vanguard party within each nation-state is itself not organized according to sectoral, racial, sexual, ethnic or cultural interests; rather it is built on the recognizing the underlying commonality of our class and its basic interests. (Language and dual nationality problems require organizational recognition, but the principle remains the same.) Nevertheless, the party is conscious that racial — and national, gender and other — divisions and suspicions within the proletarian masses are real and cannot be automatically dismissed.

The working class is composed of exploited people who all have the same relationship to the means of production no matter their race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, hair color, height, or what have you. The party is the weapon of the most far-seeing of these workers, those who understand the class struggle under capitalism and what must be done. The material basis for that consciousness is their experience with the rapacity of capitalist exploitation and oppression. That is why the program of the party does not reflect the passing interests of the aristocratic and bureaucratic elements of the class, many of whom have been temporarily bought off by the bourgeoisie. It reflects the interests of the most oppressed and exploited layers of the class, since they best represent the reality of the depths of exploitation inflicted on the entire proletariat, sooner or later, under this system.

You are what you eat. Vanguard consciousness will in time succumb to pro-bourgeois interests if it doesn't find its way to solidify its class base. The party, even though armed with a Marxist program, must find its roots over time in what Lenin referred to as “the depths of the working class.” In the process of development the party will find cadres in different sections of the working class, including some from relatively aristocratic layers. It will certainly have deserters from other class elements, particularly the intelligentsia, on condition that they forsake their previous class allegiance and prove in practice that they identify with the communist program and are committed to the proletariat. But above all the party must have real and deep roots. In today's world, the racially oppressed workers are crucial elements of the strata the party *must* reach if it is to develop actual revolutionary leadership.

However, recognition that the working class contains deep sectoral differences is vitally important for winning over other layers of the class to the party. The party sees itself in dialogue with other layers of the class, those relatively backward workers who are unclear as to how the fight for their freedom should proceed. Based on the past, they are unsure who is friend and who is foe.

With respect to national struggles, Lenin argued against leftists who asserted that it is only the *proletariat* of the oppressed nations whose right to self-determination has to be defended. That view placed the cart before the horse and meant in effect an ultimatum rather than a dialogue with the non-proletarian masses of the oppressed nation. They have to be convinced by the struggle itself who their friends and enemies are and the leadership of which class they should adhere to. It is to be expected that the masses would initially be caught up in nationalism and would see only the imperialist bourgeoisie as their enemy, not yet their own bourgeoisie. The task therefore is to go through the struggle with them to show the need for proletarian leadership.

So too, when the struggle is not national in character, there are social as well as individual reasons why all layers of the working class do not come to class consciousness at the same time. Having advanced Black workers as a significant part of the party leadership will not by itself convince the masses of Black workers that their enemies and friends must be determined by class politics and not by racial identification.

When societies head into revolutionary situations, the struggles inevitably cast up mass transitional organizations. In addition to workers' councils and other workers' organizations, mass organizations of the oppressed, like those of women or minority groups, also arise. Authentic communists not only support that form of independent organization, they help create it and seek to win leadership within it for the revolutionary working-class party. In the late 1930's, C.L.R. James and Leon Trotsky elaborated the need for revolutionaries to fight for Blacks in the U.S. to create such a formation.

Both self-determination and self-organization are bourgeois democratic rights and are *in principle* subordinate to the class needs of the entire international and interracial proletariat. Our defense of the right of Blacks as a racially oppressed people to form mass organizations separately, if they so choose, does not mean that we always advocate separate organizations, any more than we always advocate the secession of nations. It simply means that if the masses of Blacks choose such a course, we will defend their right while we continue to expose misleaderships and argue for revolutionary interracialism. In general, we would prefer the direct path to greater unity of the working class. However, given the betrayals that oppressed peoples have endured, revolutionaries are sensitive to the fact that there are situations where we must not only defend the right of Blacks to build such a separate organization but also advocate it. Black comrades will of course join and help to construct it as the best way forward.

Advocacy of the right of Black self-organization is one important way in which the authentic Marxist party can prove in practice that revolutionary working-class interracialism is the answer rather than another part of the problem.

One area in which we often advocate Black self-organization is self-defense. Here too we clearly prefer a class-wide defense of Blacks against police brutality and other armed attacks. However, when the danger is large, clear and present and no other serious forces are immediately available, it would be criminal to demand that Blacks wait. Today, for example, there is little immediate chance of a class-wide armed defense of Blacks who suffer attacks by police. That is a situation revolutionaries fight to change.

II. Race: Capitalism's Contribution

A. Genetic Races: Ingenious Nonsense

For the natural sciences today, the idea of classifying human beings by the concept of “race” is not only wrong but nonsensical. Science has determined that the genetic variations between the so-called races are less than the genetic differences within them. Pick two unrelated American Black people, and in all probability each of them will be as genetically close to a randomly picked white person as to each other. And vice versa. As a matter of fact, differences in blood types are far more important for purposes of categorization than differences in skin pigmentation, and they cut across racial lines. Only 7 percent of all human genetic variation can be said to be between the “races.” Of course, it would be absurd to argue that more significant biological differences such as blood types indicate superior and inferior people. Yet racists say skin color connotes such a ranking.

As well, based on the evidence we have today, we can say that human life originated in Africa, and only a comparatively small portion of that continent's population emigrated to other areas of the world. A recent study of the genetic pattern in one chromosome from 1600 people in 42 populations throughout the world found far more extensive variation in DNA among African sub-Saharan groups than among peoples living in Europe, the Western Hemisphere, Asia and the Pacific Islands. To single out and homogenize Blacks as a distinct racial categorization is, in precise scientific terminology, crap.

The early twentieth-century white chauvinist attempts to prove the existence of separate races of humanity, despite their accompanying scientific patter, were akin to the anti-evolution religious creationist ideology that arose in America at the same time. It is not by accident that Black separatists like Professor Leonard Jeffries openly trace their intellectual roots back to this racist pseudo-anthropology. Far more dangerous are the most recent attempts by the white racist “Bell Curve” advocates, Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, to put an intellectual modern dress on the old race claptrap. Their efforts are equivalent to the attempts by contemporary fundamentalists to re-bottle their own snake oil under the name of “scientific creationism.”

B. Race: Capitalism's Generic Brand

Yet for all the gibberish involved in the idea of differentiating between races, the notion of race persists. How can we explain the blatant contradiction between a phenomenon that doesn't really exist biologically and the persistence *in society* of that same phenomenon, most often understood to be biological in origin?

Richard Fraser, the theoretician who developed “revolutionary integrationism” as a minority position in the formerly Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (see p.36), wrote:

1. The race concept of biological superiority/inferiority has been destroyed: the race concept has no biological reality. 2. Nevertheless the phenomenon *race* exists. Proof: try to tell black people that there is no such thing. (I went through a period trying that.)
(Letter “On ‘Color Caste’” of January 15, 1984, addressed to Jim Robertson. Reprinted in Prometheus Research Series pamphlet, *In Memoriam Richard S. Fraser.*)

A grown man of obvious intelligence, who saw himself as a Marxist, spent time trying to tell American Blacks that race had no meaning! As a result he learned better. No doubt his Black listeners concluded that Fraser was either totally insensitive to their condition or simply a screwball who didn't live in this world. In Fraser's day, a Black worker in the South who ignored the reality of race was a dead Black worker. And not only in the South, and not only yesterday.

Many social as well as natural scientists tell us that racial categorization exists because of widespread prejudice and an unfortunate human penchant for stereotyping. In their minds, the ideas of race and racism are sociologically created. *Newsweek* magazine (February 13, 1995), in a major article entitled "What Color is Black: Science, Politics and Racial Identity," identified with these liberal scholars. "The bottom line, to most scientists working in these fields, is that race is a mere 'social construct' — a gamy mixture of prejudice, superstition and myth."

The idea that race is simply a clot of noxious misperceptions is wrong. The liberal scientists' attempt to counter the racists with an idealistic explanation, locating the causal factor for racial prejudice in ignorance, is decidedly unhelpful. It leads to the rationalistic liberal panacea of "education" and moralistic preaching as the answer to racism.

Why does this particular set of rotten prejudices beset society today? Why do reasoning people persist in the belief that "race" really exists — even when they are fully exposed to the biological analysis? Race and racism are certainly social in origin, but the causes are deeper than mere bad ideas. In counterposition to the academic idea of race and racism as "social constructs," Marxists (if forced to use academic terminology for the moment) would say that we understand them to be social *systemic* constructs.

The distinction between those who have a materialist explanation of racism based on the system and those who do not is crucial. No set of ideas can persist in society for any significant time without being rooted in actual material conditions of the system.

Authentic Marxism asserts that the category of "race" is a brand, or permanent badge, that capitalism bestows on groups in order to designate one or more of them as inherently worthy of subjugation. It does so to create and maintain major divisions within the laboring classes, internationally and nationally. These divisions are vital to capitalism's drive to maximize exploitation, and today they are obligatory if imperialism, the system's highest stage, is to survive.

The capitalist system is propelled forward by its insatiable drive to exploit. To maximize exploitation, capitalism tests each device of social oppression, control and division. Through its own process of natural selection, it discards those that do not serve its purposes and sustains and develops those that prove vital to its continued existence. Only people who understand the roots of racism in the capitalist system can provide an answer capable of arming the working class against the ugly reality of racism.

Unfortunately, not even all of those who present themselves as Marxists and materialists either believe or can convincingly show that racism is rooted in the very nature of capitalism as a

system. This deficiency stems from four interrelated failures:

- 1) They understand capitalism only in the most formal and therefore static and unchanging terms. Therefore they do not make the central distinction between capitalism's progressive epoch and the present decadent and reactionary epoch; that is, between developing capitalism and counterrevolutionary imperialism.
- 2) They believe that racism today is a reactionary *policy* engaged in by capitalism rather than an inherent *necessity*.
- 3) They do not have a Leninist understanding of the relation between layers of the working class (labor aristocracy, superexploited workers, etc.), the class struggle and racial divisions as they appear in the epoch of imperialism.
- 4) Crucially, they do not see that Marxism posits the struggle over surplus value between the capitalist and wage labor classes as the heart of the system and therefore do not see racism in its essential relationship to exploitation.

The false Marxists furnish answers that do not go to the heart of the problem, and end up in capitulation to the racist system. Later we will look at some of their theories in detail. However, we should first elaborate our historical materialist view on the development of racism in the U.S. Just as it is impossible to really understand racism without understanding capitalism, it is equally impossible to explain the workings of modern capitalism without analyzing the role of the socially-derived category defined as "race."

C. The Irony of Capitalism

The phenomena of race and racism owe their existence to the continued existence of a social system that once played a role vital to human progress but which should have perished nearly a century ago — capitalism.

Humanity has always been prey to "prejudices, superstitions and myths" but, prior to the advent of capitalism, such social fantasies didn't take on the forms of race and racism. Historically determined material reality did not yet render these particular forms of human self-degradation likely or necessary.

Throughout the history of class society prior to capitalism, starvation, plague and war were inescapable. In its progressive epoch, capitalism's characteristically brutal exploitation of the laboring masses was an unavoidable precondition for the accumulation of capital. Previous societies produced to ensure their survival — or at least the well-being of their ruling classes. Capitalism's great leap forward was that it accumulated. It was the first class society that could provide the basis for the future elimination of the horrors spawned by class societies, all of which ultimately owed their existence to scarcity. But to achieve that goal, capitalism itself will have to be overthrown.

The dialectic of history cannot be truly appreciated without a profound awareness of irony. The

same accumulative drive that laid the basis for a world in which humanity can transcend itself also chains humanity to the most brutal and inhumanly destructive institutions our species has devised. The very advent of capitalism that established a “free” working class also ushered modern slavery into the world.

As Karl Marx pointed out, slavery and the slave trade were vitally important elements in the rise of capitalism, not only in the New World but in Europe itself. And slavery brought with it the poisonous doctrine of racism, as a means for rationalizing and defending this new “peculiar institution.”

A diffuse but growing hostility and contempt for people with darker skins developed as a justification for European imperialist expansion around the world, particularly among the British conquerors. Once the institution of slavery developed on a large scale in the Americas, the demands of maintaining control over large enslaved populations culled from Africa served to congeal the primitive and scattered racist rationalizations into an increasingly all-encompassing, pervasive and tenacious ideology.

Capitalist slavery was different from ancient slavery in several historically significant ways. For our purposes, it is crucial to note that modern slavery, as opposed to its classical counterpart, was based on race. But it didn't start that way.

D. Slavery: Racism as Consequence, Not Cause

Capitalist slavery developed racism rather than being created as a result of racism.

Eric Williams was Trinidadian by birth, but spent a good deal of time in study abroad. This was undoubtedly important in giving him a need to deeply explore early chattel slavery and to place it within a wide-gauged world view. His study *Capitalism and Slavery* mistakenly treats slavery more as a cause rather than as a creation of capitalism, but any serious Marxist must acknowledge the monumental character of the work and the brilliance of its insights despite this error.

What Williams says about the development of slavery in the West Indies he also applies to its North American variant:

Slavery in the Caribbean has been too narrowly identified with the Negro. A racial twist has thereby been given to what is basically an economic phenomenon. Slavery was not born of racism: rather, racism was the consequence of slavery. Unfree labor in the New World was brown, black and yellow; Catholic, Protestant and pagan.” (p.7, Capricorn Books Edition.)

Initially, poor European whites as well as African Blacks were exploited in the U.S. as bond servants. The categories of indentured servant (a time-bound form of virtual slavery) and slave were not sharply distinguished, and those forced into such labor were not originally differentiated by their race. However, over time, attempts at enslaving American Indian and whites were abandoned. While enforced white service was time-bound, African Black slaves were not only forced into bondage for life but the condition was inherited: their children became

slaves as well.

What accounts for the emergence of an exclusively Black chattel slavery? Williams says:

It has been suggested that it was humanity for his fellow countrymen and men of his own color which dictated the planter's preference for the Negro slave. Of this humanity there is not a trace in the records of the time, at least as far as the plantation colonies and commercial production were concerned. (p.14.)

We cannot list here all the reasons why African labor was increasingly preferred and finally made exclusive by the plantocracy in the Americas. Briefly stated, their society did not produce sufficient numbers of Native American Indians who could survive and produce under the conditions of modern capitalist slavery. As well, it would have been politically impossible in Britain during the tumultuous years of the late 1600's and early 1700's to enslave people from its own workforce. Indentured servitude, given its time limits, did not meet the growing needs of the plantation economy, and there was an insufficient supply. Even the supply of prisoners couldn't keep up with the demands of the plantations in the New World. Further, the bloody suppression of Ireland had developed a servant workforce that was far too cohesive and rebellious from the outset, as experience in the West Indies proved.

The colonies, especially their highly labor-intensive plantation system, desperately needed masses of laborers who could be forced to work for little return. Williams observes:

The features of the man, his hair, color and dentifrice, his "subhuman" characteristics so widely pleaded, were only the later rationalizations to justify a simply economic fact: that the colonies needed labor and resorted to Negro labor because it was cheapest and best. This was not a theory, it was a practical conclusion deduced from the personal experience of the planter. He would have gone to the moon, if necessary, for labor. Africa was nearer (p.20.)

The humanity that the planters lacked towards European whites certainly never entered into their calculations when it came to the millions of forcibly transported Blacks who died in midpassage between their African homelands and the slave markets of the New World. This monstrous holocaust was relatively negligible in financial terms, the vital calculation for the slave traders and planters.

Williams claims that African slavery became the dominant form in the New World essentially because it was cheap and plentiful. That economic factor has largely been verified by the historical record; however, by itself, and even considered together with other factors cited above, the availability of huge amounts of enslavable African labor doesn't fully answer why slavery was exclusively Black. Williams of course acknowledges the role that racism played in justifying and rationalizing slavery. However, he doesn't go to the heart of the matter with respect to the North American colonies.

In the 1660's and '70's, North America was racked by a series of plebeian class revolts, most notably the "Servants' Plot" of 1663 and "Bacon's Rebellion" in 1676-77, during which European and African bond-servants seized and then burned Jamestown, the capital of the colony

of Virginia. The armed revolts scared the hell out of the tiny upper classes and the British military establishment which served as their only protection. Laborers of African and European origin not only worked together, lived together and fraternized socially, they rebelled and fought together against their common class enemy.

The historian David R. Roediger, in his book *The Wages of Whiteness*, argues that racism was pervasive very early in imperial British and colonial American society. Whatever problems exist in his overall theory, Roediger is very insightful. He is also scrupulous in his attention to facts, so he carefully points out that “In certain places and at certain times between 1607 and 1800, the ‘lower sorts’ of whites appear to have been pleasantly lacking in racial consciousness. Perhaps they had never fully imbibed the white supremacist attitudes of the larger society” He adds:

In any case, racial lines were often drawn quite waveringly at the bottom of society. Before 1680, Virginia’s “giddy multitude” was biracial and shared not only a desire for land but also social occasions, solidarity in rebellion and sometimes the same household. North and South, white indentured servants fled at times with Black (and even Indian) servants or slaves, an act which brought extra scrutiny to the white escapee because his or her companion was more likely to be stopped and questioned than he or she was.
(p.24.)

Largely as a consequence of their vulnerability to generalized revolt, the capitalists deliberately sought to populate the country with poor but free European labor in addition to the captive Africans whom they reduced to permanent slavery. They took this path in order to gain the support of those who they hoped would defend private property and the ruling class by virtue of white racial identification — in counterposition to the Black slaves. The rulers instituted a battery of laws not only relegating Blacks uniquely to slavery but also adding further distinctions in treatment based on race. As well, the ruling class increasingly propagated secular and religious myths of Black inferiority in order to rationalize the subjugation of Africans.

The relative success they had can be seen in the testimony of the highly literate nineteenth-century defender of slavery, George Fitzhugh, who observed:

The poor [whites] constitute our militia and our police. They protect men in the possession of property, as in other countries; and they do much more, they secure men in the possession of a kind of property which they could not hold a day but for the supervision and protection of the poor [whites].

Thus “race” and racism took hold. The ideology of racism and its myth of Black racial inferiority was nurtured and propagated in America for four major interrelated reasons: 1) to justify slavery; 2) to divide the working masses; 3) to harness the white laborers to the defense of property and property owners; 4) to carry out capitalism’s fundamental aim of maximizing exploitation and accumulation. Therefore Williams’ conclusion that racism was a consequence and not a cause of slavery is historically accurate.

As Frederick Douglass, the foremost leader of Black abolitionism, stated:

We are then a persecuted people, not because we are *colored*, but simply because this color has for a series of years been coupled in the public mind with the degradation of

slavery and servitude.

Skin color, facial features and hair texture were used as a brand, first to separate slaves from the poor white labor. And as the system developed in North America, its usage and significance widened.

E. Slavery and the Widening Reasons for Racism

By 1860, just prior to the Civil War, approximately 500,000 out of the 4,500,000 Blacks in America — about one-ninth of the total — were free. However, in the years leading up to the Civil War, freedom did not mean anything like real equality, either in law or in practice.

After holding an initially central position in the skilled Northern workforce, Blacks were soon displaced by craftsmen emigrating from Britain. Later European immigrants largely displaced them from the ranks of unskilled labor. In the South, slaves did perform much of the skilled labor up to and through the Civil War period. Both free Blacks as well as their enslaved brothers and sisters were used as cheap labor everywhere. As well, the capitalists used desperately poor Blacks as strikebreakers and scabs, tossing them aside when their undercutting mission was over. It all added up to bare subsistence for most Blacks under repressive conditions, in freedom as well as in slavery. Aside from a small petty bourgeoisie and a tiny middle-class professional stratum, the vast majority of Blacks were forced into the bottom layers of the workforce and the unemployed.

In a system dominated by the white capitalists, a sharp material distinction in terms of income and conditions existed between the races. Whites had open advantages before the law of the land. As well, in the North white workers had access to jobs and trades that Blacks did not. In the South, since the Black craftsmen were mainly slaves, they had to surrender the lion's share of their income to their masters. Even where white plebeians were desperately poor, as so many were especially in the South, they could still have some hope of bettering their condition since they weren't enslaved. Aside from the obvious benefits, the poor white could think of himself as part of a superior race when he compared himself to Blacks.

Africans were brought to the New World for one purpose, slavery. That was the decisive material element in any comparison of conditions between white and Black labor. Identifying slavery with the Black skin of the slave had a powerful impact on the European-American mentality. It served as the counterpoint in the development, over time, of the idea that being white brought with it an inherent proprietary right to free citizenship and the sole right to enjoy its benefits: America was white by right.

The dog-eat-dog world of capitalist relations took hold in North America with great rapidity. The lingering history of Europe was transported to these shores often in the form of national and religious hostilities. These quarrels could be ignited at given times by worsening fears of job displacement and other contentious issues. The alien and sedition acts passed in the 1790's marked a particularly rapid growth of anti-immigrant sentiment among Americans with British origins. Nativist hostility to immigrant laborers, especially toward Irish Catholics who came to these shores in a great influx after 1820, often became a bloody reality.

The United States was crisscrossed by the ugly growth of competing identities. Would it become a society chiefly defined by the newly self-identified “white” race’s privileged position over a subjugated people it identified as “Negroes,” the “Black” race? Would it become dominated by a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant nativism lording it over an immigrant Catholic pariah group? (After all, the Irish were often compared to Blacks and considered a “dark race” of “barbarians” and “apes.”)

This pair of hostile relationships *both* continued not only to exist but even to flourish. However, the overwhelmingly dominant relationship which emerged was clearly that of white-over-black racism. The Protestant hostility to Catholicism remained malignant, with periodic rises and falls in intensity until the 1960's. Nativist chauvinism toward immigrants is not only still with us, it is now peaking once again. However, the overwhelmingly dominant relationship of this kind which came to identify American society was that of the “white race” in a superior position to the “Black race.”

By no means did all workers buy into the racist division. The middle-class abolitionists were not the whole anti-slavery movement; there were significant sectors of the working class who favored emancipation as well. There were Irish workers who steadfastly refused to join in the mob violence against Blacks that became such an important feature of Irish-Black relations in the 1800's. Many of the German communist followers of Karl Marx remained adamant anti-racists long after they came to these shores. And, of particular interest were the sons of the working class who, with John Brown, gave their lives in the armed struggle for Black liberation. Of course, the chief opposition was written in the blood of the early heroic slave revolts and then, the later day-to-day resistance of Blacks on the plantations and in the workplaces.

As we have emphasized, whites’ claims of superiority were not rooted in the clouds; whites had a distinct material advantage over Blacks, primarily based on the centrality of slavery up until the Civil War period. Nevertheless, there was no social peace within the so-called superior race. Quite the opposite. The class division of society, partly hidden on the surface by the racial and national-religious differences, could not be fully buried. The raw and tumultuous development of American capital expansion saw to that.

Underneath the racist superiority relationship was the need of the developing capitalist class to maintain its real dominance over the laboring classes by using the divisions to maximize its extraction of surplus value. The victory of white capitalists in achieving the racial schism didn’t make life idyllic for white workers. They won whatever gains they got through determined economic struggles and bloody battles, not through the beneficence of the capitalists. The white race identity did not mean love on either side of the class line that divided the “Caucasians.” In fact, resentment against the upper classes for *not* being beneficent was if anything heightened by the racial identity. The riots that periodically ripped through Northern cities often displayed anti-Black venom on the part of many of the participants. But most actions were essentially directed against the capitalists.

In the years prior to the Civil War and emancipation, American capitalism was moving from an artisan, merchant, small farmer, land speculator and slave economy onto the long road toward

becoming a society dominated by financial and industrial manufacturing interests. A heavy importation of cheap labor and massive capital investment from Europe produced a country ripening for full-scale class war.

The unification of the states in the wake of the American revolution was fundamentally fragile. Although Marx correctly saw that the North and the South were both capitalist, he pointed out that the conflict between a system based on free labor and a system based on slavery was inherently unstable. The coexistence of incompatible slave and free labor sections in a developing and expanding capitalist society could not persist; yet the racial division which had its roots in slavery was the chief means by which the nation staved off radical threats to its stability. For this purpose, it was necessary to brand Blacks as inferior whether they were slaves or not.

The Northern white artisans and nascent proletarians on the one hand, and the Black slaves on the other, all demonstrated their capacity for violent rebelliousness against their exploiters in the early years. Urban riots were common. Slave revolts put constant fear into the minds of the masters. Even when these revolts lessened prior to the Civil War, the planters were constantly aware of the danger. This pervasive anxiety was accelerated by the series of slave rebellions that had ripped through the British and Spanish colonies — to say nothing of the lingering fears stoked by the successful revolt of the slaves in Haiti in 1804.

Of course, in the first part of the nineteenth century, the danger posed to the republic was not a socialist revolution. Manufacturing was in its infancy. The proletariat was just emerging as a distinct class. However, the radical and continuous disruption of the early American bourgeois order could certainly have ruined possibilities for the future sustained development that the U.S. was to experience. A relatively united workforce could, for example, have forced an alternative something like what happened in the Australian colonial-settler experience. There the working class became such a potent force that the *political* development of imperialism had to be left in the hands of the labor aristocrats via the Labor Party, at a great cost to the capitalists and their profits.

We originally cited four reasons for American capitalism wanting to secure the slave masters' property through obtaining the support of poor whites. We can add the greater goal of overall support and defense of the ruling class state power. The contentious alliance between the Northern bourgeoisie and the Southern plantocracy was able to insure its political rule of the country because of the race division. The anger of the white plebeian masses against their rulers was present but was sufficiently diverted so that the system could be maintained.

Divisions within the workforce such as country of origin, language and religion were important barriers to class solidarity. The presence of an expanding frontier and its chances for profit through farming and land speculation undoubtedly provided a general kind of safety valve effect. However, the racist division within the developing workforce was without doubt the chief factor in allowing capitalism to transform itself in the direction of eventual superpower imperialist status.

F. The Early Emergence of a Labor Aristocracy

Marx stressed that competition was essential to capitalism. Competition is not only crucial for the functioning of the various capitalist firms; Marx pointed out that the division of the working class into competing sectors is even more important for the survival of capitalism. Competition within the bourgeoisie and competition within the working class are not just policies which are deliberately turned on and off by the rulers, they are inherent drives within the system. The working class has a fundamental interest in overcoming its competitive divisions; but to do so it must overthrow capitalism. The bourgeoisie is also motivated to overcome its inherently competitive drive, but it cannot do so.

However inherent and crucial, competition is nevertheless not the fundamental drive of the system. Competition is a drive on “the level of appearance.” Appearances or forms cannot exist without content and they are very real — they are not simply myths and prejudices. Competition, as Marx stressed, is an “executive” law, a drive which carries out the more fundamental systemic laws, what he referred to as “the inner laws of capitalism.” These are the laws of exploitation, the laws which dictate the accumulation of capital (value); the laws which dictate the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the wage labor proletariat over possession of the surplus value created in production by the latter.

In a nutshell, the individual capitalist is driven to compete against other capitalists; that necessity is apparent to him. He sees and understands that it forces him to try to grab a bigger section of the market by introducing more machinery and firing more workers. Thus his drive to gain profit at the expense of rival capitalists drives him to carry out the needs of the system as a whole, something he isn't consciously motivated by on an everyday basis. Unawares, he executes capitalism's inner laws; he thereby carries on the class struggle against wage labor.

Not only individual capitals are forced to compete; national capitals do so too. Nation-states vie with each other to shelter, defend and maximize the capital accumulations of the ruling classes they represent, at the expense of rival capitals. These states are therefore instrumentalities for waging war against the international working class and the return it gets for the exploitation of its labor power. And therefore, division of that class into competitive sectors is a crucial weapon capitalists are driven to use, internationally and domestically.

The division of the working class exists not only to defend the ruling class politically and militarily; it also helps to maximize accumulation of surplus value through accelerating exploitation. In sum, competition among the toilers tends to lower the wages of all labor, even the more highly paid. The better-off workers are faced with the threat of replacement by the reserve army of labor, and therefore forced to work more cheaply.

During the historical development of Black/white relations, both in the colonies and after the American revolution, this process functioned through the mechanism of racial division. Blacks were forced to serve as cheap labor. White labor was better paid, but far less so than if the intra-class competition had been overcome or even substantially reduced by the elimination of the race barrier.

That is one aspect of Marx's well known view. In *Capital* he wrote:

In the United States of North America, every independent movement of the workers

was paralyzed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded. (New World edition, Vol.I, p.301.)

White working-class gains were undermined by slavery, according to Marx. In America, slavery cemented the racial wall and ensured a substantial material differentiation, enough so that white workers, even though they rose up before and during the Civil War, did not pose a real challenge to private property.

Marx and Engels both noticed the growth of an aristocratic layer of workers in Britain. Engels also pointed to its development in the United States when he discussed the relations between American workers and new immigrant labor. It is also clear that a white labor aristocracy arose in North America in the nineteenth century on one side of the race line, while superexploited layers of Blacks were created on the other side.

The development of early American capitalism reflected the whole structure of successive levels built on the core of the internal laws of motion Marx described. Of course, the surface of events never reflects the inner laws on a one-to-one basis; human society in general and capitalism in particular are far too complex, contradictory and creative for that. Ultimately and decisively, the inner tendential laws determine the general development; however, the surface reality always includes some anomalies and transient distortions of that internal essence.

For example, slave labor didn't fit the free labor model that Marx depicted as the norm for capitalism; nor did the planters behave like classic bourgeois entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, in their own distorted way and for their own reasons, the various institutions operated to execute the system's laws of motion. Consequently, not only did the capitalist firms, plantations, industries, governmental units, nations, trusts and cartels compete on various levels, but the system itself — anomalies included — engendered competition between what became fundamentally separated racial sectors of the workforce. Being "free, white and twenty one" did not guarantee a worker a labor aristocratic income, but it made it conceivable. For Black slaves it was inconceivable.

Accumulative capitalist class society, born out of scarcity, created a demon that still haunts us: racism.

III. Race: Imperialism's Necessity

A. Imperialism, Ingrained Racism and the Labor Aristocracy

Humanity is inherently creative. Unlike other animals, humans consciously labor to change their environment — not by instinct but according to pre-conceived ideas or plans. Such efforts are not haphazard. Neither are they simply under the control of those humans; they result from historical circumstances over which our species has up and until now had little control. This pertains to the capitalist class and its use of racism in the development of capitalism and the transformation of the system into imperialism.

“Race” and “racism” were invented not by accident, nor conspiracy, nor a fully developed plan, nor genetic determinism — but in the course of constantly changing events by a ruling class pragmatically and shortsightedly seeking to maximize its capital and preserve its rule. Racism thereby reflected the needs and behaved according to the underlying logic of the vicious system it served.

Around the beginning of the twentieth century, the forces of production had already developed internationally to the point where, for the first time in human history, they *potentially* could create abundance for the entire species. The organization of production, the technology and the working class itself had developed sufficiently so that everyone on this planet could be fed, clothed and housed. However, the capitalist system itself now became the reactionary barrier to actualizing this potential.

Racism in capitalism's initial epoch was a by-blow of the new system's need to accumulate through the most intensive exploitation the world had ever known. Theoretically speaking, it wasn't absolutely necessary for the development of capitalism.

Capitalist imperialism obviously did not suddenly appear full-blown with the outset of the twentieth century. Its roots go far back in history, but it really developed on a solidly bourgeois footing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However desirable in general for the advance of capitalist accumulation, imperialism remained a *policy* rather than an inescapable *necessity* until the transitional period between the two epochs around the turn of the twentieth century. Indeed, prior to that, imperialism and colonialism were pushed with zeal at certain times and treated as of dubious benefit by the metropolitan capitalists at others. By the outbreak of the First World War, monopoly capitalism, i.e. imperialism, *defined* the system.

Racism developed alongside of imperialism and served as its ideological armor and shield. Its development took on particular forms in relation to the development of slavery in the colonies and congealed as an ideology. Of course in practice, slavery gave rise to a variety of forms and degrees of racist ideology depending on region and country in the New World (and even elsewhere). And, accelerated and developed by the need to defend slavery, racism was expanded to reflect a general ideological need of the imperialist powers.

The racist arguments were varied and often conflicting, especially when fought out on a religious level. Nevertheless, contradictory or not, they were compounded into an overall ideology as

imperialism began to encircle the globe. Such an ideological justification was vital to offset the opposition (and to try to enlist the active aid) of the laboring masses of Western Europe and the European colonial-settler nations, and to aid the capitalists in ravishing and subjugating the laborers of Africa, the Americas, Asia and the South Pacific. As the global ambitions of full-fledged capitalist imperialism widened, the rationalizing ideology increasingly became racist through and through; directed against the people of color who were indigenous to those lands. The Europeans justified massacre, destruction and exploitation as part of their “civilizing mission” and the need to bring God to the pagans. The “white man’s burden” was enshrined.

An end to the slave trade and calls for abolition won wide support from the European proletariat. The Haitian slave revolution was favorably received. Later, during the American Civil War, British workers actively demonstrated support for the North and opposition to slavery, preventing London from entering the war on the side of the South.

The 1848 revolutions and the later growth of working-class parties throughout Western Europe — in the First and later in the Second International — haunted the bourgeoisie with the specter of communism. The Paris Commune sent chills down the spine of even American government officials, to say nothing of what it did to the fears of the European bourgeoisie.

It was necessary to break any identification by the European masses with those of the colonial and semi-colonial world. It was also vital to enlist the masses in imperialist efforts which were becoming more and more necessary for raw materials, markets and profitable investments. But over time, the bourgeoisie was also to learn the benefits of buying off sectors of the European working class with cheap foodstuffs imported from the colonies and with a small portion of their profits. The capitalists gave the workers temporary crumbs from their tables, not out of charity but to forestall the powerful working-class upheavals, the growth of socialist parties and the danger of a unified international struggle.

Generalized racism was created by early expansive capitalism. It was deepened by slavery and amplified by the ongoing development of imperialism. It was finally made inescapable and inherent for the system by virtue of the transformation of capitalism itself into imperialism as its “highest stage.”

Racism was the ideological prop for the maintenance of the whole gamut of superexploitation visited on people of color around the world. The variety of superexploitative forms grew as imperialism grew, deepened and transformed the world. Racism as an ideology was made potent by the material differences in conditions between the various forms of labor and structures of servitude both within nations and between aristocratic layers of workers in the home countries and those subjugated abroad. Slavery, indentured servitude, peonage, tenant farming, share cropping, “coolie” labor, child labor and myriads of other forms of poorly paid and murderous toil were justified by racist ideology.

Racist ideology buttressed the material growth of the labor aristocracy in imperialist countries as a whole, not just in the U.S. in relation to American Blacks. The intensity varied according to regional bourgeois needs, but the doctrine was universally necessary because it was vital to the maintenance of the entire system. Race thus became ingrained as a decisive coloration for

worldwide imperialism.

B. U.S. Imperialism and the Creation of Modern Racism

When imperialism matured with this epoch, slavery was already past history in the U.S. Inevitably, the fragile and often unfriendly alliance between the expanding Northern capitalists and the Southern planters that propped up the federal government had exploded. Slavery was destroyed because it objectively inhibited the political and economic growth and expansion of Northern industrial capitalism. As much as the dominant sectors of the bourgeoisie tried to hold the alliance together, it proved impossible. The logic of capitalist development, the necessities of the ensuing Civil War, and the decisive participation of a considerable Black presence in the Union army, finally forced the complete abolition of slavery.

The social changes wrought by the war and the post-war eras were revolutionary. A brief but important period of hopeful changes in the status of Black Americans occurred. But completion of the revolution was thwarted by the rise of monopoly dominated capitalism. Southern conservative "Redemption" below the Mason-Dixon line sought to crush any further attempts to change property and class relations by reinforcing the old race divisions among the poor plebeians of the South.

The hopes of Black plebeians raised by the Civil War and its immediate aftermath for jobs, land and equality, were smashed in the years following. Employment remained highly restricted, and the promise of "40 acres and a mule" proved to be a lie. Nevertheless, the alliance of Radical Republicans and Blacks during the 1867-76 Reconstruction period, which spawned new state governments in the South, did produce limited but real democratic gains for Blacks. It was ended by the increasingly conservative policies of the newly developing big capitalist industrialists and speculators who moved rapidly to dominate the post-war scene. Northern capital deserted the former slaves and forged an economic and political bloc with the Southern conservatives and the commercial capitalist interests they reflected. The Southern plantocracy, an anomaly within capitalism, disappeared into the pages of history as new and more organic capitalist relations were forged.

The new senior/junior partner alliance between Northern and Southern capital replaced the old doomed arrangement; a fledgling re-stabilization of American capitalism and its state power began to occur. The foundation no longer included slavery, but the bloc did rest on the containment of Black labor in the South and its reduction to semi-peonage. Tenant farmer and sharecropper Blacks in the South and poor urban Black free labor, predominantly in the South but existing in the North as well, constituted the basic superexploited layers of a newly reconfigured and subjugated Black caste in American society. The barriers isolating Blacks as a people had weakened but had hardly been obliterated.

As monopolies and finance capitalism changed the face of America, the desperation of masses of workers and small farmers could not be contained without a further upheaval and a more decisive class confrontation. The populist agrarian alliances and the upheavals in the countryside that exploded in the 1880's were particularly radical in the South. They substantively united poor whites and Blacks in a closer relationship than ever before. The burgeoning white and colored

farmers' alliances enrolled millions, and collaboration cutting across the race line ensued; this stimulated the rise of the radical Populist Party.

Among workers in the South and elsewhere, the Knights of Labor began to supplant the older national labor federations, which had been segregated. Although far from complete, major steps were taken toward breaking the color line inside the Knights and, even more dramatically, in the United Mineworkers, the major union to be organized industrially rather than on a craft basis at the time. Interracial collaboration was an important feature of a number of important strikes in the South, where the overwhelming majority of Blacks still lived.

But the struggle of the masses against the new capitalism had many serious problems. In addition to the racial and ethnic divisions, the major weakness was the absence of a powerful revolutionary working-class Marxist party. As well, the deep depression in 1893-4 was an important objective factor in the breakup of the developing plebeian populist onslaught and its subordination to the Democratic Party. The transformation of a once progressive but petty bourgeois-led populism into a racist, counterrevolutionary lynch-mob phenomenon in the South buried any hope for blunting the growth of American finance capitalism and its racist substructure. White plebeians were demagogically whipped up to see Black plebeians as their enemy instead of their ally. The old segregationist walls were shored up once again, re-elaborated and reinforced with murderous vengeance, although based on new class relationships. The American masses suffered a monumental defeat.

In the years around the turn of the century, one Southern state after another passed Jim Crow segregation laws, legally formalizing the reinforced racial borders of the newly reconstructed and socially transformed caste structure of the United States. The constitutional amendments guaranteeing Black rights were rendered a hollow shell throughout the country. Southern Blacks were largely restricted to backward agrarian conditions and denied the vote. In the North, contrary to most academic versions of "caste" analysis, the caste relations also were dominant. There they were more a result of the absence of laws protecting Blacks against discrimination than of openly racist laws, although those existed as well.

It was no coincidence that the same years saw the outbreak of the Spanish-American War and the launching of U.S. imperialism as a permanent and major factor on the world scene. The re-consolidation and transformation of the race-caste system served as the basis for the take-off of the imperialist epoch in the development of the United States and its now relatively stable and very powerful federal government. As long as the "Old South" could be kept racist and backward, reactionary Southern congressmen could provide continuous bottom heavy ballast for the modern twentieth-century American ship of state.

C. American Imperialism's Race-Caste Base

In order to divide the laboring population, the capitalist rulers of the early American colonies chose to make race into a brand. The "Black" or "Negro" race was made into a badge of degradation and forced on a group of people who were thus distinguished as allegedly inferior, because of a few superficial differences in skin color and physiognomy. The stigma was inflicted so as to mark off and isolate a special and different kind of toiler, slaves. Blackness was an

indelible, permanent, brand designating the wearer not only as inferior but also as properly subject to becoming property.

Skin color was made into a brand of race not because people just happened to decide Black meant inferior. As we have demonstrated, skin color became a convenient and palpable way to mark off and isolate a particular group of people who played a particular role in the economy that society wanted to make sure was *unique*. Race wasn't the reason; the slave role was. Race was the brand specifying the role.

Usually, classes in society have a distinct relationship to the means of production (or, more loosely speaking, to the economy in general), but they are not a separate people. However, on quite a number of occasions in history, societies have designated a distinctive group to function as the sole population of a particular class, when it seemed to be important to ensure the uniqueness of the specific role. In his trail blazing work, *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation*, Abram Leon, one of the most outstanding thinkers in the history of the Trotskyist movement, described the Jewish people in ancient society and in feudal Europe in this way.

The feudal lords needed a segregated group of distinctly different people to play the socially necessary and interconnected roles of traders, merchants and usurers, in order to bar others from engaging in those occupations in their rigidly stratified society. The Jews were a pariah class, branded as outsiders by society while they played a necessary role within its economy. They were the unique members of a unique class.

Leon referred to the Jews as a “people-class.” Black slaves in North America were also a people-class — more precisely, a race-class.

Slaves differed from feudal Jewish traders in many obvious respects. Slaves were subjugated and superexploited; Jews were also badly persecuted at certain times, but those who functioned as merchants and usurers generally benefitted as a special privileged class. Nevertheless, both the pre-capitalist merchants and the slaves of capitalism were constituted as people-classes at their different times in history.

Among the glaring differences between the two groups is that the feudal Jews had a choice, a chance to discard their sign of differentiation: their adherence to Judaism as a religion. The option of Christianity was present for those who wished to switch class roles (or when their roles ceased to be unique). Most often, conversion paved the way for assimilation into the wider society. American slaves had far less choice about their class role in society. And their brand was permanent: slaves were property for their entire lives, and the condition was passed on to their children. Conveniently for the capitalist slave masters, the skin color brand was also passed on.

For the most part, slaves had no option of voluntarily switching class roles. There can be no real comparison with the Jews on this score. However, some slaves were successful in escaping, some were able to buy their freedom, and some were freed in other ways. As we have pointed out, most of the free Blacks became low-paid workers or unemployed. As such, they were forced into being a superexploited section of the free working class.

We have used the term “class” for the slaves without yet indicating whether or not they were, in

our opinion, part of the developing American working class or a different class, subject to a different kind of exploitation. Both Marxists and non-Marxists have debated whether the American slaves were actually proletarians or a separate laboring class. Another document will deal with that question at some length, along with a more extended treatment of Leon's conception of a people-class and its applicability to U.S. Blacks. For our summary purposes here, let us just indicate that whatever conclusion one comes to, it is clear that slave labor was quite distinct in very important ways from ordinary wage labor, even when slaves worked in urban industry.

However, it is also true that slave labor played an economic role (as well as the political and social roles we have mentioned) in relation to free wage laborers. Slaves could not freely sell their labor power on the market nor could they commonly bargain for what they were paid. As a whole, they obviously received far less than other labor for comparable tasks. That also meant that slave labor tended to lower the whole wage structure, even for free workers and agrarians — most obviously in the South.

When individual slaves achieved freedom, the social brand of race was not removed. Its meaning was extended to include slave-worthy if not actually enslaved, and unequal by nature with respect to social, economic and political rights in what was considered to be the white man's America.

Early U.S. race relations were fundamentally sculpted by capitalism's need for racially determined slavery, but we cannot ignore the role of the growing number of Black wage laborers. Nor for that matter should we underplay the development of small but politically and socially important petty-bourgeois businessmen and ministers as well as professional middle-class elements. Blacks were not simply members of a single class: they were part of a segregated *race-caste* which contained elements from different social classes. In order to understand race relations under capitalism, it is necessary to extend Leon's people-class conception to embrace the idea of a people-caste — and its particular expression as a race-caste).

Although the early American Black race-caste contained numbers of people who occupied differing class positions, the caste was based on the superexploited slave class. The end of slavery undermined the old caste relationships. However, with the defeat of the populist-led rebellion in the late 1800's, race-caste walls were reconsolidated on a new and transformed basis. The modern twentieth century race-caste is based on the capitalist superexploitation of oppressed Black wage laborers and small farmers.

Since the turn of the century there has obviously been a shift from peons and agrarian proletarians to the urban working class as the center of exploitation within the oppressed caste. Today, in the wake of the 1960's upheavals there has been added a layer of aristocratic Black workers.

The race-caste also includes the small merchant, religious and professional layers who have provided much of the leadership, and even a handful of capitalists. The middle and upper strata have also expanded. Despite the importance of other class elements, the essential reasons for the existence of the caste relationship are the race division of the proletariat, the superexploitation of the Black working class, and the consequent maximization of exploitation of the entire class. The

racial division of the working class serves to stabilize and defend the dominance of the big bourgeoisie and its state power. In the modern era, the stability achieved by racial oppression and caste containment has enabled American imperialism to become the mightiest superpower the world has ever suffered.

The people who constitute the modern race-caste are far more rigidly contained than were the feudal Jews, because the brand is skin color and virtually indelible. We have examined some of the reasons why this was necessary for the early capitalists with respect to American slavery. However, with the development of Black wage labor as the dominant class relationship, Blacks no longer performed a unique economic role in the same sense as they did under slavery.

Generally speaking, the relation of Black workers to the bourgeoisie has the same essential character as that of white workers, except that the jobs are worse and harder to obtain. And they get much less in return. In fact, American capitalism needs to utilize Blacks as a pariah sector of a multiracial working class and as a reserve army of labor. This serves to hide class identity and maximize exploitation. The need for a uniquely cordoned-off group remains, but the uniqueness has to be marked more by the exclusive brand than by an exclusive function. That is one crucial reason behind the twentieth-century reinforcement and expansion of genetically ascribed racism.

The idea of race-caste that we have developed is quite different from the idealist and suprahistorical versions of caste advanced by Gunnar Myrdal and the academic sociologists. As indicated, we will discuss a Marxist understanding of castes at greater length in a separate document. For us, the importance of pointing out the caste condition is to focus on the fact that racism has been the enforcer and not the reason for the oppression of Blacks and other people of color. It shows that the race relationship is institutional and directly tied to the system's need to exploit. If differences in skin color and physiognomy were suddenly to disappear, another brand would have to be discovered to mark off a caste, lest the underlying class relations of capitalism be exposed.

Castes in Indian society centuries ago were a product of a different epoch in human history. The American caste relationship is utterly different in appearance and content. Castes differ hugely from one social system to another, just as classes do. However, all such lines of stratification tend to hide the inner class relations of the particular society, and tend to stabilize it. Castes have an institutional, shut-in and permanent character; permanent, that is, in relation to the existence of particular societies.

Trotsky once pointed out the unfortunate fact that "caste" is a poor term, which he used in an obviously makeshift fashion. We, like Trotsky, bemoan the fact that sociology hasn't come up with a more scientific terminology. But the point isn't academic labeling; it is that racism reflects an institutionalized pariah condition which is now inherent and permanent as long as capitalism continues to exist. Reform rather than revolution is the consequence of any other supposedly anti-racist view. And trying to reform the system in the belief that it will eliminate racism is a completely utopian path.

D. Racism, the Labor Aristocracy and Caste Oppression Today

Dying capitalism means more, not less, rivalry between capitals. The emergence of monopoly capitalism's domination in this epoch did not destroy competition; it rendered it worldwide and raised the stakes, thus intensifying its ferocity. Today's "global market" means that multinational corporations both interpenetrate and compete with each other everywhere. Today's national capitals erect more and more protectionist barriers against each other, often in the name of free trade. The declining rate of profit and the scramble for diminishing pieces of the economic pie force even more hostile rivalries. Eventually imperialism, if it isn't stopped by revolution, will produce a third world war.

Since the systemic purpose of competition is to deepen the exploitation of the working class, it should be no secret that the current waves of "downsizing" and austerity attacks across the world are accelerated by these rivalries. Corporations institute wage reduction systems, lay off thousands of workers, take back fringe benefits and break unions, all — as they see it — to better compete in the global market. Governments cut budgets to the bone, getting rid of the gains won by the workers in the past. The reason given is the need to become "lean and mean" — to save capitalists' social overhead costs so they can undercut their rivals on the world market. Now, even the relatively higher wages of the aristocracy are being undermined as a result of decaying capitalism and its whipsawing of different groups of workers against each other around the world.

The imperialism Lenin described has evolved in keeping with its laws of motion. Export of capital is still dominant, but it takes new forms. Today, imperialism is driving the poorest neo-colonies to the wall and draining the most superexploited sections of the working class at home and abroad. However, instead of maintaining the past level of sops to the labor aristocracy and the middle classes, it has decisively moved toward draining them too. Instead of building up the labor aristocracy at home, it has partially industrialized the "uneven and combined" countries (Pacific Rim, Latin America, etc.) within the so-called "third world" and has expanded and enforced the deadliest forms of exploitation of the workers, including child labor. In turn, it uses the low wages it pays there to undercut workers at home.

Of course Marxists fight to keep every real gain won by even the aristocratic workers. The task is not to give the capitalists their sops back but to win for the whole class what the labor aristocrats have won, and then a lot more. As materialists, we aim as well to expose the efforts of the imperialists to give the aristocrats "moral values" instead of real value. "God," "family," "country" and "race" are counterfeit coin. Blaming the workers of other nations, nationalities and races for worsening conditions is suicidal for any part of the working class.

Imperialism's whipsawing of the working class internationally means not only using the workers of countries abroad against the workers at home. Imperialism has also forced the greatest migration of peoples that the world has ever known. Today, roughly 2 percent of the world's population — approximately 100 million people — have left home to become international migrants. Capitalism uses the import and export of (largely) poor workers so that competitive divisions are multiplied at home as well as abroad and exploitation is thereby maximized. Then the indigenous workers are told their enemies are the poor workers from abroad, not the system which forces them to migrate under the threat of starvation.

Country after country throughout the world plays host to immigrant groups of poor workers who left their homelands in a desperate search for livable wages. Virtual slave labor has returned, not only in poor countries but in advanced imperialist countries like the U.S. For example, mainland Chinese labor is imported to work in sweatshops under slave conditions to compete with low paid labor producing competitive goods in China, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia, etc. Mexican workers are driven by excruciating poverty inflicted at home by imperialism to work for a pittance in the U.S.

Germany plays host to Turks and Kurds. France maintains a workforce with many Caribbean, North African, sub-Saharan African and Middle Eastern immigrant workers. Iran utilizes Afghan labor. Pakistani and West Indian workers are a serious factor in the British working class. Israel exploits Thai and Romanian workers as well as Palestinian. Saudi Arabia uses Pakistanis, Palestinians and so forth. Northern Italy uneasily hosts southern Italians, Sweden has its Latinos, Denmark its Africans, Australia, its Asians.

U.S. Blacks are hardly alone in the imperialist world in being forced into castes for the purpose of providing and preserving superexploited labor. Even in the U.S., they are being joined by others. In North America, this arrangement includes Latinos, Asians, Haitians and West Indians. Within and between nations, imperialism pits one group against the next in an intra-class fratricidal war. Superexploited layers compete with other superexploited layers as well as with nationally, ethnically and regionally divided layers of workers who are, or were, better off.

As if that is not enough, the worldwide conglomeration of castes are increasingly being developed as *racially determined* castes. For example, in Japan there are the Burakumin, a group of approximately 3 million people — a little more than 2 percent of the population — whose ancestors did the dirty jobs under feudalism and who are still outcasts. In recent times the discriminatory barriers against them have been lowered significantly, although there are no guarantees of permanency. The reason? The Burakumin are Japanese, only distinguishable by name and residence, both of which are changeable in a period of such great flux as today. Now Japanese capitalism prefers to superexploit the more readily identifiable Korean “immigrants,” who even if born in Japan are not considered Japanese.

In country after country, national or regional groups who are distinct because of physiognomy, language or other suitably identifying brands are being transformed into race-castes, even when they haven't been technically cast into different “races.” The point is that they are being treated as such. Race has become imperialism's ideal divider.

Trotsky made the point that American Blacks were a racial group and not a nation; but he went on to say that under conditions of historical trauma, they could be forged into a nation. Race can be the raw material for the creation of nationalities. We can now say that imperialism is turning nationalities and even religious and regional groups into race-like formations. Seemingly unique characteristics are used to mark off groups who are forced to compete with their fellow workers who perform in similar occupations, a competition configured by those differences. This reality amplifies the necessity of viewing interracialism as part of an internationalist strategy, since escalating institutional racism is far from just an American phenomenon.

The modern epoch of capitalism was ushered onto the world scene with the bloody disaster of World War I. Capitalism was then ripe for revolution. That the Russian revolution did not spread and that world capitalism still persists has meant that the world grows evermore overripe for socialism. The disasters of the early days of the epoch seem small compared to what has happened since, and even these horrors will seem pale next to what is now being brewed by imperialism. The vast intermixture of peoples and cultures now going on would be a wonderful experience for the human race if we lived in a classless world of plenty. If capitalism persists, it will drown our species in the blood of new wars waged ostensibly for the stupidity of proclaiming the superiority of a particular race or nationality — but in reality for the superprofits for a few.

The migration of vast numbers of workers into the heart of industry around the world can have a magnificent effect on the proletariat as a whole, even prior to the communist society of the future. Superexploited workers can often make the best revolutionaries. Trotsky believed that U.S. Blacks would play a vital role in the vanguard of the American proletarian revolution. Less well known is another comment of his about French strikes in 1930, which noted

the important role of the foreign-born workers in the strike movement, who, by the way, will in the future play a part in France analogous to that of the Negroes in the United States. But that is the music of the future.

Indeed it is! And now, not only in France.

IV. Alternative Theories

A. Assimilationism-Integrationism

1. The Failure of Integrationism

Despite the legal end to segregation and the declared victory of integration, the caste barriers have not only remained, they are being re-strengthened. The gains are being undermined. The Black working class has been hard hit; its poorest strata are being devastated. Significant sectors of the middle strata are besieged as well.

Today “integrationism” is the watchword of reactionaries. Almost no elements of the Black leadership use the term any longer; only a handful of Black conservatives actively employ the concept. The dream of an integrated color-blind America has disintegrated.

Derrick Bell writes in *The Nation* (May 23, 1994):

“Growing up,” says my father, “we thought we knew exactly what integration meant. We would all go to school together; it meant the city would spend the same money on you that it did on white students. We blacks wouldn’t be in some cold isolated school that overlooked the railroad yards; we wouldn’t have to get the cast-off, ragged books. We didn’t think about the inevitability of a fight about whose version of the Civil War would be taught in that utopic integrated classroom.”

Today, more than forty years after the landmark Supreme Court decision to desegregate schools, more Black students attend all-Black or virtually all-Black schools than then. You can count the number of stably integrated communities in America on your fingers. The idea that American capitalism would permit a color-blind society is going up in the smoke of more and more burning crosses. And even the pro-business Urban League, which was a bulwark of the integrationists years ago, says, “The degree of racial inequality is higher as we begin the 1990's than at any other time in the last 20 years” (*State of Black America*, 1991.)

The same study examined wages and other income in addition to overall employment statistics. It concluded:

The consistency of these results for the last decade leads to one inescapable conclusion. *The disadvantaged economic status of the African-American population is a permanent feature of the American economy. The permanence of this disadvantaged status implies that it is perpetuated by the normal operations of the American economy.*

At a time of relative prosperity, the U.S. economy yielded to the threat of the exploding ghettos. The caste laws were officially abandoned, and the promise was made that the *de facto* caste would disappear. The caste line was partly hidden and in fact was bent; but it never disappeared. Today, the caste barrier, “perpetuated by the normal operations of the American economy,” is coming back to the surface of events with full force.

Marxists of course supported the struggle against segregation and all the Jim Crow laws. What distinguished authentic communists was that they constantly warned that a really color-blind and

egalitarian society was impossible if capitalism was not overthrown. To trust the courts, the police and Washington was a death trap. To gain social, economic and political equality, socialist revolution would be necessary.

2. The Origins

Historically, the assimilationist-integrationist ideology reflected the outlook of the small stratum of Black middle-class professionals. Around the turn of the century, this current was most notably represented by W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois, the noted Black academician, was locked in combat with Booker T. Washington, the white bourgeoisie's anointed leader of the Black community, over the education of Black youth. As the age of imperialism and the vast expansion of American industry dawned, their differing ideas on this question reflected sharply diverse views as to how Blacks could better their lot.

The robber baron speculators and the old private entrepreneurs were in the process of giving way to financial and industrial oligopolists with their insistence on a more professional, scientific, rationalized and bureaucratic discipline — not only for business but for the increasingly important governmental functions as well. In this context, Du Bois urged an education geared to the broad liberal arts and a scientific outlook that would develop a Black intelligentsia. This layer could then self-confidently rise and expand within society.

In contrast, Washington advocated teaching practical industrial and artisan skills. He reflected the outlook of the tiny Southern Black petty bourgeoisie. Washington believed that Blacks would best prosper through having a large pool of trained and docile workers readied for hire by white industry. This source of income, combined with the growth of Black artisan businesses in the South, would promote racial progress.

At issue were two different paths for Black social mobility. Washington and his friends accepted segregation and the end of Black intervention on the political scene. Their road demanded the good will of the white bourgeoisie, its willingness to hire and invest and, above all, to subsidize Tuskegee and the other Black industrial arts schools. If the price was abstention from politics, not to mention oppositional politics, then so be it. They felt that there was little choice.

On the other hand, the sophisticated and radical “new middle class” elements believed that Black advancement depended on the achievements of the “Talented Tenth.” The rise of a small number of relatively gifted people would inspire the rest of the Black people to move upward and would show both Blacks and the rest of the society their capabilities.

Du Bois bitterly fought the enactment of all the new Jim Crow laws and the effective ban on Blacks voting in the South, whereas Washington acquiesced. Du Bois knew that Blacks would not be given access to mobility without a fight against the deeply entrenched racists. He and his colleagues favored social and political advocacy rather than expecting noblesse oblige from the monopolists. Black people must influence the growing political power of the state if discriminatory barriers were to be smashed and the marauding lynch mobs stopped. Only thus could Blacks achieve equality and eventually a color-blind society. Du Bois was instrumental in founding first the Niagara Movement and then the National Association for the Advancement of

Colored People in the early years of this century, as means to fight for such goals.

The dream that Blacks could assimilate in the U.S. grew in lockstep with the growth of the theory of an American “Melting Pot” in the early 1900's. As the burgeoning national industry developed, it incorporated huge waves of immigrant labor. How would all these nationalities be forged into a united nation, a solid base for the rising imperialist state? The escalating anti-immigrant chauvinism was partially confronted by elements of the “progressive” intelligentsia with its notion that over time the various “hyphenated Americans” would melt down into one big assimilated American nationality. Many advocates thought of this meltdown as the creation of a completely new nationality. Others knew it meant an evolved white Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture. Either way, the whole melting pot notion was linked to the powerful attraction of social mobility — the “American Dream.” European immigrants were told that by virtue of hard work, education and Americanization, they could move upward in a way never dreamed possible in the Old World. They could become the new supermen.

Meanwhile, Asians were still excluded and Blacks were still segregated. Hope to melt in could occur, but the reality was something else, even then. Now, recent years have once again proved that American capitalism in the imperialist epoch is incompatible with equal rights in any form for Black Americans, let alone assimilation.

3. The Attempt to Gain Equality

The 1930's saw the mass eruption of the American industrial working class. In a historic split from the conservative, labor-aristocratic craft-based American Federation of Labor (AFL), the upheaval led to the formation of a rival body, the Congress of Industrial Organizations. The CIO organized the unskilled as well the skilled workers, Black as well as white. The workers' movement was so hostile to the bosses and so organizationally independent of their domination that it could quite possibly have broken from their grip politically as well as industrially. However, significant portions of the CIO leadership, in the hands of both the liberal progressives and the Stalinist Communist Party (CP), acted decisively to keep the working class from breaking with Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Democratic Party.

The work of the CIO was hardly done at the end of the '30's. Given the movement of industry to the South to escape unionization, the CIO leadership pledged to organize the region. But it postponed the drive to do so until the end of World War II. Then in the late 1940's it reneged on its promise. Such an organizing drive would have had massive social, political and economic consequences. To unionize industry in the South would have meant a head-on attack on segregation laws right in the heart of racism and reaction in the U.S. It would have meant the end of low-paid labor, white as well as Black, in the South — and that would have had an enormous impact on wages throughout the country.

It therefore would have meant a collision with the Democratic Party, which at the time still retained its absolute political power over the “Solid South.” This control rested on the near-total exclusion of Blacks from the political life of the country, including the vote. The economic changes themselves over time would have played havoc with white plebeian support and certainly ruptured parts of the caste wall which kept poor whites lined up behind reactionary

Dixiecrat demagogues. Since the turn of the century, political stability in Washington and the rest of the country depended on keeping the South racially segregated and therefore backward socially, economically and politically. The Democrats' ability to elect a president and hold formal control over Congress depended on the Southern Democrats. The Republicans' ability to keep Congress conservative depended on the same Southern Democrats.

Elements of the CIO leadership in the middle-late 1940's might have wanted a break with Harry Truman and the Democrats, but they didn't want the radical disruption of American society that a Southern organizing drive would have entailed. In fact, it would have taken a racially unified working-class movement and a revolution to actually do the job. The crumbling of the caste line in Dixie would have ignited the whole nation, given the angry militancy of the Northern working class in the post-war period. No wonder the labor bureaucrats were increasingly cool to the idea.

McCarthyism, the Cold War and the post-World War II prosperity bubble were utilized to defuse the radicalism rampant among the workers in the CIO. Not only the Stalinists but other more radical voices in the unions were besieged. Likewise, the pressure on the union tops to open up a struggle for equal rights and economic advancement by a major organizing drive in the South was also diverted.

The capitalist system is contradictory; the capitalists themselves have conflicting interests. The South could not be kept agricultural and backward. The spread of industry and urbanization to the South, begun during the war and vastly accelerated in its aftermath, was undermining the old social structure. The post-war prosperity fueled the transformation. The developing urban bourgeoisie and professional middle class wanted to bring the South into the modern world and take political power away from the rural and mining interests, but as long as the threat of labor remained real they would continue to bow before political dinosaurs who could be relied on to chew up labor organizers.

The prosperity of the 1950's and '60's and the changes in the South spurred sectors of the Black middle class — ministers, students and professionals — into action. They wanted the right to rise and better their condition. They demanded equality, the end of enforced segregation and integration into American society. The fact that large numbers of Blacks had migrated to urban areas in the North and the South and were becoming a powerful force in industry and politics was fostering an increasingly important national pressure for equality on Washington. Sections of the Black clergy and the shopkeeping petty bourgeoisie in the South who had benefitted from segregation were marginalized, as the fight for equality meshed with the yearnings of the Black masses.

The U.S. had fought the Second World War under the banner of democracy and equality; the Cold War was being fought with a similar claim. And in the period of colonial revolution and the emergence of people of color on the world scene as a powerful new force, all these factors acted as enormous pressure on the federal government — especially the incorporative national Democratic Party — to make concessions to the Black demands. Prosperity and the capitalists' ability to give more sops in response to economic struggles temporarily fattened the white labor aristocratic layers. This and the political docility of the national trade unions reduced the risks inherent in lowering the caste walls.

The labor leaders, with the help of growing governmental intervention, were able to institutionalize their power in the unions. The CIO recombined with the AFL and the bureaucracy heightened its position in the industrial unions as well as the crafts. Now, faced with an increasing Black presence in industry, the last thing they wanted was racial upheavals to rock the boat. Thus they were instrumental in forming the “Negro-Liberal-Labor Alliance” to demand orderly concessions and the promise of integration to Blacks. (Naturally, they were far more reluctant to allow Blacks to have more power *within* the unions.)

In the South, the national pressures as well as regional changes accelerated the shift from the dominance of rural capital to the urban bourgeoisie in the ‘60’s. The shift was less explosive than the modern capitalists feared; after all, they were two wings of a financially interrelated class, and the union threat was now minimal; Blacks were their problem. Prosperity and the growth of industry and industrial agriculture made the bourgeoisie crave racial peace to avoid disrupting the rising profits. The Southern capitalists were tied as well to Northern industry and finance. The big corporations, under the pressure of Washington, pressured their junior colleagues to exercise political power in Dixie comparable to their already great economic power and make concessions to Blacks.

The urban capitalists in the “New South” might have been more modern than their country cousins, but they were Republicans and still conservative and cool to Black self-assertion. Only force or the threat of force could compel them to make even small concessions. They didn’t want to alienate the reactionary racists and disrupt an orderly transformation of the power structure. And since Blacks were a growing presence in Southern cities, they wanted to be sure that they could trust the Black leadership to contain the masses of their race.

The middle-class Black integrationists had an ambivalent relationship to the plebeian Black masses. While Black workers and small farmers approved of attacks on Jim Crow laws and restrictions, they viewed the civil rights organizations’ agenda as different from their own. The preachers did not focus on the essence of their problems. Their plight was determined by the economic as well as the political and social consequences of racism. But with no working-class alternative on the scene, Black workers in the South as well as in the North were unable to group around a defined alternate program.

Nevertheless, in the mid-60’s, when civil rights actions were violently met by the power structure, or when the police committed a particularly brutal act of racism, Southern urban Blacks, like their counterparts in the North, took to the streets in bitter revolt. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and the other Black leaders tried their best to restrain the masses. Still, the capitalists feared that King & Co. would ignite a social and racial explosion that they couldn’t contain. This potential, plus the pressure of a frightened White House, produced the grudging concessions made to the civil rights leadership forces in Dixie.

Thus, under the influence of white urban businessmen and the new middle class, the segregation laws were abandoned, integration was promised and reform steps were taken. This process was buttressed by the national Democrats in Washington, who promised defense of Black voting rights in the South. The Kennedy and Johnson administrations’ emphasis on voting rights was

part of an effort to redirect the Black movement from provocative actions which could spark more upheavals. As the riots escalated in the middle and late 1960's, power through passive electoralism and the Democratic Party was more and more cast as the proper alternative.

Given the class and race leaderships then operative, the capitalists were only willing to give limited gains, even though capitalism was experiencing a time of prosperity the like of which it will never see again. Tokenism in the South seemed to work. Bi-racial councils were set up in major cities. Legal caste restrictions were dropped. Promises were made with respect to integrating schools. However, whatever was being accomplished by tokenism in Southern cities, on a national level the concatenation of seemingly endless ghetto rebellions demanded more than that for the urban masses. More sops were given in terms of jobs and expansion of the welfare state. But hardly enough to curb the searing poverty which beset the lower rungs of the class ladder.

The struggle called attention to the newly evident power of the Black masses on the American scene. The Democratic Party, liberal white middle-class professionals, "progressive" industrial union bureaucrats and mainstream religious leaders now welcomed the integrationist Black middle-class leadership with greater enthusiasm into their national alliance. The role of Rev. King as the recognized Black leader of the Southern civil rights struggle was further acknowledged by the more leftish liberals when he joined them in opposition to the Vietnam War.

The stability of American capitalism could no longer be based on an Old South that was rapidly disappearing. Capitalism had to shore up its Northern pillars of support; the bureaucratization of the unions proceeded apace, along with the already expanded white labor aristocracy. These buffering strata were joined by the enlarged and prosperous white liberal middle class. The remaining prosperity, which gave American capitalism the ability to prop itself up by buying off white working-class threats, also permitted it to channel its sops to develop a newly expanded Black middle class, North and South. This stratum was developed to act as a border guard against the alienated and angry masses. A serious Black wing of the labor aristocracy began to develop. The liberal-labor border guards welcomed the assistance of emerging new groups of Black lieutenants in their fight to reform and thereby stabilize capitalism.

The new setup could only serve as a solid basis for U.S. imperialism as long as prosperity continued. The underlying social problems remained unsolved. With the passing of the prosperity bubble, they would rear up again in full force.

The middle-class Black integrationists were accorded status in the struggle to preserve the national interest. Increasingly in the late '60's, the liberals were terrified not only by the losing war in Vietnam, which was costing America support abroad, but by the growing rumblings of rebellion within the armed forces and their large contingents of Black and Latino soldiers. With good reason, they were also afraid that the growing rash of wildcat strikes and the mass ghetto upheavals at home would get out of hand.

The class-collaborationist alliance of labor, white liberal and Black integrationist leaders was designed to create an electoral bloc of people who would passively vote together for the Demo-

crats but who were fundamentally to be kept separate. United, they could have placed demands on capitalism that the system could not afford to meet. The leaders were trying to prevent class consciousness, as opposed to sectoral consciousness, from deepening and combining. The struggles had to be kept divided and above all contained. It is not that these chieftains were particularly conscious of these needs, they just didn't want "anarchy" and unseemly disruptions. In other words, their class instincts determined their acts.

But even the Rev. King was run out of the ghetto when he tried to calm the riots. For all the Black masses' identification with the struggle for equality, the middle-class ideology of integrationism had never dug deep roots.

B. Black Nationalism

1. Anger and Isolation

That the gains made in the 1960's and '70's have not led to liberation has fueled the present widespread mood often wrongly labeled as "Black nationalism." This is an umbrella term embracing far more than one particular current. And at the moment, it is far more a defensive cast of mind than it is a social movement. However, there are serious ideas and serious organizations who put forward nationalist positions and lay claim to leadership. We will look first at a few important ideological interpretations of that nationalism, and later on at some trends that specifically declare themselves revolutionary nationalists.

To begin, we note that it is often difficult to sort out the radical and even the revolutionary appearing trends from the conservative tendencies. This is not only because the different views have not yet fully sorted themselves out. It is also that even very conservative nationalistic doctrines, if they assert too positive or too angry a tone in their advocacy of Black self-assertion, are commonly taken to be revolutionary, or at least militantly extremist, in this caste-ridden and fear-ridden society.

What is called Black nationalism today still has its most solid base in the petty bourgeoisie, both in its relatively established sector as well as in its more socially fragile wing. Its message emphasizing separation from whites has echoes among Protestant traditionalists in the highly important Black churches as well as having a more vigorous expression in the newer Black Muslim circles. It is the daily fare of the shopkeepers and street peddlers. The so-called nationalist outlook heightens among middle class as well as working class elements at every example of outrageous and indiscriminate police brutality. It fills the columns of local Black newspapers; its rhetoric crowds Black talk radio; years ago, its invective even colored some of the hip hop music so important to the youth. Its often expressed anger and rage seem to connect with the most alienated in America's inner city slums.

Nationalism's influence has most noticeably spread among the disillusioned young college trained intelligentsia, even among those who have been involved with the social welfare programs spawned or subsidized by the government. Importantly, it also resonates among sections of the working-class masses — loudly among some layers, while for others it is merely background music. Many have mixed emotions. Nationalism reflects anger, the rising tide of hatred for a society incapable of giving up its capacity for wreaking indiscriminate harm upon

Blacks.

Marxists do not equate the nationalism of the oppressed with the nationalism of the oppressors. The playing field is not level. The anger against Nazism expressed by Jewish survivors of the concentration camps often took the form of castigating the Germans as a whole people for the horrors they endured. Even moralists can see that this kind of nationalist hostility is hardly to be condemned in the same way as the Nazis' murderous national chauvinist treatment of the Jews. Nevertheless, many such commentators develop a blind spot when it comes to Black nationalism and its antagonism toward whites. They equate the anti-white views of the victims with the anti-Black venom of the lynch-mob killers.

While we do not equate the Black nationalist response, we still oppose it. As with Jewish anti-Germanism, it points to the wrong road; it is self-defeating. However, to point to a different road, Marxists must understand nationalism and why so many Black people embrace it at this time.

Nationalism keys into the fact that previous promises made to Blacks by white-dominated society have proved to be lies — and into the consequent feeling that if Blacks are to defend themselves, let alone make sustained progress, they will have to do it on their own in the face of a hostile white world. Nationalism seems to explain the failure and treachery of the integrationist alliances which promised so much.

The nationalist appeal proclaims the need for Blacks to take pride in themselves, come together and fight back as a people. Hence its popularity. But it is a defensive mood which reflects the need for a collective identity since the racist attack is aimed at the group. It is a collective disposition which follows from the fact that Blacks are treated as an institutionalized collectivity, a race-caste in U.S. society. As well and however, as more and more Blacks recognize, its rhetoric and proposals do not answer the all-important question of what is to be done? And for vast numbers of Black working-class people, a strong belief that Blacks as a group have to get it together against a racist society is mixed with an equally strong belief that the only good society is a racially egalitarian one. Nationalism leaves many questions unanswered.

The irony of the dialectic rears its head again. Just at the point where the various beliefs lumped together and mis-named "Black nationalism" have achieved such a wide resonance within the Black community, the "nationalist movement" finds itself in its highest state of confusion.

In the 1960's and '70's, what was thought of as Black nationalism had many different expressions but there was a radical movement of sizable proportions. By and large the major religious and cultural nationalist figures of today are quite conservative; their radicalism is largely confined to rhetoric. Today, there is no Malcolm X, no large Black Panther organization — and few ghetto riots.

The poorer sections of the working class pay attention to the religious nationalists because they identify with the need for Blacks to come together in common defense. Separation into a different nation is hardly even a sign of militancy any more. "Community control" is still talked about, but sounds more hollow every day that passes. There is no expectation that the religious nationalist leaders will actually fight for a new road. Laboring under a sense of defeat,

beleaguered ghetto dwellers identify with the need to “circle the wagons.” They bristle at every white attack on the nationalists, because they see such attacks as part of the renewed anti-Black backlash. The major nationalist leaders like Farrakhan have extended their influence greatly — by default. There doesn't seem to be a real way out nor a real fighting leadership, as far as the discontented but also disoriented masses can see.

Some of the political nationalist elements, often found among college and university graduates, are profoundly caught up in anti-white and anti-Semitic dead ends. Others, including students and graduates as well as non-college trained workers and youth, fight off such adaptations to bourgeois ideology and are searching for real answers. Anger and advocacy of group militancy attract numbers of young Black radicals to the loosely connected circles of “revolutionary nationalism” at the edge of the main “separatist” circles. Sections of this milieu are in a state of ferment; ideas as to the way forward are debated and re-debated; but the current has yet to come to any firm agreement.

Revolutionary nationalism is caught up in the same dilemma as the more mainstream elements. A separate American Black nation? Where? Why don't the masses seem interested in a national migration? Is the goal only a spiritual separation from whites? Is it community control? How can geographically distinct, territorially small and economically dependent ghettos exercise independence? Is cultural separation and independence from whites more of an answer than territorial separation? Should Blacks stress reparations for slavery and the hundreds of years of murderous subjugation? Are these things possible, given the balance of forces? Can Blacks participate in the political life of this country? Should they participate in the white-dominated elections? Should they vote for “lesser evil” white candidates? Should they build an independent Black party? Are the elected Black political officials moderate friends or at bottom out-and-out Uncle Toms? How can Blacks become an independent force in American politics when the Democratic Party has them in their hip pocket? How critical should they be of the Nation of Islam (NOI), the most powerful nationalist group and the one which seems to have the ear of the ghetto poor?

What is the concrete relationship of American Blacks and the rest of the Black diaspora to Africa? Are the Black masses themselves to blame for the present impasse? What kind of economic change is necessary to rescue Black America from the grip of poverty? Is there any force within the white world that Blacks can align with?

At this point, much of Black America finds itself politically isolated, its past alliances have proved fruitless. Clinton's appointment of more Black faces to government positions may vicariously delight the still-striving sectors of the middle strata, but it has less and less impact on the poorer and more exploited strata.

In the 1930's and '40's, when Black or white youth became angry, militant and radical, many naturally turned to working-class and socialistic solutions. Usually such activists were able to see beyond the racism and the conservatism of the trade union bureaucrats and the prevalent racist attitudes of so much of the white working class rank and file. They felt that mass struggles, socialist intervention and related educational work would undermine the bureaucrats and lead to decisive change in backward racial attitudes. There was concrete evidence in the big struggles of

the '30's that such transformations did occur.

Today, only a few young militants, Black, Latino, Asian or white, even when they are working-class themselves, turn to the proletariat — or what they identify as the same thing, the trade unions, as a force to transform society. The white-dominated union bureaucracy and its liberal Democratic friends have carved out such a profound record of betrayal that it is difficult for any real radical to believe in anything they say or do. The bureaucrats don't fight for their own members, even their own *white* members; how can anyone take them to be serious allies of an increasingly desperate Black population? The reactionary state of the trade unions seems to indicate the futility of working-class politics. This is what such politics appears to add up to. And when most of the people who call themselves Marxists ally themselves with the union leaders, it seems to make it more than clear that “socialism,” “working class” and all that stuff are irrelevant for the liberation struggle.

In the absence of a powerful authentic Marxist alternative, the go-it-alone, all-classes-as-long-as-they-are-Black nationalist message has a certain resonance even within the industrial blue collar working class, radical as well as non-radical. Even though its impact there has been less than in the middle layers, it is real enough.

The revolutionary argument against Black nationalism is exactly the opposite of the anti-Black, anti-nationalist diatribes that fill the white ruling-class media. It is vital to argue against nationalism — in order to win key elements among Black workers and youth to the revolutionary party. Underneath the rhetoric, nationalism, like integrationism, is thoroughly pro-capitalist and ends up capitulating to the dominant nationalism of U.S. imperialism, as we shall see. Underneath the militant rhetoric is opposition to mass action, liberation and revolution.

2. The Search for a Black Nationalism not Based on Racism

Instead of recognizing that capitalist exploitation is the source of race and racism, Black nationalist theorists tend to speak of eternal races and racism; a separateness deriving from either genetic or cultural heritages. They hold that racism thrived for centuries prior to the existence of capitalism. Inevitably, this idea reduces to the conception that race and racism are the driving forces behind exploitation, rather than seeing exploitation as the motivating factor fueling racial and racist ideas and institutions. Ultimately, this eternal racism conception is rooted in a derogatory view of human nature and the masses, Black as well as white.

If racism has been eternal and its source located more deeply than the drives of a particular social system, then no wonder so many of the nationalist theorists believe that the evil stems from something inherent in the dominant people themselves. If white Europeans have always victimized Black Africans, then aggressive racism is intrinsic to their nature. Even though there are nationalists who assert that the problem is one of culture rather than genes, they fall into similar traps. When they claim a suprahistorical persistence of the same racist cultural reactions, despite huge social changes over thousands of years, it points to the probability of a genetic cause. The problem is not confined to whites. If Blacks have always been the victim of racism, then the same logic also says something is deficient in their make-up as well, given their perennial inability to successfully fight back; they are always tricked.

If integrationism harbors seeds of racial elitism in that it implies that Blacks need to associate closely with whites to be deemed equal, nationalism also nurtures a certain patronizing outlook toward Blacks. Indeed, nationalism ends up being elitist in that it locates congenital problems as inherent among the masses of Blacks, and it ends up looking down on them. Despite proclamations to the contrary made frequently by honest and quite sincere advocates, nationalism very often accepts much of the racial mythology and stereotyping of Blacks.

Integrationism and nationalism both reflect the fact that it is the relatively small middle strata — religious and secular, shopkeepers, professionals and lately even government, corporate and union bureaucrats — who have provided leadership for the Black community. Their elitism is class-based, and the ideologies, even when couched in fiery hostility to the American ruling class, reflect the fact that the middle strata have been designed by the system to act as stabilizing agencies within the Black caste. Whether the role is played consciously or not, the system doesn't care.

Some nationalist writers assert that racist hostility toward Africans is eternally present in white European society. Such assertions are usually heavy handed or built upon tenuous references. Other arguments carry more historical weight; whatever their current popularity, they must receive rigorous attention and argument by authentic Marxists. For example, in what seems to us to be the most serious theoretical work defending U.S. Black nationalism, his book *Black Marxism*, Cedric Robinson dwells on the existence of the xenophobic hostility against all outlanders exhibited by various European cultures from early times in history. However, the most that can be said with assurance is that the potential for a future racism lay in the hostility and contempt directed toward outsiders, which often exists in a wide variety of pre-capitalist societies. The equation of outlanders and foreigners with “barbarians” gave rise to sustained hostilities that played important roles in the immediate world of those peoples. They certainly served as a breeding grounds among Europeans for the later racism visited on Black Africa and its diaspora. Nevertheless, acorns are not necessarily fated to become oaks. Nor was it destined that a general hostility toward foreigners in pre-capitalist society would evolve into a full-fledged racism directed toward African Blacks.

History knows many cases where the same attitudes and acts seem to persist as constants over eons of time. Marxists are trained to see the decisive inner transformations, no matter the continuity of the forms. Nationalist writers like Robinson tend to see eternal cultural responses and value systems. On the one hand, racism becomes a suprahistorical permanent feature of European society; on the other, a suprahistorical and permanently repetitive and specific African reaction occurs — disengagement.

Robinson conceives of himself as a radical who sees the liberation of Blacks coming from the formation of a national outlook, as opposed to the “European” notion of proletarian revolutionary consciousness. Class answers inhere in European Marxism; national answers inhere in African revolutionary movements.

Sophisticated intellectuals like Robinson try to give far deeper causal explanations of race and racism than myths or genes. Ultimately for Robinson, racism is a function of the historic development of specific and separate racial cultures in Europe and Africa.

No serious Marxist would want to deny cultural heritage. The problem with Robinson and others like him is that they conceive of a particular set of cultural aspects as determining the character and outlook of a wide range of very different peoples. Both Europe and Africa have had a large variety of highly dissimilar cultures. As well, the social traits Robinson attributes to Europeans and Africans dictate their active responses over centuries and in a multiplicity of societies. It is not the persistence of cultural forms (i.e., syncretisms), but the eternity of their content that Marxists take issue with.

Robinson attempts to specify particular ways that distinguish African responses to oppressive attacks from other, particularly European, responses. He says:

Why the pathology of race was so dominant a part of Western consciousness or what might be done to change that character was of less concern than how Black peoples might survive the encounter. This perhaps is part of the explanation of why, so often, Black slave resistance naturally evolved to marronage [the establishment of “maroon communities” by escaped slaves in the Caribbean and South America] as the manifestation of the African’s determination to disengage, to retreat from contact. To reconstitute the community, Black radicals took to the bush, to the mountains, to the interior.

Just as in Africa until the last quarter of the 19th Century retreat had been a possible response of African peoples, it was similarly the case at the sites of slave labor. In the Caribbean islands as well as in Latin America and North America, Black peoples found means of disengagement. Away from the plantations ... Black communities could be reestablished. (p. 444.)

Robinson indicates that the first response of Blacks to attack was derived from the primacy of survival, not on asking why the attack took place and how to change the pathology of the attackers. But that is the spontaneous first response of most people, including Europeans, when attacked by vastly superior force: first save your neck and only afterwards try to figure out why the attack is happening.

No doubt, in the beginning of slavery, rebel Blacks both yearned to go back to the homes from which they had been forcibly taken and to re-create home-like conditions. That too would be characteristic of most people from most cultures. Despite the efforts of the slave masters to break up and destroy traditional ties among the Africans they held in bondage, there can be little doubt that significant vestiges of the old cultures remained as the new culture evolved. This too does not add up to a continuous pattern in which a constant escape syndrome is the dominant theme.

Whether he is discussing 17th century marronage in the Caribbean or the Black and American Indian creation of Seminole communities or the flight to Black quarters in Southern cities in the 18th century, Robinson stresses the disengagement factor as a constant. He doesn’t mention that in all three situations the slave masters had the overwhelming military power. Once again, Robinson fails to acknowledge that not only African Blacks but any rebellious people with common sense will tend to run, if they can, rather than immediately confront under those circumstances. (The others are no longer around to testify.)

It is clear why Robinson stresses disengagement as a major characteristic of Black radicalism. It supports contemporary Black cultural nationalism and asserts it as the dominant feature of the historical American Black struggle against racism. These efforts, he says,

were all part of their preservation as an African people and the nurture of the Black radical tradition. On the other hand, the drift towards assimilation to the Europeans by a fraction of the Black population was of little importance. (p. 445.)

But migration and nationalism have hardly been the dominant traditions of American Blacks rebelling against racism. Escape from slavery? Of course. However, as time and generations pass, flight is hardly the dominant trait. “Escape” generally became popular only when the first impulse — inclusion — failed.

Black abolitionists certainly aimed at inclusion, despite peripheral notions of emigration that arose when racist reaction strengthened. The desire for equality was true as well for the Black soldiers in the Civil War. It was certainly true for the Black working-class and agrarian plebeians who played a crucial role in Reconstruction in the post-Civil War South. It was likewise true of the post-Civil War Black trade unionists who did their best, time after time, to merge with the white-dominated unions, only to be rejected. It was likewise true of the Black workers who joined the Knights of Labor in the 1880's and the CIO in the 1930's.

As we have already pointed out, the fact that integrationism failed does not mean that inclusion was never connected with the sentiments of Black people. And even though the masses didn't see color-blind assimilation as a likely next step, they did desire to participate equally in society, not to escape from it. Inclusion and the integrationist ideology are not the same thing.

Likewise the Black masses invested different content than the leaders when they turned to nationalist movements, which generally arose after failures of Black struggles to achieve equality as Americans. Even then, only a relatively small portion of the population has shown any desire to actually migrate. For the masses, the threat to create a new nation was symbolic, a statement of militancy and hostility thrown back at a white America that has lied to, rejected and repressed them time and again.

In sum, the Black masses have over and over again fought for equality, a decent standard of living and inclusion in one form or another in U.S. society — not to achieve an external community based on traditional African values.

Moreover, racism and the shut-in caste condition were designed to isolate and segregate Blacks from their white counterparts; Blacks had no free cultural choice. A crucial problem with Robinson's Black “disengagement” thesis is that it removes much of the onus for segregation and inequality from white racism and invests it in African culture. This is certainly not Robinson's conclusion, far from it. But like it or not, it emerges from his theoretical framework. The truth is better served by emphasizing that Blacks remain apart and subjugated within European-dominated society despite their repeated attempts to end this condition.

Blacks *have* engaged in a mass migration, but not one that Robinson's theory realistically accounts for. Blacks began to migrate to American cities, along with white masses from the rural U.S. and multitudes moving from Eastern and Southern Europe, starting in the late 1800's. In the early 1900's, millions of Blacks flocked to the urban industrial centers in the Northern and Midwestern U.S. in search of jobs and a better way of life. Later, once again like rural whites,

they also moved to the cities of the South. Contrary to Robinson, who claims that this job-seeking movement shows his disengagement pattern, it was clearly no special escape drive stemming from African culture but a common phenomenon at the dawn of the present epoch of capitalism. In fact, as we shall demonstrate below, *this migration has given Blacks the potential not to escape but to determine the future of America as a whole.*

We can think of no better commentator on emigration than C.L.R. James, the Caribbean intellectual whom Robinson admires and to whom he devotes a long section of his book. James for a time was a leading Fourth Internationalist who formulated the U.S. Socialist Workers Party's first position on the "Negro Question." As should be obvious to those who know James' writings on Black America, our current work on this struggle owes much to him, despite disagreements. In his discussions with Trotsky in 1939 on this subject, his concrete knowledge of the Black condition was unquestionably far greater than Trotsky's. They reached a general agreement on the need for Black self-organization. But while both opposed the nationalist ideology of Marcus Garvey, who was vastly popular in the ghettos in the middle 1920's, they had different interpretations of its goals. James' understanding was on the mark:

Garvey raised the slogan "Back to Africa," but the Negroes who followed him did not believe for the most part that they were really going back to Africa. We know that those in the West Indies who were following him had not the slightest intention of going back to Africa, but they were glad to follow a militant leadership. And there is the case of the black woman who was pushed by a white woman in a street car and said to her, "You wait until Marcus gets into power and all you people will be treated in the way you deserve." Obviously she was not thinking of Africa. (Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination, p. 25.)

Unlike James, Robinson cannot see that a proclaimed intention to migrate from the horrors of white racism can be a symbolic statement of militancy and anger against whites, not an actual intention. The ideological blind spot blunts his ability to see that the path liberation has to take is within the society and overall culture that Blacks are now so inextricably a part of. If he surrendered his "escape" thesis, Robinson would have to abandon the nationalist path. He is resting on very shaky ground, and the attempt to maintain his view leads him in dangerous directions.

For example, when he treats the post-Civil War period to illustrate the importance of "escape," Robinson states:

... in the wake of the years of fighting and the subsequent years of being victimized by the terror and the manipulations of the industrial, financial and plantocratic classes, streams of Black emigrationists sought again the safety of distance. (p. 445.)

But far more Black people did *not* migrate from the South at that time. And, although substantial numbers did try to move, it was in hopes of being included on the urban employment rolls. However, the real point is that Robinson's picture of post-Civil War history is highly selective. Robinson is a careful scholar who really knows Du Bois and his book, *Black Reconstruction*. Elsewhere, he gives a more serious picture of those times. Yet to sum up what he believes is the most significant aspect of the Black response to the events of that period, he presents this

severely unbalanced estimate. His thesis serves to strangle, not illuminate, history. To see how this is so we have to provide only a short glimpse of that history.

As we have already pointed out, many Southern Black people, upon obtaining freedom from slavery, expected the North to carry through on its promises. In this period, amendments to the Constitution were passed granting equal rights to the former slaves. Black ex-slaves became voting citizens. Reconstruction governments in the South appeared to be the vehicle by which Black plebeians would actually achieve their goals; indeed, they did get some important benefits. And during the immediate post-war period, newly freed Blacks did move around the country. They were seeking jobs, not yearning to re-establish traditional cultural enclaves.

Only after the betrayal of the Southern Blacks by the rapidly conservatizing Northern capitalists and the removal of the Northern troops after the Compromise of 1877 did emigrationist tendencies, aside from movement based on the search for jobs, really develop.

The number of those who actually migrated was small. The most graphic example for our purposes was the emigrationist trend led by Martin Delaney, who has accurately been awarded the title of "Father of Black Nationalism."

Once an associate of Frederick Douglass, Delaney became prominent in the South during Reconstruction. He broke from the assimilationist Negro leaders allied with the Northern Radical Republicans, in order to support the Democratic Party and the Southern Conservatives led by Wade Hampton. Hampton spearheaded the newly forged coalition between Northern capitalists and their Southern junior partners, the alliance that broke the back of Reconstruction and signaled the end of Radical Republicanism as a serious force.

Reconstruction wasn't simply a Radical Republican scheme nor a device of white "carpetbaggers." In large part, the state governments it set up reflected the outlook of a movement of former Black slaves trying to carry the Civil War through to full revolutionary democratic conclusions. Delaney participated in the sell-out of Reconstruction's attempt to promulgate Black equality; his efforts gave aid and comfort to Hampton's successful fight to install the "white redemptionists" in power in Dixie in place of Black Reconstruction. Delaney then sponsored small handfuls of Blacks who sought to return to Africa. A minor office holder in the South, beholden to Hampton, he had no intention of going to Africa himself.

In defeat, several other emigrationist trends developed. They mostly sought to go West or elsewhere in this hemisphere to establish new communities. However, even then the overwhelming majority of Blacks remained in the South, particularly in the Black Belt, surviving as share croppers and tenant farmers under the most onerous conditions. Once again, this was a reflection of the particular circumstances. Many would have liked to leave if they could find better conditions elsewhere; however, the growing reaction effectively prevented that. Once again, all the evidence suggests that such yearning was a matter of economic survival and not permanent culture. These Blacks formed an important base for a revived plebeian movement in the 1880's and early '90's, as we have outlined.

Delaney was a counterrevolutionary and an opponent of the Black mass movement. Sending

Blacks to Africa who were unwanted by the racists here was a way Delaney could prove himself to the white Americans he both hated and bowed to. Robinson of course conceives of himself as a leftist radical. He is genuinely concerned with finding a path to liberation for Black people. But since he views disengagement as the significant event in the post-Civil war period which most typifies the African-derived destiny and the path Blacks should follow, Delaney's course has to be the right one. Given the logic of his position, Robinson, a sincere radical, would therefore find himself in the unenviable position of aligning himself with a counterrevolutionary who helped sell out the struggle. No wonder in a work devoted to nationalism Robinson doesn't mention Delaney.

Robinson himself is forced at times to note that Black consciousness and action don't always conform to his disengagement response. As an overall historical assessment, he says:

Manifest expressions of Black radicalism such as marronage, arson, the destruction of work tools, and even open rebellion were complemented by less overt forms. When separation was not possible, open revolts might fester; where rebellion was immediately impractical, the people prepared themselves through *obeah*, voodoo, Islam and Black Christianity. (p. 444.)

And it has been even more true that separation "might fester" when open revolts were not possible! Robinson manages to list a variety of responses, none of which differentiate a special African set of characteristics in the way he claims. The variations in beliefs such as *obeah* and voodoo indicate that there have been significant African survivals in religious forms. As well, Black people have given a special stamp to religions like Christianity and Islam that they have embraced. However, religious escapism is not a uniquely African cultural response to adversity. European history is also full of such responses.

Robinson's essential claim is fundamentally so undefined that virtually any response can be deemed an aspect of the claimed identity. Since it is obvious that the history of Black struggles in the New World could hardly be confined to escape but had to account for the repeated revolts: rebellion and revolution are also thrown in for good measure as aspects of disengagement. Thus he claims that "Like the Haitian slaves, disengagement was the ideological currency of the rebel American Blacks" (p. 445.) In addition to claiming the Haitian revolution for his disengagement thesis, he adds sabotage and the American slave revolts. He even includes the Black supporters of John Brown, who like others of his supporters was white and who was anything but a disengagement advocate!

Obviously, Africans and the people of African heritage in the diaspora have made many unique contributions to human culture. But permanent preoccupation with disengagement isn't one of them. Robinson's suprahistorical thesis fails to put the nationalist theory of racism's causation on any sounder basis than does genetic determinism.

3. Can Black Nationalism Be Racist toward Black People?

We have considered Robinson at some length because, in our opinion, he makes the best theoretical case for nationalism. However, it is important that we deal with the more popular separatists as well. As well, for clear evidence of the elitism so endemic to nationalism, one has

to look more toward the Black nationalists and Afro-centrists of various sorts who are less sophisticated, more typical or more demagogic than Robinson.

Many Black people defend Minister Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the NOI, because they believe that whatever disagreements they may have with him, he is being attacked by the white media because he is a fiery and militant champion of Black people; a proud Black man who will not compromise with the racists. Indeed, that *is* why he is attacked by the white bourgeoisie. However, in deed and many times even in words, that isn't what Farrakhan, the foremost leader of Black nationalism today, is really about.

The Million Man March in October 1995 was an historic event for two reasons. 1) It was such a huge outpouring of Blacks. 2) For once, it was not a protest march on Washington by angry Black people, but a "Day of Atonement." Black men were to come together to apologize for purported sins, including sloth, crime and drugs, "abuse of our women" and the failure to assume responsibility "as heads of our households." Removing these ills from the Black community would be a major blow against white supremacy. The March was billed not as an attack on whites but as "an internal thing," an attempt by Black America to straighten up and fly right.

Since the historic event, what has happened? Once more the hopes of many Black people for "self-uplift" have been dashed. Not because the struggle for liberation is really hopeless, and not because Blacks are really as powerless as they currently believe. In reality, Blacks today have tremendous potential power as a strategic force in urban and industrial America. But the only way to actually achieve liberation is to use that power *against* the system. Black men are victimized by capitalist society and then vilified as an underclass of criminals and drug addicts. Then, to top it off, the nationalists ask them to atone for *their* sins. Atonement is no answer to raging unemployment, low-wage jobs, total disrespect and across-the-board discrimination.

The white capitalists attribute the responsibility for criminal acts to the Black masses. This stereotypical view is echoed in the attitude of the Black petty bourgeoisie. However, what are generally considered to be undesirable anti-social traits in many cases are the self-defeating by-blows of subjugation and their acceptance by victims of racism themselves. They reflect the penetration of the racist judgment as to the low worth of Blacks into and among the most oppressed ghetto dwellers themselves. Anti-social elements can only shed such traits by participating in the mass struggle and accepting its standards. (Of course, there are those who have become so degraded that they cannot be rehabilitated.) Through rebellion, victims get off their knees, stop praying and assert their dignity and their rights. A major "sin" that must be cast aside in the course of such struggle is self-blame by the oppressed and their supposed need to atone.

The middle strata of Blacks who embrace Farrakhan are impressed by his ability to connect with the gangs and other anti-social elements as well as the much larger numbers of the poor working class who display attitudes alien to and frowned upon by the middle classes, Black and white. Unable to disassociate themselves from such people, they hope Farrakhan can both change them and use them to the advantage of the petty bourgeoisie.

It is testimony to the power of the human spirit that, from the beginning, the people wrenched

out of Africa and dragged to these shores revolted time and again. In the face of their threat to its power, capitalism reacted, not by conspiracy but by systemic reflex, by telling Blacks that their truculent “attitude,” undiscipline and rebelliousness were further proofs of their inherently inferior nature.

The inhuman horror of white racist domination over Black people in the United States hasn't been confined to slavery, wage slavery, peonage, lynch mobs, starvation, segregation and the like. One of its most bestial aspects has been the rape of the human mind; the extent to which Blacks have been made to accept the myth of their own inferiority. The racial lie has penetrated to all classes of Blacks, and its impact has been devastating. When masses begin to struggle, one of the first steps is their attempt to slough off that myth. It is not by accident that all political currents who want social change appeal to “Black Pride.” During the struggles of the '60's and the '70's, “Black is Beautiful!” became a clarion call, a demand for a transformation in the way many Blacks as well as whites had come to regard the Black masses in this caste-bedeveled class society.

The May 1993 issue of *Third World Viewpoint* quotes from a speech by Min. Farrakhan given in October 1992, “Obedience is the highest form of sacrifice.” He said:

All in that area called the Garden of Eden, that's where the original man first started when this planet was found in its new orbit after the explosion of Moon from Earth 66,000,000 years ago as the Hon. Elijah Muhammad taught us. So Shabazz was not permitted to stay in that area so he took his family into the jungles of East Asia which we now call Africa, to make a people close to nature. And the Hon. Elijah Muhammad said, this is the origin of “kinky” hair because we didn't have “kinky” hair prior to that. The hair on our head was like the hair on our eyebrow.

The hair on your eyebrow is straight, the hair on your head is not the same as the hair on your eyebrow. But the hair of every other people is the same as their eyebrow; your eyebrow straight, your hair, something different. Wouldn't you like the hair on your head to be as straight as the hair on your eyebrow? That's why you are so busy frying it Because most of your family of other black people on earth, jet black, they didn't have no broad nose and thick lips and “kinky” hair. They were dark skinned people, jet black, but they had straight hair, thinner lips, a thinner nose. We are marked as a different kind of black person and we were rejected and despised not only from the circle of the Gods, but we were despised and rejected by all the other dark people of the earth. This is why today black people with ‘kinky’ hair and broad noses and thick lips are rejected in every society. (I want you to hear me well tonight.)

Why are we rejected? Because the essence of beauty is in obedience and submission to God and the essence of ugliness is when you rebel against God. And when you rebel against God, in your rebellion you are marked with a certain mark of your rebellion; which is the disfigurement of your internal self which manifest itself in the disfigurement of your external self. And this is why when you look at our people, wherever we are found on the earth, you find us either disfiguring ourselves physically because we are disfigured on the inside because of rebellion.

No wonder that Minister Farrakhan wants the Black masses to atone! Farrakhan disgustingly

stigmatizes Black features as inferior and attributes this brand of “disfigurement” to Blacks’ rebelliousness — not only against God, but obviously against American capitalist society as well. The white religious establishment, which early on propagated the myth that God had marked Blacks as fit only to be slaves, evidently did their miserable job of preserving the system from rebellion very well.

Compare Farrakhan’s view to that of a genuine anti-racist fighter, Malcolm X, when the latter addressed white racism:

When you teach a man to hate his lips, the lips that God gave him, the shape of the nose that God gave him, the texture of the hair that God gave him, the color of the skin that God gave him, you’ve committed the worst crime that a race of people can commit. “Not just an American problem, but a world problem.” (*The Final Speeches*, p.157.)

Farrakhan is hardly alone among nationalists for putting down the masses. Combing the African past for supposedly eternal racial attributes has provided the more reactionary wing of Black nationalism with ammunition for its ideology of racial self-blame for the present condition of peoples of African origin around the world. In seeming counterposition to Robinson’s European-based xenophobia, they assert it as a leading historical-cultural fact of life once operative in Africa. For example, Kwame Ansah in an article entitled “Are We Our Own Worst Enemies?” (*Daily Challenge*, Dec. 5, 1996, states:

It was observed many centuries ago that most Africans, in their tribal customs and values, lived and died in village type communities ... and showed no charity or concern towards other villages and regions. In other words, Black folks — back then and now — held and hold parochial mentalities that compact their universe into very small circles... .

He goes on to note that “Many Africentric historians have concluded that we have been our own worst enemies because of a consistent failure as a people to concentrate our own resources as measured power in a world where powerful men amass markets, materials and money.”

Thus the net result today is that “the descendants of African slaves rush blindly to spend their money in suburban malls loaded with goods from Asia and financed by American capital.” He then adds that there are “the tens of millions more Black consumers in African and Caribbean markets with a strongly indoctrinated daily yearning to buy Asian and European goods and services rather than from their own kith and kin.”

Thus the calamitous impact on African peoples of the whole historic development of capitalism is turned by Ansah to its opposite. For Black nationalists like Ansah who bemoan the absence of a separate Black economy, and a separate Black bourgeoisie, the real fault lies with the Black masses themselves; “Truly, for them charity does not begin at home — with both the would-be king and queen, and the ignorant peasant alike, lusting to buy from strangers rather than brethren.”

In reality, Blacks have no more inclination to disregard the goods produced and sold by “their own kith and kin” than any other people in similar circumstances. Poor people tend to buy what

they believe are the best quality products they can get for the least money. In our society, that often means the products produced by the giant (white-dominated) monopolies and sold by the big (white-dominated) discounters. Even when buying from smaller merchants, people choose those who are better financed and consequently have the widest range of products and can afford to extend the most credit — and those rarely are Black merchants, who have been kept marginal. Moreover, Black people like all others are susceptible to the biggest advertisers and often can be induced to believe that certain products are better and cheaper than they really are.

The masses have a different hierarchy of needs from the shopkeeper. As well, money spent in purchases from Blacks doesn't necessarily stay in the Black communities. Money will tend to be invested where more is to be made and where it is safest. That is why, after the nationalist-led anti-colonial revolutions, the emerging "third world" capitalists chose banks, industries and property in the advanced imperialist nations when it came to investing what they made from exploiting the labor power of "their own" working classes.

Ansah and the overtly pro-bourgeois nationalists like him nurture among Blacks very clear cut ideas of intrinsic Black inferiority. The decisive class within the Black race-caste is the working class; most particularly its superexploited sectors. When the racists stereotype Black people, they depict them as having all of the characteristics they associate with the "lower classes." This class-based racial elitism is obviously not confined to whites but has invaded the awareness of numbers of Blacks as well.

Frantz Fanon once pointed out in his famous work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, that "The desire to attach oneself to tradition or bring abandoned traditions to life again does not only mean going against the current of history but also opposing one's own people"

In the modern world, no ruling class dominates by force alone. A rationalizing ideology which justifies the legitimacy of its rule is necessary. The rulers maintain their dominance to the extent that the subjugated peoples and/or classes come to accept the idea that they deserve their position in society because of who and what they are.

4. The Real Business of Nationalism Is Business

The business of nationalism is business; therefore the business of the modern Black nationalist tradition is as class-collaborationist and as elitist at its center as is any nationalist trend. Like the rest, when push comes to shove, it accepts and defends capitalism, a system dominated by whites.

The nationalist outlook traces back to Booker T. Washington, even though he never talked about emigration. It was no accident that Marcus Garvey regarded Washington as his mentor; all important mainstream Black nationalist trends acknowledge him as a great pioneer. Nationalism evolved out of the petty-bourgeois small business stratum whose message Washington so clearly proclaimed.

In contrast to the Black-white plebeian alliance forged by the populists in the 1880's and early 1890's, Washington and his allies collaborated with the Northern and Southern capitalist bloc,

led below the Mason-Dixon line by Hampton. In time, the white petty-bourgeois populist misleaders betrayed their agrarian followers into the hands of Hampton and Co. as well. They demagogically whipped up the white masses at the expense of Blacks. The net result was that Blacks were subjected to the series of Jim Crow segregationist laws, effectively banned from voting and condemned to abject poverty and the reign of lynch mobs. Finance capitalism now dominated North and South.

With the end of progressive populism and the once-growing racial alliance, Washington was unchallenged as the leading Black counterrevolutionary. At the mercy of his powerful capitalist friends, he readily accepted segregation and even the loss of the vote.

Overwhelmingly relegated to the backward conditions of semi-serf agriculture in the Black Belt, Blacks still posed enough of a threat that growing capital had to isolate them from the political life of the country. The capitalists had to take every step to see that white and Black plebeians in the South remained hostile, lest they re-combine and thereby undermine the political foundation of developing American imperialism. Blacks still had enough potential power so that plebeian whites could be led to see them as competition on the farm and in industry. However, Blacks simply did not *yet* have the power in the rapidly expanding industries and urban concentrations to play the decisive role in revolution or counterrevolution that they do in the U.S. today. Only the industrial proletariat in alliance with the wider masses could have led a socialist revolution — and only such a revolution could have carried out the bourgeois democratic program of ensuring democratic rights and equality.

When the Black masses were removed from the active political scene, there was no reason for the big bourgeoisie to pour funds into the hands of the Black leadership. However, given the enormous potential problem, it was worth their while to anoint Washington as the preeminent spokesman for Blacks and to support his position by dribbling a little financial support to Tuskegee and to other elements of the Black petty bourgeoisie.

Historically, this stratum continued to find a small but guaranteed market among Blacks, as long as segregation existed. Tiny Black operations existed for some personal services or when white-dominated capital didn't find the profit margin worthwhile enough to step in. Industrial production was always overwhelmingly in the hands of white owners. Unable to get major capital investment from white financial institutions or to compete with the expanding economic giants in distribution, this stratum led a precarious existence.

The two major nationalist movements in this century, the Garveyites and the Black Muslims, have both been far more devoted to creating a serious Black small-business economy in the U.S. than they have been to actually attempting to found a separate nation.

Genuine nationalism needs a definite territorial basis, because nation-states cannot exist without it. The inability of the Black nationalist currents to agree on a specific territory stands as testimony to the fact that no such nation exists. This does not of course preclude the possible, if unlikely, development of a Black nation through a future historical trauma, but it is a convincing argument against nationalism today.

A real nationalism not only rests on a definite territory but on a consciousness of the masses that this territory is rightfully theirs and no one else's. Given his admitted lack of knowledge about American Blacks, Trotsky mistakenly thought that the Black Belt in the South was the territorial base for a possible Black nation. Although his view was far more subtle than was Stalin's immediate call for a Black republic in the South, it was nevertheless wrong. Blacks who lived there never regarded the Black Belt as their own. In fact, when nationalist currents did develop in the Black belt, they always sought territory elsewhere. We cite Trotsky even though his concrete assessment was wrong, because his methodology was excellent. He insisted that:

An abstract criterion is not decisive in this question, but much more decisive is the historical consciousness, their feelings and their impulses. But that also is not determined accidentally but rather by the general conditions. (*Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination*, p. 16.)

Today, the idea of the Black Belt as a national homeland has ceased to have any touch with reality, given the Black migration and urbanization. The previously mentioned turn-of-the-century migration from the rural South to the industrial North accelerated when many jobs opened up for Blacks as a result of the First World War. With the end of the war, the return of white soldiers and a reactionary onslaught, the opportunities closed down for Blacks. Powerful struggles by labor were contained and witch hunts against communists escalated. Racist riots terrorized the urban Black communities. One consequence of this bleak situation was the development of the powerful nationalist movement led by Garvey.

As James pointed out, although the movement was committed to a philosophy emphasizing a Black return to Africa, that was only its surface manifestation. The bulk of its efforts and its financial strength was poured into building small businesses centered in the U.S. Garvey was born and raised in Jamaica. In addition to the migration from the South, large numbers of Blacks from the British West Indies had come to get jobs in the U.S. The strength of Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) was centered among the socially mobile West Indians, but it picked up considerable support from angry but still hopeful North American Blacks as well.

After the defeat of Garveyism in the 1920's, the next explosion of nationalism on a nation-wide scale was spearheaded by the Black Muslims in the 1960's. Elijah Muhammad, founder of the Nation of Islam, generally cast his expectations for the future of the "Lost-Found Black Nation" in vague theological terms. Today's reincarnation of the NOI continues to call for a separate national state, as it must if it is to maintain its claim of continuity with Elijah Muhammad. However, Min. Farrakhan also speaks in "practical" terms. In his book *Back Where We Belong*, published in 1989, he states:

If you say we must return to Africa, what nation in Africa is willing to receive 40 million of us? Let us be reasonable America is not willing to give us eight or ten states, or even one state. Let us be reasonable.

Like Garvey's, the NOI's real program is the development of Black-owned businesses here in the U.S. The NOI has invested several million dollars and developed a number of commercial operations in agriculture, restaurants, trucking, security services, health supplies, marketing of

books and tapes and other media productions. It projects a wide expansion beyond these businesses.

The major nationalist currents have all attempted to build an independent Black economy within the U.S. That has been their real thrust rather than nation-building “marronage.” Given the overwhelming power of monopoly capitalism and its financial and industrial institutions, such an independent economy is impossible in this imperialist world. Politically independent nation-states have been unable to achieve it, let alone scattered communities of people.

The nationalist small-business advocates want to expand their power and their independent economic base. In fact, the original firms started by Garvey and Elijah Muhammad, to the extent that they lasted at all, inevitably meshed with the dominant economy. That will be the fate of the NOI’s present operations.

Steps toward an independent Black economy in the U.S. would prove even more impossible than the attempts of nationalism abroad. American imperialism has no intention of giving up its direct exploitation of its specially oppressed caste. It has no room for an intermediate power which would act to broker a semi-independent Black labor supply.

Under continuing economic discrimination, Black business takes in approximately 1 percent of the national income. It exploits a tiny fraction of the Black working class; white dominated capital directly exploits and superexploits Black labor without a significant Black intermediary layer. Blacks are not now what some theorists have claimed, an “internal colony,” in any reasonable sense of the words. Imprisoned, yes; a colonial set up, no.

If it were possible for the nationalists to succeed, a comprador class of Blacks would have to be developed. Whether formally owning their own businesses or acting as franchise managers, they would exploit Black labor. Fundamentally tied to the huge monopolies and financial institutions, the arrangement would be neo-colonial. No matter the subjective aims, therefore, the real goal of the nationalist movements is an attempt to build what would turn out to be a necessarily subordinated Black “national” economy. In effect, an internal colony would be created. However, the whole path is utopian.

The gap in today’s nationalist movement is not only between its actual business direction and its ostensible national aims. Malcolm X pointed out the gap between NOI’s militant stance and the actuality of its failure to militantly defend the Black community.

At first glance, Farrakhan’s fiery anti-white and anti-government rhetoric may not seem to fit into our description of socially quiescent mainstream nationalism. There are in fact “revolutionary nationalists” whom we will take up later that are not as tame with respect to action. But Farrakhan can hardly be included in the more radical category, although he is far more openly hostile than his historical ancestors.

Farrakhan’s hostile rhetoric is often accompanied by statements that say the opposite. For example, at the Million Man March, where he proclaimed the need for *Blacks* to atone, he also went out of his way to hail the bloody U.S. government as “great.” He could never have retained

his Black support with such a line if not for his well known attacks on powerful white institutions. And, for all his supposed opposition to American imperialism in Africa, in *A Torchlight for America*, published by the NOI in 1993, he urged the American government to send her “permanent underclass” of imprisoned Blacks to Africa — where Farrakhan’s group would hold them in a penal colony subsidized by the U.S. This, he maintained, would “gain for America a strong foothold on that strategically important continent.” He compared the benefit for the U.S. to that once gained by Britain through penal colonies in Australia.

It is also absolutely crucial to note that for all the *rhetoric*, like his political ancestors, Farrakhan has been careful to avoid sponsoring or endorsing any mass *actions* against the system. The Million Man March brought masses to Washington but went overboard to avoid even making demands on the government, much less threaten it. Not by accident, politicians and press all voiced agreement “with the message, if not the messenger.” Highly controlled demonstrations are one thing; action by the masses is another.

In today’s world, with a highly urban working-class Black population undergoing a fierce attack by capitalism, it is impossible for nationalist leaders who seek mass support to speak in the placating tones of a Booker T. Washington. They must at minimum give voice to the anger and frustration of the Black public. This does not mean that Farrakhan is essentially different from his sellout nationalist predecessors, but to understand him we have to understand the struggles of the ‘60’s and the forces that molded him.

C. Black Power and Malcolm X

The 1960’s saw the rise of “Black Power,” a movement which left a lasting impact on nationalism. In 1966, the previously integrationist Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) led by Stokely Carmichael became an all-Black organization and committed itself to Black Power. SNCC had been born in the South out of the student sit-in struggles and was heavily involved with Rev. King and voter registration. Other groups previously under the pacifist and integrationist umbrella, notably the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), also broke with their past and espoused Black Power. It became a widespread battle cry.

Black Power ideology was ambiguous. Although its advocates both inside and outside SNCC often spoke of U.S. Blacks as an internal nation or colony, their definition generally did not include any notion of a specific territorial goal. Black Power implied that Blacks should have control over areas and communities in which they were the majority, and some sort of political influence where they were not. Whether or not “power” meant sovereignty was left open. Ambiguous as to their goals, Black Power advocates nevertheless represented political intervention and radical struggle. They clearly stood for all-Black independent organization, self-pride and Blacks’ achieving power in some decisive way. No longer could Blacks accept an alliance with liberal and labor chieftains that gave whites veto power over them. The white lib-lab allies were deemed the barrier preventing a more radical advance in the struggle. Black people had to decide the course of their own organizations and their own liberation struggle.

In 1964, Malcolm X was thrown out of the Nation of Islam by Elijah Muhammad. For some time before his ejection, Malcolm clearly had a far more overtly radical and interventionary outlook

than the NOI as a whole. He condemned King not only for his integrationism but also for his pacifism and acceptance of the American political structure. Malcolm thought some sort of Black revolution was necessary for liberation. Consequently, he condemned the Democratic party and belittled the power of the vote.

In 1964-5, following his expulsion from the NOI, Malcolm became a more orthodox Muslim and also more tied to a pan-African world outlook. As well, he ceased to believe that color was the decisive test for revolutionaries. He worked with people who believed in socialism, but he did not have a working-class view himself. He was still very much in motion, seeking a new outlook which would transcend Black nationalism. A few months before he was assassinated, Malcolm said:

So, I had to do a lot of thinking and reappraising of my definition of black nationalism. Can we sum up the solution to the problems confronting our people as black nationalism? And if you notice, I haven't been using the expression for several months. But I still would be hard pressed to give a specific definition of the overall philosophy which I think is necessary for the liberation of black people in this country. (Excerpt from an interview in "Young Socialist," March-April 1965. Reprinted in *By Any Means Necessary: Speeches, Interviews and a Letter by Malcolm X*, Edited by George Breitman, pp.159-160.)

It was no accident that the militant Black Power advocates identified with Malcolm and not with Elijah Muhammad's NOI. Starting from two different places, both militantly radical trends came together in a mutual rejection of civil-rights integrationism and the abstentionism of the mainstream nationalist community. Despite the direction Malcolm seemed to be taking in his last days, his political legacy served to identify Black Power as a revolutionary nationalist doctrine rather than a clear anti-capitalist view. However, the identification of Black Power with the uncompromising and heroic figure of Malcolm X gave it a more staunchly revolutionary cast than it could otherwise project. Likewise, the association with Malcolm gave its previously integrationist advocates an aura of authority in the urban ghettos that they otherwise would not have attained.

There were good reasons why the currents associated with SNCC and Malcolm developed when they did. The Southern integrationist civil rights movement had reached a point of no return. Segregation laws were being dismantled. Urban America, North as well as South, was being ripped apart by mass ghetto revolts. Spearheaded by the poor sections of the Black working class, the "riots" occurred without the leadership or even the sanction of the NAACP, King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) or the NOI.

The United States in the mid-1960's was still under the prosperity bubble. As middle-class Blacks got some benefits, the hopes of the Black masses had risen. But as their material situation remained at the level of stark poverty, the ghettos exploded across the country demanding jobs, equality and the end of racist oppression. The ruling class looked in vain for a leadership it could buy off in order to tame the ghettos. The leaders it could reach had no authority with the masses. For better or worse, no organized leadership did. Perhaps the only leader who then could have had an impact on the direction of the mass struggle was the martyred Malcolm X.

The entire white ruling class, as well as the present-day Black leadership, has sought to bury the

fact that it was essentially the ghetto uprisings that forced capitalist America to disgorge the major concessions to the Black masses — jobs, education and civil rights — not the NAACP and the SCLC.

The ruling class was in a vulnerable position by the late '60's. The prosperity period was ending internationally; the mortal crisis of capitalism in this its decadent epoch was forcing its way to the surface once again. The working class was rising around the world: sparked by the massive general strike in France in 1968, proletarian revolts and upsurges broke out in a rising crescendo in other Western countries, in Stalinist East Europe, in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Australia. The restraining grip of the traditional reformist parties operating within the working classes internationally — the social democratic and Stalinist parties — was rapidly loosening.

In the still relatively prosperous U.S., inflation was growing and the economy was heading downward. Wildcat strikes broke out in industry after industry. The New Left student movement, middle-class but militant, had grown sizably and had become more radical and rambunctious. The U.S. was losing an increasingly unpopular war against the Vietnamese masses; the “peace movement” grew by leaps and bounds. On top of this, the ghettos were exploding in the face of a frightened and restive ruling class.

Given the rebellious potential of the mass drafted army being used as cannon fodder in a rotten war, the U.S. had to end the draft and opt for a voluntary army. Yet, as we have previously noted, the government had real fears that even the voluntary army, with its sizable number of Blacks and Latinos, would refuse to repress the “inner city” uprisings that continued into the early 1970's. On top of all the turmoil, the problem of Watergate then broke out, accompanied by a further drop in the already precipitous loss of the masses' faith in the American government.

Under those circumstances, it is no wonder that the capitalists conceded economic benefits and reforms in the years between the mid-60's and the mid-70's. Many Black people got access to jobs and education through various governmental programs and laws. The affirmative action and preferential hiring regulations helped mostly middle-class elements and those aspiring to middle-class status, at least for a while. They hardly affected the employment and wage needs of the huge number of unskilled workers. However, at the same time, given the presence of industry in troubled urban areas, private capital did open up industrial jobs to new layers of Black youth.

Nevertheless, the jobs made available never came close to solving the deep problems of poverty and unemployment which beset Blacks way out of proportion to whites. Black income for comparable work never equaled white income.

The major capitalist outlays had another purpose beyond simply buying off dangerous masses. We have mentioned the creation of a bigger layer of Black “border guards” in this period, a stratum whose interests came to lay with the preservation of the system. The mechanism was the government. Along with private capitalist foundations, it dispensed the concessions in such a way as to prop up the rule of the state. Unable to find leaders who both had clout with the masses in the ghettos and who would defend the system, the state now financed and built institutions and programs in Black communities under the facade of “community control.” The whole network of

a massive and well-financed “war on poverty” spawned the growth of the sizable new layer of welfare bureaucracies and professional “new middle-class” bureaucrats all tied to direct and indirect government spending. The capitalists expanded the middle class in order to get a reliable layer of Blacks who had enough authority in the communities to act as bargaining agents for the Black masses, and who would defend the system that gave them titles, jobs and the semblance of power.

If, in order to maintain their standing with the masses, the Black bureaucrats involved in the poverty programs had to rhetorically denounce “whitey” and the “honkeys,” so what? Not by accident, many of the new povertyocrats had their origin among those activists who had worked among the masses as Black Power advocates. “Community control” also served to divide the Black struggle into separate community programs, neighborhoods and types of institutions, all competing with each other for funds and recognition. It also served to make Latinos, poor whites and Blacks into rivals, and it even turned various ethnic groups within those sectors against each other in the war for relatively scarce funding. Above all, it prevented class solidarity.

Community control, even in its most radical forms, was always a call for cross-class organizing of Blacks. It carried capitalism’s need for dividing the struggle of the Black masses to a degree beyond the sectoral racial division, it divided the different communities of Blacks into separate and often competing units placing demands on the state.

Gains can either pacify masses and thereby push them along the road to losing those gains — or they can whet their appetite for more, for real equality. Community control meant middle-class control *over* the Black working class, the one class whose struggle, once unchained, could actually have paved the way toward authentic liberation. Community control did not rest on the central need for working-class action and therefore, the deepening of consciousness. Many working-class people were involved in community struggles, but in a way that suppressed their class identity.

Under a centralized workers’ state, there would be actual proletarian control over the whole society expressed through workers’ councils in industry as well as in neighborhoods. The same institutions would exercise real local control over local community issues. Real community control for Blacks or anyone else is impossible, so long as it exists within the capitalist system and under the power of its executive committee, the state and its armed forces.

This essential problem came to the fore when the Black Power notions originally associated with community control helped steer Black activists into the capitalists’ community control program. Those who found their home and income in the vast governmental network of welfare and community programs became dependent on government largesse. They naturally turned their sights toward securing larger portions of the sops churned out by the administrations of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. They could get such subsidies only by acting politically within the system. Thinking that they were “fooling the Man,” they only fooled themselves and those in the communities that looked to them. The community boards and other local institutions became power bases for increased activity within the Democratic Party. Black Power conferences and declarations rang with militant rhetoric in the ‘70’s, often threatening independent Black political action. Such calls were merely levers designed to pry more crumbs and posts from the Democrats. “Revolution,” “community control” and “Black Power” were more and more viewed

as flourishes for oratory.

Black Power pit bulls turned into housebroken Democratic Party watchdogs for the ruling class, as more and more of them became elected and appointed officials. As the economic crisis deepened, who better than a Black mayor could preside over the growing capitalist attack on the working class in general and its poorer sections in particular? All over the world, the reformist and liberal parties that had retained some semblance of support among workers were beginning to use their clout not simply to limit gains but to convince the masses to give them back — step by step, piece by piece. The system sought to train Black American workers to identify with Black Democrats in office who used their race credentials to act as pointmen in the drive to eradicate all past Black and working-class gains.

The entrance of the Black masses onto the political scene in the form of the ghetto revolts marked the end of integrationism as a serious ideology. The uprisings fueled the popularity of the Black Power slogan. The government had obviously responded to Black demands with concrete concessions. The gains did not come from the exemplary acts of dedicated middle-class idealists but from the raw power of the angry Black superexploited. The masses understood to varying degrees whose power had achieved the gains and therefore they invested some of that meaning into the slogan, even if it remained vague.

However, given the needs of the ruling class, even such programs as affirmative action and preferential hiring, as well as plans for more jobs and better housing, had to be cast as steps toward color-blind integration. Officially, integrationism was declared victorious and Martin Luther King, Jr., after his assassination, was made into a national hero. The playing field was declared to be safely on its way toward being level for all, irrespective of race.

It wasn't long until the assault on the working class and some sectors of the middle strata — an attack especially hitting Blacks and Latinos — became full-scale in the 1980's. Court decisions nullified the quotas for minority hiring, leaving only the shadow of affirmative action. Past victories that had achieved some redistricting so that Blacks and Latinos could elect some more Black and Latino representatives were increasingly gutted by judicial and legislative acts. Cuts in welfare and associated programs accelerated. At the same time, the more exploited layers of minority workers, seeing no gains from electoralism, began to vote less and less.

The radicalism of the 1960's had been spearheaded by middle-class leadership elements during prosperity. It accepted the divisive competition of capitalism and defended narrow sectoral rather than overall working-class interests. This was bad enough, but when prosperity ended and the economy began its downward slide in the 1970's, the tendency of capitalism to pit sector against sector accelerated.

D. Rainbows, Cultural Pluralism, Multiculturalism, Ethnicity and All of That

When Rev. Jesse Jackson, originally an associate of Dr. King's, attempted to rally Blacks against the avalanche, he couldn't use King's slogan of integrationism. Instead, he hailed the multi-colored "rainbow" as his symbol, another mutation of Black Power notions. Blacks, along with

other dispossessed groups would form an alliance, within which Blacks would have their own organized political power.

In the '60's, the old melting pot notion had melted away and "ethnicity" was revived as the way forward. The America of the future would be "pluralist" and tolerant of "diversity." In a vain attempt to establish the legitimacy of Black demands, Jackson promoted the label "African-American" to replace "Black" — the self-description won by the struggle. The term "African-American" says that Black people, like "Polish-Americans," "Italian-Americans," et al, can legitimately make and win demands on the system as another ethnic group.

However, the reality of caste-divided America is that the system does not allow Blacks to be like the various white ethnicities. Along with growing numbers of Latinos, they are necessarily to be pushed to the bottom for purposes of superexploitation, so that the entire working class can be divided and hit harder. As we in the LRP predicted at the beginning of the "Rainbow Coalition," Jackson would be used to re-attract Black voters to the Democratic party; then he would be tossed aside, for his alliances would never jell. His attempt to organize Blacks as just another ethnic group proved to be merely another way to incorporate and disarm the Black struggle.

Having successfully performed his Judas goat mission, the once touted Jackson today receives fewer and fewer plaudits from the big butchers in the Democratic Party slaughterhouse. Ghostlike, he now goes through the motions as just another campaign speaker, trying to maintain the now declining and dispirited Black vote.

The Rainbow notion was rooted in the idea of an America in which diversity was a desirable norm rather than an indictment. It was one political expression of the pluralist multiculturalist vision developed over the years by a strand of white liberalism which opposed the melting-pot theorists.

As far back as 1915, Horace Kallen had argued against mainstream assimilationism. His point was that ethnic groups had a democratic right to exist on their own terms and not be transformed into copies of the Anglo-Protestants. Posed as an alternative to the chauvinist Americanization drives then burgeoning, Kallen's theory conceived of an American nation based on multiple cultures rather than one fused identity. By the 1920's, Kallen described his theory as "cultural pluralism." It provided the essential basis for today's "multiculturalism."

The bourgeois liberal character of Kallen's theory wasn't its acceptance of diversity as opposed to assimilationism. Its problem was that like assimilationism, it refused to accept the fact that either ideology forwarded American capitalism's denial of the decisive importance of the class division. To paraphrase one writer: class, not sex, is America's dirty little secret.

The notion of the melting pot in one form or another persisted as a goal in American ideology until the 1960's. However, as a practical matter ethnic divisions continued to play an important role in everyday life, especially in the life of the urban Democratic Party machines in the East and Midwest. The machines organized the working class on a divided ethnic (and racial) basis, as an electoral counter to the development of independent class action and class consciousness. Traditional assimilationism assumed that the tendency toward homogenization in modern society

is inexorable. Since Kallen's time, events have proved the expected total meltdown to be untrue.

In the 1960's, writers such as Michael Novak and the team of Nathan Glazer and Daniel (Pat) Moynihan began stressing the idea of the continuity, despite important internal changes, of ethnic identities over the generations. They regarded this phenomenon as both positive and inherent in the way the American nation was developing. In an article entitled "Why Ethnicity?" (*Commentary*, October 1974), Moynihan and Glazer noted that ethnic assertion was again on the rise and was linked to the growth of the welfare state. In modern society, it is not desirable, they said:

... to assert claims on behalf of large but loosely aggregated groups such as "workers," "peasants" Claims of this order are too broad to elicit a very satisfactory response. ... As a matter of strategic efficacy, it becomes necessary to disaggregate, to assert claims for a group small enough to make significant concessions possible and, especially, small enough to produce some gain from the concessions made.

In plain English, Moynihan and Glazer were advocating a strategy to replace working-class-wide demands that capitalism cannot concede. Instead they advised workers to make their demands as part of separated ethnic groups small enough to get something.

The number of workers obviously remains the same, whether they are organized ethnically or by class. The difference is that divided into separate units or sectors, they can be compelled to compete with each other over which will get what concessions the system can afford. Under ethnic organization, the middle-class leaders and the highly driven (or lucky) socially mobile elements in the winning ethnic groups will get the real sops, while the majority get ... hope. Today the sops are even smaller and are ceded more rarely. The immediate hope is more of maintenance rather than mobility, although that dream still persists.

The current stress on ethnicity in the U.S. is related to the revival of nationalist sentiment throughout the world; fundamentally it comes from no progressive source. Past defeats suffered by the working class as a result of misleadership have led to the substitution of nationalism for class consciousness. The vicious forms of nationalism evident today are a consequence of betrayals by Stalinism and Social Democracy. Ethnic assertion in the U.S. owes its resurgence to the treachery of the liberals and the labor bureaucrats. Nationalism and ethnicity both reinforce the lack of class consciousness, both drawing workers to expressing their grievances in sectoral and therefore potentially fratricidal ways.

Marxists vigorously defend the rights of immigrants to come to the United States and to share equal rights once they are here. Furthermore, we favor the right of all ethnic groups, whether composed of recent arrivals or not, to retain as much of their linguistic and cultural heritage as they wish. We urge them to learn English so they can effectively participate in American society and better achieve working-class solidarity, but we oppose any compulsion in this regard.

However, the reinvigoration of ethnicity among white Americans is reactionary and in this race-caste divided society it is inevitably racist. As Michael Novak, a leading advocate of ethnic re-assertion, has pointed out, the new demands being made are for white Eastern and Southern Europeans as a collective identity rather than for the specific nationalities. Inevitably, an ethnic

sectoral demand made by people of European origin becomes a “white ethnic” demand, in counterposition to Blacks. Once the slice of pie allotted by capitalist scarcity is accepted as the practical limit, then any concession to Blacks must be seen as undeserved favoritism by white ethnic minorities. No wonder many of those elements who made such an identification very important, became part of the “Reagan Democrat” trend — and why sizable numbers of them look with favor upon Pat Buchanan and his overt chauvinism today.

Ethnic pluralism is obviously not the sole accelerator of today’s increasingly racist climate — after all, assimilated Americans can be just as chauvinist — but it is a major ideological and functional contributor.

Ethnic division has even come to affect who is really considered an immigrant. The tendency is that anti-immigrant chauvinism becomes more and more aimed at non-white immigrants alone. And since most Latinos and many Asians, no matter the date of their arrival, are placed in at least a semi-race-caste relationship, they too bear the brunt of this racism.

Just as we distinguish between the national consciousness of oppressors and oppressed, Marxists align ourselves with the racially oppressed even when they too mistakenly adopt cultural pluralism and see their identity as basically ethnic. While fighting as part of and alongside the racially persecuted, we point out their race-caste condition and their fundamental class position. We counterpose our view to the belief that they can be simply another ethnic special-interest group in American capitalist society. No matter the ideological cover, nationalist separatism or African-centered cultural sectoralism, such pluralist paths will never achieve equality.

E. Pluralism: Another Path into a Blind Alley

We have pointed out that during capitalism’s ascendant epoch, Marxists favored assimilation into a single nationality as the best means to buttress the then-progressive creation of nation-states. However, they recognized that states like Switzerland, with greater internal difficulties, could do the same job although they were rooted in multiple nationalities. In this epoch of prolonged reaction, decadent capitalism best props itself up through multiple racial and national divisions of the people on whom its state power rests. Thus assimilation as a goal for minorities today is a generally impossible form of adjustment.

Integrationism, the notion that imperialism can allow assimilationism and grant equality to different peoples, races, religions and ethnicities is a blind alley. Cultural pluralism, the notion that imperialism can provide a society where such differences can be respected and can flourish freely, is also false consciousness for Black people; it distorts their world view and therefore their struggle.

Since integrationism-assimilationism has failed, cultural pluralism is the alternate adjustment mechanism. Black nationalism, Black Power, community control, Rainbow Coalitions and the like are all varied Black political expressions of cultural pluralism. Such views are hardly revolutionary; quite the opposite, they represent a path leading to adjustment to American nationalism.

The collapse of Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition led to the reinforcement of the idea that Blacks had no real allies among whites or white institutions. Of course, all these liberal alliances

with other ethnic groups, unions and interest groups are joint agreements at the top for leaders to get along. The groups at their working class base, mauled by capitalist scarcity, are in fact left in competition with each other. Rainbow Coalitions inevitably go to pot, and there isn't any gold for Blacks at the end. The result of the fading rainbow was a rise in the notion that Blacks had to go it more or less alone.

Jackson's virtual political decapitation left a vacuum at the summit of Black leadership. Black Power has blended into Black nationalism, "Afrocentrism," and other variants of multiculturalism. This is what allowed Farrakhan to become a major challenger for leadership. However, he too now espouses a "nationalist" doctrine that runs lighter on separation and much heavier on political interventionism and verbal hostility to racism than mainline nationalists used to project.

Farrakhan's nationalism resonates among the unemployed and workers because the bourgeois attack has led to a profound distrust of "white America." The need for self-defense becomes vital, and he seems to reflect that need. Although it now has the allegiance of some of the angry educated middle class professionals, Farrakhan's essential base remains in the layer of shopkeepers, shopkeeper "wannabe's" and street peddlers. It is very important to note that the gap in income between the Black middle and upper classes on the one hand and the Black working class and the unemployed on the other has grown even wider than the class gap among whites. At the same time, it should also be made clear that the feelings of affluence among the better-off middle strata are accompanied by economic forebodings.

Of course, forebodings appear in different degrees, especially among middle-class people. The middle layers are not really a class in the Marxist sense; they are a collection of very different types of people who are spread like particles of dust between the major classes. There are middle-class Black people who, while they share the general worries, have also come to feel secure enough that they regard even the small uptick in the economy under Clinton to be a source of real hope for Black "self-improvement." They are more attracted to the sight of prominent Blacks in display posts under Clinton than they are distracted by his attacks on welfare. Well educated, they already see themselves as rivals of Jews, Asians and other interest and ethnic groups for positions in society. True advocates of cultural pluralism, their "Black nationalism" can be very intense but is certainly not aimed at any idea of migration or even really going it alone. They tend to see it defensively in relation to ever-present police attacks and as an ethnic demand "to get ours."

The fate of Black America is inextricably caught up in the question of state power. The Black petty bourgeoisie, even more than the white, must survive through direct and indirect government subsidies, credit and loans. The middle and working classes are even more obviously dependent on answers relating to the state. It is no longer possible for a serious nationalist to avoid politics. And given the frustration of the Black masses, any politician who wishes their support has to express their anger.

F. Nationalism Abroad and its Impact at Home

The reception of nationalistic ideology among American Blacks was enhanced by the worldwide

upheavals against imperialism. The colonial revolution of the post-World War II era was led in Africa, Asia and Latin America by radical middle-class nationalists. Whether they styled themselves as Communists, socialists, revolutionaries or simply patriots, they were seemingly committed to radical nationalism and “anti-imperialism.”

That the anti-imperialist rising of the masses of these countries was led by nationalists was no accident. It was a by-product of the massive defeat inflicted on the proletariat through the victory of the Stalinist counterrevolution in the USSR by the end of the 1930's. As we have mentioned, Stalin's “socialism in one country” was counterposed to the internationalism originally espoused by the Bolsheviks, and in reality led the victory of an inherently nationalist capitalism in Russia and the end of the workers' state.

Stalinism, Nazism and the imperialist Second World War all contributed to the smashing of the Trotskyist Fourth International and proletarian internationalism generally. When, in the wake of the war, the masses rose up in the colonies against imperialism, the leadership fell into the hands of the middle-class nationalists. These “third world” revolts did succeed in establishing politically independent nations which often presented themselves as radical socialist states — that is as alternative societies to those imposed by the imperialists. Each nationalist ruler promised the masses that after they made sacrifices they would witness the creation of powerful independent national economies.

“The chickens came home to roost.” Socialism cannot be built on scarce resources; it cannot be built in one country. Marxism recognizes the power of imperialism and its thoroughly intertwined world organization of production, vast resources and division of labor. The imperialist terrain presents the essential choice: either a revolution is nationalist and therefore seeks favors from imperialism by selling out its own workers and workers elsewhere; or it is proletarian internationalist and works to destroy the capitalist grip over the world economy by promoting workers' revolution everywhere. Of course, this “choice” actually depends on which class is at the helm of the revolution.

“Nationalist anti-imperialism” meant in reality accepting coexistence with imperialism. Inevitably, nationalism betrayed the promises it made to the workers and peasants and then completely succumbed to imperialism. Today, in place of the once militant-sounding independent states, we contemplate neo-colonies dominated by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and drained even more than in the past by the big imperialist powers.

However, in the glow of the anti-colonial revolution and the identification of the oppressed American Black masses with the struggles of peoples of color overseas, the Black nationalists developed a widespread attraction. Like nationalists abroad, many of them pledged to develop an independent economy. But, if that proved impossible in “the third world,” it is all the more impossible within the U.S.

G. Revolutionary Black Power/Black Nationalism.

1. Nationalism Tests its Limits

The various nationalist and separatist ideologies have not existed in isolation. Configured and reconfigured by the struggles of the ghetto dwellers, some of them leapt forward and came to reflect more and more of the actual aspirations and real needs of the Black masses. Their uphill battle to forge new and more radical paths to liberation compelled them to investigate the relationship between Black liberation, nationalism and socialism.

The period of the late '60's and early '70's was very fertile, but attempts to overcome the limitations of nationalism and move to a class-based view were sharply checked by the power of the white labor bureaucrats to hold back the wildcat strike movement. The bureaucracy succeeded in blocking the upheaval of the working class from taking the massive action that was clearly brewing and detouring it from generalizing its struggle politically at a time when inflation and Vietnam war weariness were rampant. As a consequence, radicalizing developments and disenchantment with the bureaucracy among white aristocratic craft workers began to polarize toward George Wallace and the racist right wing. This meant that Black workers were given few positive signals towards an interracialist class movement, as opposed to a sectoral caste movement. Once again, the liberal reformist labor misleaders must take the lion's share of blame for the retention of the strong elements of "nationalism" in the Black communities across America.

The limits imposed by the bureaucracy occurred in the context of a world still caught up in what seemed to be a largely successful radical guerrillaist nationalism in the "third world." Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh seemed to symbolize hope for liberation to militant youth everywhere. In the U.S., the ghetto rebellions themselves, although they were overwhelmingly working class in composition, did not achieve any tangible class consciousness. In Detroit there were instances of interracial participation, but it was hardly the norm. Across the world, the mammoth wave of worker strikes and revolts inflicted mortal wounds on their Social Democrat and Stalinist misleaderships but did not succeed in creating an alternative revolutionary class leadership. The pseudo-Marxist far left was too busy tailing the reformists to provide a real oppositional pole of attraction.

Given the overall social scene, the fact that the nationalistic Black movement forged ahead as far as it did was quite remarkable. But it was unable to go far enough.

The transformations and the vacillations of the leftist Black leaderships' goals were distorted reflections of the impact of the Black working class's trial-and-error search for liberation. Even the most insincere demagogic outlook must reflect mass sentiments and needs if it is to capture a leading role in the ghettos. The more important formations, led by sincere ideologists, made even greater attempts to transcend the limitations of conformity to American nationalism.

The legacies of Black Power and Malcolm X, fused with elements of Black nationalism, were the sources for a wide variety of radical organizations and trends which espoused revolution. Given the late 1960's-early 1970's point of origin of this subjectively revolutionary development, the major elements were deeply affected by the more popular "third world" forms of Stalinist nationalism embodied in Maoism. It would be a gross error to think of these groups as Stalinist themselves; they were influenced heavily by what seemed to be the most radical forms of nationalism. As well, Maoist ideology expressed best their ambivalence between the two paths

that promised salvation. Historically, Maoism emerged in China as a negation of the Marxist working-class movement in China. Still paying lip service to the Marxist tradition, in practice it espoused guerrilla nationalism. The Black militants got caught up in an outlook favoring elitist guerrilla actions that used class-undifferentiated plebeian masses as battering rams against the system — while it acknowledged some role for conscious working-class revolutionary action.

2. The Black Panther Party

Two of the larger revolutionary nationalist groups that exemplify the ferment and the struggle at the time were the Black Panther Party, initiated in the Bay Area of California, and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in Detroit.

The Panthers were originally formed around the fight for Black armed self-defense. They were based on militant students and radical ghetto activists. At various times, they attracted the support of many “lumpen proletarians” and even Black workers for periods in the late ‘60's and early ‘70's. In general, they looked to the lumpen — the perennially unemployed hustlers and wheeler-dealers on the bottom of ghetto society — rather than the working class as the vehicle for liberation.

Although couched in terms of socialist revolution, their world view still accepted capitalist institutions — even the citadel of imperialism, the United Nations — as reformable means to that end. For example, the 10-point Black Panther Party Platform and Program, adopted in 1966, stated:

... as our major political objective, a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the black colony in which only black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of black people as to their national destiny.

While they regarded Blacks as an internal colony in the United States, their view of what the term “colony” meant shows their ambivalence as to national destiny quite clearly. Huey Newton, the paramount leader of the Panthers, stated:

The Black Panther Party's position is that the Black people in the country are definitely colonized, and suffer from the colonial plight more than any ethnic group in the country. Perhaps with the exception of the Indian, but surely as much even as the Indian population. We too, realize that the American people in general are colonized. And they're colonized simply because they're under a capitalist society, with a small clique of rulers who are the owners of the means of production in control of decision making, they're the decision making body. Therefore, that takes the freedom from the American people in general. And they simply work for the enrichment of this ruling class. As far as Blacks are concerned, of course, we are at the very bottom of this ladder, we're exploited not only by the small group of ruling class, we're oppressed, and repressed by even the working-class Whites in the country. And this is simply because the ruling class, the White ruling class uses the old Roman policy of divide and conquer. in other words, the White working class is used as pawns or tools of the ruling class, but they too are enslaved. (“To the R.N.A.,” from *The Black Panther*, Dec. 6, 1969; in *The Black Panthers Speak*, edited by Philip S. Foner.)

The concepts of “colony” and “class” are clearly confused, very much in line with the Maoist conflation of national and class revolutions. However, the divide-and-conquer methodology of American capitalism towards Blacks and whites is posed with great insight — and represented a substantial leap forward within Black Power ideology, already ripping through much of its nationalistic wrappings. The analysis clearly pointed to some sort of joint struggle to overcome the divisive strategy of the white ruling class which had also created a colonized class of white “enslaved” people.

In fact, the Panthers did try to form alliances across the caste line — but with white students, hippies, middle-class left groups, etc. Unable to focus the question of class and revolution for Blacks, they could not do so for whites. As well, the remaining impact of sectoral nationalism meant that the Panthers could not think in terms of forming an interracial working-class vanguard united in class consciousness; they thought only in terms of alliances, coalitions and blocs.

Whatever the sectoral limits still constricting the Panthers, one thing certain was that they saw through and fought against the anti-revolutionary and even reactionary character of the African-traditionalist cultural nationalists. Huey Newton put it bluntly:

There are two kinds of nationalism, revolutionary nationalism and reactionary nationalism. Revolutionary nationalism is first dependent upon a people’s revolution with the end goal being the people in power. Therefore to be a revolutionary nationalist you would by necessity have to be a socialist. If you are a reactionary nationalist you are not a socialist and your end goal is the oppression of the people. Cultural nationalism, or pork chop nationalism, as I sometimes call it, is basically a problem of having the wrong political perspective.... . The cultural nationalists are concerned with returning to the old African culture and thereby regaining their identity and freedom. In other words, they feel that the African culture will automatically bring political freedom. Many times cultural nationalists fall into line as reactionary nationalists.” (*Huey Newton Talks to the Movement About the Black Panther Party, Cultural Nationalism, SNCC, Liberals and White Revolutionaries*, also in *The Black Panthers Speak*.)

Newton went on to compare cultural nationalists with Papa Doc Duvalier, the murderous Haitian dictator, who saluted Blackness and promoted African culture. He adds, “He merely kicked out the racists and replaced them with himself as the oppressor. Many of the nationalists in this country seem to desire the same ends.”

Blazing new and exciting paths, the Panthers tried to widen the gap between those whose vision was trained on returning to the African past on the one side and those who wanted to create a modern revolutionary answer to the problems of oppressed Blacks. Unfortunately, the correct stress on the need for armed Black self-defense was also laced with adoration of Mao’s proclamations on guns. Weaponry, instead of being at the service of a political and social program became to a significant degree a substitute for it as the Panthers growth faltered and their program failed to become more focused. Among other problems, this left them open to vicious government provocations and murder at the hands of the police and the FBI.

When the reality of the state's power set in, their advocacy of guns as the answer receded, the subjective revolutionism faded with it and the "practical" reformist underpinnings came to the fore. Social work in the form of projects like the Breakfast for Children campaign came to dominate their practical work as the means to retain a base in the ghettos. Collaboration with the reformist pro-Democratic Party Communist Party replaced the old radical ties. The old dynamic combat organization faded. Unable to cohere a Marxist program and a way forward, resting on a volatile but impermanent base, the Panthers collapsed in the 1970's. In the last analysis, the organization had been unable to overcome its student/intelligentsia leadership foundations.

3. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers was initiated in Detroit by class forces similar to those found in the Panthers. Originally composed of students and other ghetto militants, it differed from the Panthers in that it sought and found its base in the industrial working class, primarily among the young Black militant auto workers who had just gained access to industrial jobs as a result of the riots. Ideologically, the League too identified with Maoism, but it also included activists whose outlook stemmed from more proletarian-oriented traditions. It made more serious efforts to deal with Marxism in its educational work than did the Panthers. In Detroit Chrysler plants, it represented a serious challenge to the United Auto Workers (UAW) bureaucracy and, in fact, to the union itself. Its pressure was undoubtedly responsible for forcing the UAW's social democratic bureaucracy to add more Black faces into its leadership ranks.

The League was torn apart by the inherently contradictory political views within it. A working-class outlook militates in the direction of an interracial class consciousness. This contrasted with efforts of militants who favored a more nationalist approach, seeing only Blacks as their base and their future. As well, the organization was torn by its inability to decide whether it was an alternative union, a group of caucuses within the existing unions, or a radical political party. The Maoism that emphasized populist class collaboration as a "first stage" helped to prevent a serious political break with middle-class reformers and local politicians. Unable to resolve its differences or deal with outside pressures, the League too collapsed in the mid-1970's.

Across the country, including in the South, Black workers were for the first time in U.S. history able to lead white workers in militant strikes. The strike demands were confined to particular economic goals and could not then create a new alternative path for the working class as a whole. However, these strikes did show that white workers were able to overcome their prejudices, not by virtue of moral preachments or liberal education but through class consciousness arising out of common action for common goals. These actions were high points within the rash of wildcat strikes and heightening working-class militancy.

As we have pointed out above, the Herculean efforts made by the labor bureaucracy were successful in preventing the widespread industrial militancy of the ranks from becoming politically generalized. A critical factor in the undermining of this upheaval was the inability of the left radical Black nationalist leaderships to overcome a sectoral division imposed by the trade union bureaucracy. Sectoralist themselves, they could not point in another direction.

The failure to overcome sectoralism also meant the failure to break with the then radical middle-class self-described Black Power politicians whose calls for "independence" led straight to the

Democratic Party and pacification of the ghettos. Once again, the labor bureaucracy and liberal reformers asserted their grip over Black politics even though it was now indirectly; the welfare state and the maze of programs it planted in the “community” took hold. The re-alliance of liberals, Blacks and labor took place within the Democratic Party. The Congressional Black Caucus became the toast of the town, resting on an increasingly passive voting base.

4. Differences among Radical Nationalists Today

The radicals who today attempt to combine “revolution” with nationalism have an enormous problem in relating to the much more numerous separatist forces dominated by the NOI, who are reactionary to the core. After all, it was Malcolm X who dramatically exposed Elijah Muhammad’s dealings with the Ku Klux Klan. Farrakhan himself has openly welcomed the support of Tom Metzger and his “Aryan” Nazi followers. Today’s NOI provides defense guards not for ordinary Blacks brutally attacked by police but for David Irving, the white British Hitler lover and open racist, when he speaks in the U.S. The NOI’s defense of Mauritania and Sudan against the well-documented charges that they hold African Blacks in slavery also creates a moral and practical difficulty.

The difficulty can be papered over for the moment because the Islamic nationalists cannot openly ally themselves with any important white reactionary force at this time. A significant portion of Farrakhan’s clout among those nationalists who consider themselves left radicals is his ability to speak to the masses. This connection would be smashed if a tangible bloc was formed with Nazis or the Klan. Actually, Farrakhan’s real outlook at this time would lead him not to fascism but to a relationship with particular conservative sections of the Republican Party. He has already publicly eulogized Jack Kemp and John Kasich. However, given the importance of the links between all levels of the Black population and the remains of the welfare state, the NOI leader could not even openly endorse the Republicans in electoral contests with the Democrats. Certainly, any overt link with white political conservatives would make it very difficult for Farrakhan to solidify the statesman image of leadership within the Black leadership that he obviously wants. It would also make political life impossible for those nationalists who embrace both Farrakhan and radicalism.

There are radical Black nationalists like Elombe Brath who openly take issue with Farrakhan. There are still other currents who put even greater distance between themselves and the NOI; the resurrected Black Panthers under the leadership of Dhoruba bin Wahad, for example. However, the inability of the NOI to openly embrace right-wing politics at this time, plus the racist attacks on Farrakhan, make it easier for the bulk of the radical Black nationalists to adapt to the NOI. But any real movement on the part of Black workers would make the straddle impossible.

So-called “revolutionary Black nationalism” remains today as the ideology of some secular bits and pieces of what was once the mainstream Black Power-nationalist milieu. It includes vestigial remains of the Maoist-Stalinist groupings and some radical pan-Africanist trends. Virtually the same ideology is also promulgated by a few pseudo-Trotskyist groups.

Some of the radical elements take the question of the creation of an actual nation very seriously; some still search for ways to make independent Black Power manifest without a specifically

territorial aim. Some still adhere to the idea of community control; other seek newer roads. Some are totally activist; others more prone to study as of now. Some are totally hostile to collaboration with whites; others are to some degree concerned with the question of which whites are possible allies and/or comrades. Importantly, we note that there are some who identify with “revolutionary nationalism” in the belief that it is opposed to the currently trendy reactionary cultural nationalism. These include younger people who are earnestly exploring the contending world views.

H. Trotskyist Black Nationalism?

Trotskyism should provide the alternative to all forms of reformism from integration to nationalism. Today instead we see pseudo-Trotskyists promoting various pro-capitalist solutions. Those who still espouse Black nationalism have been plagued with the obvious problem that the Bolshevik tradition of struggle for the right of self-determination of nations has never meant defending nationalism as such. After all it was Lenin, the adamant champion of the right to self-determination of oppressed nations, who said:

Marxism cannot be reconciled with nationalism, be it even of the “most just,” “purest,” most refined and civilized brand. In place of all forms of nationalism Marxism advances internationalism, the amalgamation of all nations in the higher unity
(“Critical Remarks on the National Question,” *Collected Works*, Vol. 20.)

In contrast, the centrist SWP — once the organization of American Trotskyism — began moving rapidly into an open embrace of Black nationalism in the 1960's. It did so as part of its adaptation to middle-class student radicalism, which was increasingly enamored of “third world” guerrilla nationalism. Today, guerrillaism is no longer fashionable, so the SWP prefers tailing the trade union bureaucracy and has backed away from some of its other past love affairs. It suffered significant splits as a result of its drastic shifts. Most of today's pseudo-Trotskyist nationalists came from such schisms in the 1980's.

The only real organization still around from those splits is Socialist Action (SA). In their pamphlet, *The Coming Black Rebellion and the legacy of Malcolm X*, they turn Trotsky upside down:

After listening carefully to the factual presentations of his American comrades, [Trotsky] argued for an understanding of the entirely progressive sentiment Black nationalism represents.

Whatever mistakes Trotsky made in seeing a possible Black Belt national development and, therefore, future use of a slogan defending the right of self-determination, there is no way to interpret him as favoring nationalism; certainly not “entirely”! He was an internationalist and like Lenin understood Bolshevik support for self-determination to be anti-nationalist.

It is one thing to understand and to try to relate to the sentiment of the masses who identify with Garvey or Farrakhan, it is another thing to equate their interests with those of the pro-capitalist leaders.

Socialist Action deliberately confuses the right of self-determination with support to nationalism in order to tail the popular NOI. As we have pointed out, national self-determination is meaningless without a territory. SA openly says that Blacks are not a nation and that Black nationalism isn't nationalism — that there is no reality to the idea of a separate state. Translated from doublespeak, this means that they defend the purported right of Blacks to chose the path to a separate national existence *and* acknowledge that the basis for that choice doesn't exist. Therefore, the defense of the right is merely the Bolshevik-sounding cover for an apology for the NOI and whatever path *it* chooses, since it is that group that they are set on tailing.

SA's national convention resolution in 1992 states:

Black nationalism remains a powerful current in Black America. The Nation of Islam continues to be the largest Black nationalist force in the country. It remains capable — despite contradictory cross-currents — of making a major contribution to the struggle for Black liberation and the coming American revolution.

SA acknowledges the NOI's "cross-currents" but remains optimistic that booboos — like anti-Semitism and the commitment to business — will drop by the wayside, given the progressive dedication of Louis Farrakhan.

But for the genuine aroma of apologia, we turn to Jim Henle's essay in the SA pamphlet:

The Nation of Islam also advocates Black capitalism. They promote religious/cooperative business ventures in the Black community under their own auspices. They view this as building the base of the Black nation. Should we attack these petty capitalist ventures? I think the response should be that we respect the attempt to create the Black nation, but we don't see its fulfillment coming through this road. While we don't advocate Black-owned businesses as the road to Black liberation, we don't oppose them as such.

Authentic Marxists analyze all such bourgeois ideologies as false consciousness. Revolutionaries expose their real class position from what these ideologists say in order to appeal to masses. Not to oppose the lie being promulgated to Black workers — that creating serious independent businesses is both possible and a step toward liberation — is criminal. But Henle and Co. are not interested in raising the consciousness of the masses; they want to stay on the good side of the misleaders.

SA uses the time-honored excuse of those who wish to avoid telling workers the truth:

We in Socialist Action view the nationalism of the oppressed as a progressive force. And since Black nationalist demands *cannot be fulfilled under capitalism*, we can't exclude the possibility that the Nation, or a current within it, can go farther along the road to socialist revolution than they might intend. [Emphasis in original.]

What happens to people who follow a direction that proves false? Unless Leninists have warned them and put forward an alternative, they suffer defeat and become cynical. When they learn that demands cannot be fulfilled under capitalism, they give up because they equate the boundaries of capitalism with the limits of reality. The blame for this rests with those who claim to be

revolutionaries but have implied that capitalism will tolerate such demands, demands only achievable under socialism.

The reader will note that SA's faith is not placed in the masses to transcend the capitalist boundary but in Farrakhan & Co. It is the NOI, or a segment of that organization, which "can go farther along the road to socialist revolution than they might intend." This is exactly the same formulation that greased the way for all the pseudo-Trotskyists to tail the Stalinists and to declare the existence of "deformed workers' states" in Eastern Europe, where they had to admit there had never been workers' revolutions.

Of course, the creation of privately owned small businesses is hardly a demand that will drive its advocates unknowingly into surrendering their obeisance to Allah in favor of the banner of Marxism. In reality, the NOI's central and undeviating concern with its network of small businesses is prima facie evidence of its petty-bourgeois character.

But that is of no deep concern to these "Trotskyists." The pamphlet asks, "Is the Black middle class removed from and indifferent to the situation of the Black working class and those among the latter driven down into the depths of hopelessness and demoralization?" It replies, "Not at all. Like with any oppressed nationality, all of its members feel the effects of national oppression" And it concludes, "... we can be certain that Black students will be most open today to our conception that there is no contradiction between the goals of revolutionary Black nationalists and revolutionary minded workers."

The Black middle stratum, like the Black working class, suffers from racism, as is true of oppressed nationalities in general. The same reasoning has been used over and over again by liberals, social democrats and especially the Stalinists to justify class collaboration in general and the popular front in particular. As Trotsky pointed out time and again, the middle strata can be won to the side of proletarian revolution. This means that the proletarian revolutionaries have to counterpose their Marxist leadership to the middle-class leadership. They have to expose the misleaders in the course of mass struggle and win the bottom layers away from their tops. In other words, for the proletariat to win the other oppressed strata to their side, they have to do the opposite of SA: continually point out the contradiction between the mass and the misleaders of so-called revolutionary nationalism.

SA declares that Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution applies to the struggle of American Blacks. And so it does. The theory says that in our epoch, only the proletarian socialist revolution can carry out the uncompleted tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution. Certainly capitalism has proven it will never allow Blacks to achieve equal rights as long as it remains. Trotsky hammered home the idea that the socialist revolution can only be carried out by the proletariat, led by its revolutionary class party — not by a popular front of petty-bourgeois nationalists and revolutionary workers. The October Revolution of 1917 was the classic example of permanent revolution.

The perspective of permanent revolution for Blacks in America is clear. Contrary to SA, there is a decisive contradiction between "the goals of the revolutionary Black nationalists and revolutionary minded workers." It is called class. The failure to discern the contradiction results

in popular frontism. The Stalinist seizure of power in East Europe and sections of Asia was made in the name of blocs with bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist groups under the explicit banner of the popular front. The new regimes announced themselves not as working-class nor socialist states but as people's (or popular) democracies. Only the fraudulent "Trotskyists" laughably called them "workers states."

Permanent revolution, as Trotsky explained, could not be successful without spreading abroad. Trotsky's internationalism was counterposed to Stalin's equation of nationalism with socialism. SA, in practice and even in much of its non-holiday rhetoric, also sees no contradiction between narrow parochialism and internationalism. The degeneration of the Trotskyist Fourth International into centrism in the 1950's reflected its adaptation simultaneously to imperialist reformism and "anti-imperialist" middle-class nationalism, including "third world" guerrillaism. In all cases it meant forsaking the working class and its centrality for revolution. The adaptation to Black nationalism in the U.S. continues this tradition.

The irony of pointing to Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution to support the politics of nationalism — whether they be Black nationalism or the Stalinist nationalism which created stratified capitalist regimes in Eastern Europe and Asia — is remarkable. The core of the theory is its firm assessment of the need for the revolution to be internationalist if it is to succeed and if it is to be able to complete the bourgeois democratic national tasks.

I. Trotskyist Revolutionary Integrationism?

One of the shopworn techniques of phony Marxists is to brandish positions taken by Marx in the epoch of capitalist ascendancy and apply them today as if capitalism was still progressive. As we have pointed out, supporting the building and the consolidation of the nation-state was a position taken by the early communists, since this was the only way in which the bourgeois democratic revolution could succeed in developing capital and thus pave the way for socialism in the future. Contemporary renegades seeking to justify capitulation to bourgeois nationalism use Marx and Engels' stance in the 1800's as a rationalization. Most shocking is their use of the historical position in the progressive epoch to support the nationalism of imperialist nations — a particular specialty of the Spartacists. (See below.)

A noted American "socialist" authority on nationalism, H.B. Davis, in his book *Towards a Marxist Theory of Nationalism*, written in 1978, stated that "Marxists profess to be internationalists and yet everywhere we find Marxists acting as nationalists." He added, "proletarian internationalism is dead."

Davis thought the change was for the good. He was not a hypocrite like others who pretend to be revolutionary internationalists at the same time that they enlist in the nationalist cause. And he was right: for the middle-class "Marxist" nationalists, internationalism was indeed dead.

Marx and Engels strongly advocated assimilation as a means to effectively build and consolidate the capitalist nation-state. However, Western capitalism's decisive transformation from its progressive epoch into its imperialist epoch has turned everything around for Leninists. To apply the assimilationist outlook today is a direct capitulation to imperialism; it is dangerous advice to

oppressed peoples who in this epoch will not be allowed to assimilate. Leon Trotsky in 1937 pointed out:

During my youth I rather leaned toward the prognosis that the Jews of different countries would be assimilated and that the Jewish question would thus disappear in a quasi-automatic fashion. The historical development of the last quarter of a century has not confirmed this perspective. Decaying capitalism has everywhere swung over to an exacerbated nationalism, one part of which is anti-Semitism. The Jewish question has loomed largest in the most highly developed capitalist country of Europe, in Germany. (*On the Jewish Question*, “Interview with Jewish Correspondents in Mexico.”)

Trotsky went on to deny claims that he was an assimilationist. If assimilationism was an impossible perspective for Jews in this epoch, it is certainly impossible for American Blacks. For a time, Jews can believe that they are assimilated and accepted; eventually the tragic reality of their underlying position in society inevitably will come home to roost. The overwhelming majority of Blacks have never come even close to believing that they were assimilated into U.S. society.

Thus “revolutionary integrationism” is a contradiction in terms. It is the outlook of some of the pseudo-Trotskyists, most notably the Spartacist League (SL). When the bulk of pseudo-Trotskyists once tailed the nationalists, the Spartacists tailed the middle-class integrationists. Today they are a tail which wags even more than in the past because it is without a dog.

The Spartacists favored the court-ordered bourgeois busing schemes for integrated schools, which sent Black children into hostile city schools, using them as cannon fodder to carry out the liberals’ paternalist and racist social engineering plans. The Spartacists not only cheered them on but counseled Blacks to “integrate” the suburban schools as well — as if that too was possible under capitalism. The idea that the superior funding given to middle- and upper-class white schools would continue if these schools filled up with Black children was absurd.

To ask Blacks to act as if society were color-blind, simply because the law seems to say it is, meant setting up Blacks for potential death-trap situations — as happened in Boston and elsewhere. Instead, communists fought for the end of segregation laws everywhere and defended Blacks’ right to choose.

As Malcolm X pointed out many times, the essence of segregation in schools was its unequal funding and unequal education. Marxists argue that Black youth had to have the freedom to go to any school, contrary to the racists — and also contrary to the courts that sought to use them as pawns. They and their parents would have the right to calculate the dangers and the advantages and decide to act in concert with other Black parents and youth. They had a right to demand equal education wherever Black youth went to school. In other words, instead of acting under the compulsion of the police powers of the capitalist courts, Blacks should have some control over their own destiny. This would seem to be elementary for Marxists. The notion of placing judicially-decided numbers of Black children together with judicially-engineered numbers of white children reeks of the paternalist attitude that Blacks cannot learn except when rubbing shoulders with suitable numbers of whites.

If Black youth were placed in dangerous schools by the courts and the state or by virtue of their own decisions, Marxists had to point out the need for and fight for armed defense. Further, they had to warn those Blacks against having any illusion that the police, the courts and the liberal integrationists would defend them. What is more, in contrast to the Spartacists, it was absolutely necessary not only to demand mobilization of the unions and the organization of defense from the labor bureaucrats, but at the same time to truthfully warn Black youth and parents that the bureaucrats would fight tooth and nail against delivering such a defense.

Real “integration” of the schools would have also necessitated the courts ordering teachers to be redistributed in the schools according to race. If the Spartacists really took their position seriously, they would have had to raise this need, but it would have brought them right up against the fact that they would have had to support the bourgeois courts in an intervention into the unions, an impossible position for anyone claiming to be a Marxist. The SL therefore kept its mouth shut; evidently it was alright for the courts to order Black working class children and parents around but not to order working class organizations around. Real communists oppose all such state interventions in our class.

Above all, revolutionaries had to warn constantly that while it was absolutely necessary to fight for Blacks’ elementary rights to equality and democracy, the struggle itself would prove that these gains are impossible under decadent capitalism, that revolution was the only way to secure them. Not even the court-ordered “integration” was possible under this system.

The Spartacists on occasion state that assimilation-integration could not fully be accomplished under capitalism; ergo they call it “revolutionary” integrationism. But they do not warn Black workers of the system’s trap. By analogy, authentic Marxists aspire to a future communist world where armaments will be unnecessary — a pacifist world. However, we warn workers that pacifism today will not only not lead toward that goal but will result in getting us killed.

As we predicted then, the integrationist schemes have resulted in the Northern schools being more segregated than before court-ordered “integration.” “Revolutionary integrationism” was merely the left cover for the illusion that race-caste barriers could be broken without destroying the essential basis for the caste relationship, superexploitation in relation to class exploitation.

Richard Fraser, the source of the Spartacist’s theory, openly acknowledged the link between his integrationist theory and assimilationism, as do the Spartacists as a whole. As well, in documents reprinted by the SL, he ties their view to the explicitly assimilationist view of Arne Swabeck, who represented the initially misguided American Trotskyists in the early discussion with Trotsky on the U.S. Black struggle. He says:

This process was begun by the founding leaders of American Trotskyism as expressed in the position defended by Swabeck in 1933 in his discussions with Trotsky. It is this tradition which I defend ... (“For the Materialist Conception of the Negro Struggle,” Spartacist League *Marxist Bulletin* 5, Revised Edition; reprinted from *SWP Discussion Bulletin*, August 1955.)

Unfortunately, the American Trotskyists had paid little attention to the question, something Trotsky correctly berated them for. Fraser, however, commends them for their efforts to deal

with the Black question as a phenomenon disassociated from the “national question.” The danger of capitulation in the assimilationist-integrationist view was immediately grasped by Trotsky before the position was even put into practice. Trotsky warned Swabeck:

I have never studied this question and in my remarks I proceed from the general considerations. I base myself only upon the arguments brought forward by the American comrades. I find them insufficient and consider them a certain concession to the point of view of American chauvinism, which seems to me to be dangerous. (Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination.)

Building a national shelter through assimilation in the epoch of advancing capitalism was one thing; advocating the same program under decadent American imperialism was something else. The SL’s view embodies their elitist and paternalist attitude toward the struggle of the Black masses.

Integrationism, as we have pointed out, was torn apart in the late 1960's by the ghetto revolts. As C.L.R. James used to stress, Marxists prefer revolts which center on the point of production, in industry. This shows where the proletariat’s source of strength is located. It tends to heighten and speed the development of class consciousness. However, as an integral part of our class, we identify with and support its rebellions even when they do not initially spring from the factories. The ghetto revolts and riots were hardly class-conscious, but class consciousness is a by-blow of the combination of mass action and the leadership of the revolutionary communist party. Marxists have always pointed out that action not only precedes consciousness, it is the means by which consciousness develops. The mass action, spearheaded by the poorer strata of the working class, the very sector Lenin argued was the true basis for a Bolshevik party, was on the scene; the missing element was the vanguard. It was missing because it was cheerleading and tailing one or another element within the civil rights leadership rather than fighting among the masses for revolutionary working-class consciousness.

Most of the left paid at least lip service to supporting the masses in their confrontation with state power. The Spartacists took an openly integrationist approach instead. They said:

It was clear to all that the ghetto uprisings, which began in Harlem in 1964 and continued with undiminished intensity until Newark in 1967, marked the end of the old civil rights movement. What was not clear was how the uprisings affected the future of the black movement. Rather than recognizing the ghetto outbursts for what in fact they were — the final spasm of frustration and fury in the wake of a movement which had raised great hopes and activated enormous energy only to accomplish nothing The ghetto uprisings did not give the black masses a sense of their own power. They did just the opposite. During the rioting, it was blacks’ own homes that were burned down and the cops who went on a killing rampage. (“End of the Black Power Era,” *Workers Vanguard*, January 1972; in *Marxist Bulletin 5, Revised Edition*, p.34.)

If the civil rights movement “raised great hopes” but “accomplish[ed] nothing,” and the uprisings were just the final acts of furious frustration which lowered Black consciousness and gave the cops a killing field, the question arises: how did Blacks win anything? Even the SL acknowledges the obvious gains Blacks won. Was it a coincidence that Lyndon Johnson’s “Great

Society” welfare programs and the like were enacted at that time? Was it a coincidence that jobs, including industrial jobs that Blacks had no access to before the crescendo of riots, suddenly opened up? Was it an accident that colleges and universities then opened their doors a crack further — some, like the City Colleges in New York, grudgingly allowing “open admissions”?

In the wake of the 1992 Los Angeles revolt, there have been only a few riots; the recent one in St. Petersburg, Florida is probably the most important. But no one can deny the frustration and fury in the inner cities today. The ghetto masses know that the capitalists will not respond with concessions but with rampaging armed forces, preparations for which were made right after L.A. The balance of forces and the underlying situation is different than in the 1960's.

The ghetto masses are not stupid. Although there certainly was police brutality in response to the 1960's riots and certainly Black houses were burned, the uprisings kept occurring. The media even attempted to hide particular riots because they produced a chain reaction in other cities. The revolts won not only direct gains but as well, as Malcolm X stressed, a rise in consciousness of strength, contrary to the SL's assertions. That “Black Power” became a universally popular slogan among Blacks at that time is attributable to the fact that the masses knew they had forced the mighty U.S. government to make concessions.

The SL assimilationists faced a dilemma when SNCC went into opposition to the civil rights integrationists under the banner of Black Power. On the one hand, it was impossible for a left group to support Rev. King against what was clearly a more radical political tendency. On the other hand, the Black Power advocates were decisively rejecting integration. The Spartacists had to support the Black Power types. It might have seemed ridiculous to argue that they conduct a fight for integration* which they were breaking from. Yet that is what the Spartacists did. They urged the SNCC leaders to fight for an “integrated anti-capitalist movement” of workers. (“Black and Red — Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom,” *Marxist Bulletin No. 9*, p. S7.)

Tacking their integrationist demand onto the banner of forces clearly fighting integrationism was a way to dodge reality, to avoid confessing that their strategy had proved to be less than radical and more than bankrupt. However, the SL leaders were not simply attempting to justify their integrationism. They were also motivated by the class affinity they felt for the SNCC leaders. For example, they claimed that SNCC raised positions which could not be fulfilled within capitalism. They added:

However, as yet the movement has not become consciously anti-capitalist. It has rejected what it knows as liberalism but is unsure of how to go further. Lacking a conscious orientation towards the working class, and constantly surrounded by bourgeois propaganda, the movement may yet fall prey to bourgeois politicians with radical phrases (ibid.)

Note that the SL reference to “the movement” is really a reference to the middle-class leadership group it is discussing. The Spartacists did not address themselves to the Black working class, as opposed to the Black Power leaders, and argue that the aims of the working-class ghetto fighters could only be accomplished by their moving to a conscious class rejection of capitalism. Rather it urged the radical middle-class SNCC leaders to have “a conscious orientation towards the working class,” as a solution to the problems of Black liberation.

The method the Spartacists use is the same as that of Socialist Action and the rest of the pseudo-Trotskyists. Instead of turning the base against the middle-class leadership in the course of struggle, they appeal to the leadership to transform itself. It is clear what Trotsky would have said about the ghetto revolts: *once again, the masses demonstrated their willingness to rebel and, once again it was revealed that the crisis of our epoch is the crisis of proletarian leadership!*

Revolutionary workers do not insist that only people from working-class backgrounds can be authentic Marxists. That is not our point. The vanguard party welcomes the help of people from other classes, provided they break with alien class interests and adopt the interests of the working class as their own. In contrast, the SL claims that the revolutionary leadership needed by the working class must come from “declassé intellectuals” rather than from the working class itself.

Thus our first argument with the Spartacists is over reliance on the working-class masses themselves. Our second argument is not over the necessity for leadership but over the class nature of that leadership. We do not dispute that some of the SNCC leaders were potential socialist revolutionaries. But we do say that they could fulfil that potential only by breaking from middle-class radicalism, not by “orienting” toward the workers. Our class does not need “condescending saviors” who see themselves as preaching to the class from the outside.

Trotsky’s insight into the link between Swaback’s assimilationism and American imperialist chauvinism should be amplified in the light of long experience. The Spartacists reflect the outlook of the middle-class professional and bureaucratic intelligentsia, overwhelmingly white in this society. This stratum by its very nature blends into and overlaps with other classes, including the labor aristocracy and the trade union bureaucracy. The SL represents its more radical, labor-based and leftist elements. Not by accident, the organization equates the working class with “the labor movement” — the trade unions. Although authentic Marxists understand the crucial significance of the unions, they also understand that the unions in reality represent only a part of their class, frequently its more aristocratic layers.

The radical wing of the bureaucratic stratum in the unions seeks to incorporate Blacks, Latinos, women and other oppressed groupings into the union hierarchical apparatus itself. The radical bureaucrats believe that exclusion is both wrong and impossible. They fear that if the oppressed groupings are not included they will go their own way, form their own competitive institutions and “do their own thing.” Given their elitist outlook they welcome Blacks but under leadership of people from similar class backgrounds and with attitudes akin to their own. They fear any moves toward independent mass struggle by impoverished workers in general; that is also why they are hostile to the ghetto upheavals.

American reality has demonstrated that Blacks must have the right to collective self-defense and other forms of collective self-organization. We advocate ad hoc armed self-defense for any oppressed group under attack under conditions where a wider and preferably interracial organized working-class military response is not immediately possible.

The question of a broadly encompassing Black political organization is particularly crucial

whenever American society goes into deep class turmoil. Given the history of race relations, such independent Black mass organizations are likely to be created by Blacks in such periods of struggle. Even if the situation were at optimum and decisive layers of white workers were to unreservedly welcome Black equality, the historically justified suspicions of many Blacks would demand some level of independent organization. Thus revolutionaries both advocate and actively support such independent organizations when they reflect the necessary struggle of the oppressed.

Trotsky and James proposed such a “transitional organization” in the late 1930's: an institution based on a mass movement within which the various political currents can contend for leadership. If the Marxist vanguard is able to win leadership, the transitional organization becomes a base for revolution. Thus it is distinguished from a temporary formation for a specific purpose, such as an ad hoc defense group against attacks in a particular community. Following the lead given by Trotsky and James, the SWP adopted a position favoring their proposal. It stressed that:

This organization will NOT be either openly or secretly a periphery group of the Fourth International. It will be an organization in which the masses of Negroes will be invited to participate on a working-class program (1939 National Convention document, “The SWP and Negro Work.” Emphasis in the original.)

In the discussions Trotsky stressed that such an organization would not be a phony front group. It had to reflect the logic of the actual mass struggle. He even expected that some of its members would be pro-Democratic Party. Within it, Black Fourth Internationalists would seek to convince the members to become Bolsheviks, confident that the struggle itself would prove that communist doctrines reflected their true interests.

The Trotskyists favored a transitional organization based upon a program of transitional demands. Non-revolutionary Black workers in such a period would favor such demands, believing that they could be won through struggles for reforms. It was the task of Fourth Internationalists to convince fellow members of the mass organization, in the course of the struggle, that they could only be achieved through socialist revolution. Thus the vanguard party could *win* political leadership of such a mass organization.

Having no such confidence in the struggle of the masses unless firmly controlled from the outset, the Spartacists always discuss such an organization as an appendage of their party. For example, in the time-honored language used when proposing a controlled front group, the SL says:

These organizations are a *part* of the revolutionary movement, and their struggles advance the overall class struggle. They are neither *substitutes for* nor *opponents of* the vanguard party of the entire class, but are *linked to* the vanguard party through their most conscious cadres. (“Black and Red — Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom,” *Marxist Bulletin* No. 9.)

Fear of masses not properly housebroken by middle-class standards and control reflects a general Spartacist outlook, as one would expect given their class position. It is no accident that the Spartacists continue to defend their original position on immigration from oppressed countries

into advanced imperialist nations. *Their reason? It would threaten the “national identity of the recipient countries.” (*Workers Vanguard*, Jan. 18, 1974.)

“Assimilation” of ethnic minorities in the U.S. is generally understood by scholars to have taken place when the group adopts the language, the culture and the outlook of the American middle class. For the Spartacists, immigrants who can readily assimilate into the dominant culture are OK; but should they by overwhelming numbers or cultural stubbornness menace the “national identity,” they fall out of favor.

The SL’s “integration” is an ideology of taming and incorporation. Any Black is welcome who behaves according to left bureaucratic rules and standards; in other words, if they can “pass.” The SL is not racist in any genetic sense; skin color and differences in features are irrelevant. Let Blacks behave as good leftish white American trade unionists or middle-class radicals and the SL will welcome them into the fold.

The SL’s stance presents Blacks with a dangerous illusion. Cultural conformity and acceptance of all the norms of “national identity” are goals packed with illusion. Capitalist America’s inescapable need for an oppressed race-caste means that no matter how much Black people adjust their “attitude,” change their cultural outlook or play the game by someone else’s rule book, when the crisis demands it, they will still be isolated as pariahs. A political group that does not clearly and openly say that integration into capitalist America is an illusory road and a deathtrap for the liberation struggle is part of the problem and not the solution.

Inherent in the integrationist position is its vantage point within society. It is not by accident that integrationism has never had much ideological resonance within the Black working class; it deals with arranging society by plan from above, by social engineering or social work. We have already looked at those pseudo-Trotskyists who tailed “third world” nationalism abroad and at home. “Revolutionary integrationism” represents an alternate tie to the labor aristocracy and aligned middle-class elements. Both centrist trends use revolutionary rhetoric to tail ideologies that lead people on U.S. nationalist paths that cannot transcend capitalism.

In contrast to Socialist Action, the SL *openly* rejects the theory of permanent revolution as having any application to the struggle of American Blacks. This reflects the fact that permanent revolution rests squarely on the proposition that only proletarian socialist revolution can carry out the democratic and egalitarian tasks, promised by but not delivered by capitalism. That necessity serves as a driving force propelling the Black proletariat in the direction of class-conscious revolutionism, as a result of its struggles. We stand with Trotsky, who in 1939 declared:

What can transform a certain stratum, make it more capable of courage and sacrifice? It is concentrated in the Negroes. If it happens that we in the SWP are not able to find the road to this stratum, then we are not worthy at all. The permanent revolution and all the rest would be only a lie. (*Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination.*)

J. The Labor Aristocracy and the Model of Self-Denial

As we used Socialist Action and the Spartacist League to illustrate the errors of “revolutionary” tailism of Black nationalism and integrationism on the part of allegedly Marxist groups, we can use the International Socialist Organization (ISO) to show the problems of a more flexible form of opportunistic centrism. The ISO has apologized for a whole variety of petty-bourgeois “solutions” to racism. The foundation of their approach on the level of theory is to virtually deny the concept of a labor aristocracy in general and to explicitly deny its relevance to the relation between white and Black workers.

The American ISO is tied to the British Socialist Workers Party led by Tony Cliff. It claims to adhere to the Leninist-Trotskyist tradition but openly rejects almost all of its key concepts, like democratic centralism and permanent revolution. And because it so directly reflects politics stemming from the labor aristocracy, Cliff and all the lesser lights who have commented on the question are compelled to cast doubt on the conception itself.

Every serious Cliffite treatise that deals with Blacks attempts to ignore or downplay the gap in income and social conditions between Black and white workers. This includes Ahmed Shawki’s “Black Liberation and Socialism in the United States” (*International Socialism* No. 47), Kevin Ovenden’s book *Malcolm X: Socialism and Black Nationalism* and Alex Callinicos’ booklet *Race and Class*. Of course, it is literally impossible to flatly deny something so obvious, but they come mighty close. For example, Callinicos, a top British Cliffite theoretician, states that “Perhaps the single most important difference between Marxists and black nationalists is that the latter believe that white workers materially benefit from racism.” (p. 40)

The Cliffites object to the understanding that white workers are in a labor aristocratic relationship to Black workers. They correctly point out that the number of poor whites is greater than the number of poor Blacks. However, the truth is that in proportion to their numbers in American society, Blacks are far worse off.

The nearest thing to acknowledging a gap in income comes from Lance Selfa’s document “Race and Class in the U.S.” (*ISO Internal Bulletin* No. 5.) Written in preparation for the ISO’s 1993 convention, it admits in passing that white workers have “marginal advantages.” Nevertheless, Selfa hews to the Cliffite line: “The influence of racism on white workers is a question of their consciousness, not a question of some material bribe from the system they receive.”

The facts are that even in official government figures, Black unemployment is still running double that of whites. And although the Black poverty rate has supposedly dipped to 29.3% in 1995, that is still approximately triple the white rate. Even the overly optimistic report in the *New York Times* of November 18, 1996, “Quality of Life Is Up for Many Blacks, Data Say,” acknowledges that, “To be sure, there remain large gaps between African-Americans and whites in educational attainment, infant mortality, income and poverty rates.”

The ISO’s view that the advantages white workers have had in the labor market are “marginal” is absurd. As an analysis of current conditions, it is also a concession to the arguments of reactionaries. Surveys of white opinion indicate that a majority have been led to believe that economic discrimination against Black people has largely been overcome. The victory of this big lie serves the racists who are rolling back Black gains.

The Cliffites face the problem that their denial of material advantage points to the notion that the basic cause for white working-class racism is bad ideas. In an effort to avoid the obvious charge of anti-Marxist idealism, they have come up with a quote from Marx on the importance to capitalism of competition among workers. “Competition” sounds very Marxist and materialist, but the way they use it, it’s neither. If two groups simply compete, the laws of probability tell us that sometimes one will win and sometimes the other. But between whites and Blacks under capitalism, whites almost always win. Moreover, “competition” by itself doesn’t tell us why the rivalry isn’t also between black-haired and brown-haired people.

The Cliffites’ problem is that they do not wish to acknowledge a real material advantage underlying white working-class racism. That would mean that their prescription of liberal moralizing propaganda combined with purely economist trade unionist militancy would provide no path to class unity and anti-racism.

They know that racism exists and that Blacks are oppressed. Under pressure, they grudgingly allow that whites make marginally more and are more often employed. The gap, however, between acknowledging the obvious and analyzing how and why it occurs is huge. Their model of competition-by-itself — without indicating that one side has a built-in constant material advantage — simply cannot account for reality. But as Callinicos in his booklet *Race and Class* was later to admit, even that point isn’t enough of an answer. So he adds a fig leaf, the white workers’ “public and psychological wage.” This is an idea he takes from Du Bois meaning roughly the sense of superiority whites have in relation to Blacks. Unfortunately, Callinicos has to leave out what is included in Du Bois’ concept — that the higher status belief is rooted in actual material discriminatory differences in access to education, etc.

In fact, under competition, someone wins and someone loses. If one side is the continual loser, the dice must be loaded. The loading of the dice must obviously stem from a structural and institutionalized social difference, a materially based built-in barrier that gives rise to a material difference in rewards. Since Blacks constantly get the less pleasant end of the croupier’s stick, it must mean that they have been relegated to a race-caste position at the bottom of society. The basic cause is more than bad ideas and egoist prejudice by whites.

Callinicos & Co. point out that white laborers who work in the same regions as large numbers of low-paid Blacks are paid only slightly better. Very true. The purpose of a superexploited stratum is to lower wages across the board. This is not confined to the specific region in which superexploitation is most operative; its function is national and international. Wages for other workers may very well be higher in other regions — in fact they will certainly be higher everywhere for the hardcore solidly demarcated stratum of labor aristocrats. But even those wages are lower than they would be were there no superexploited working-class (and reserve army) sector of Blacks used to drag down wages in the labor market as a whole.

V. Interracialism: the Way Forward

A. The Labor Aristocracy: Here Today, Gone Tomorrow

Even the Cliffites admit that there is a relatively small hardcore layer of white workers who make far more than Blacks, even in regions where Blacks are numerous. But they don't understand how that affects the general white-Black aristocratic relationship.

When we discussed the role of ethnicity, we pointed out the impact of the arousal of hopes for social mobility among the more impoverished layers when others of their nationality secure gains. This was based on a reality for much of American history, namely that *some* workers could move upward. For white workers this has been the "American Dream." White workers in general have been able to identify with the hardcore aristocratic layer, based on the fact that some of them could actually achieve that status (or even in other cases actually transcend it). That hope has been unreal and largely absent for Black workers. The aristocratic relationship between whites and Blacks has not depended on higher actual income alone; it is also based on the fact that there is a material basis for whites' expectations of an even higher income than the one they have. Not by accident, the Southern Klan frequently was able to recruit a base among the "strainers," those whites strenuously engaged in moving upward on the economic ladder. Mobility aspirations are a crucial cornerstone of the "psychological wage."

A question often put to us is: You Marxists claim that the struggle of the working class will automatically lead to socialist revolution. Nine times out of ten, that has not been the case. You also talk about the working class being inherently internationalist and interracialist, yet most often the workers have lined up behind the capitalist nation-state to fight the workers of other nations. That's clearly true for American workers, isn't it? And don't tell me that the majority of American white workers aren't prejudiced against people of color. The depth of that hostility may vary, but interracialism hardly seems to describe the actions or the views of many white workers in the history of the U.S.

Our answer is that there is nothing "automatic" about socialist revolution. It is impossible without the working class consciously constructing its own revolutionary party. This party is the embodiment of the Marxist program which can be summed up in those two words: socialist revolution. Although final proof awaits the revolutionary achievements made by a workers' state, the horrors of capitalism every day prove that the revolutionary program does in fact reflect the most fundamental, objective material interests of the entire international and interracial proletariat. The workers of the world have those interests in common; they have nothing like that in common with their ruling classes.

Capitalist exploitation drives proletarians toward consciousness of their real, revolutionary interests. Those workers who see their class interests, and the way to win them, are the advanced (vanguard) workers who actually build the class party. Workers arrive at revolutionary consciousness in layers, at different rates due to different social conditions (aside from personal factors). The vanguard workers are in a constant dialogue with the newly advancing layers, trying to show them the way. This crucial activity is the basis for the revolutionary vanguard party's strategic and tactical approach, which in its entirety is designed to teach the necessity of proletarian socialist revolution.

Consciousness of the true position of the proletariat is never arrived at in an abstract intellectual way. It develops in the course of the class struggle, which itself is a response to the ups and

downs of the social crisis endemic to capitalism, especially in this epoch. Combined with the guidance of the party, which tries always to “say what is,” this produces the advanced layers of the working class. The early Leninist Third International pointed out that the working class as a whole can’t achieve advanced socialist consciousness except as a consequence of the gains made by the revolutionary workers’ state. The revolution itself comes when, as a result of growing experience with capitalism, the less advanced workers come to recognize the need to follow the vanguard and help overthrow the ruling class.

The theory of permanent revolution states that capitalism in this epoch is terrified of any threat to any property, because of the maturation of the proletariat and its socialist mission. As the nineteenth century was drawing to a close, the capitalist class stopped supporting revolutions against pre-capitalist property forms — if all property was not treated as sacrosanct, theirs’ would be endangered as well. Memories of the Paris Commune and the later growth of Marxist parties, especially in Europe, haunted the bourgeoisie with the threat of socialist revolution.

As profits from imperialism rolled into the capitalists’ coffers, they were able to dribble out sops to buy off sectors of the working class who began to feel that they had a material stake in preserving capitalism and their nation-states. Marx and Engels had described the harbingers of these aristocratic layers of workers as they appeared in England and North America. Lenin analyzed the labor aristocracy (and the closely associated new middle-class stratum) as it grew in tandem with the developing imperialist epoch leading up to the First World War.

Lenin showed the connection between the growth of the labor aristocracy and its role in turning the Social Democratic parties away from revolutionary internationalism. Led by the party and union bureaucracies, the social chauvinist aristocracies each championed their own nations in the imperialist war. Not only did the aristocrats defend their imperialist nations against each other in Europe, they came to defend racist imperialism in general. The Marxist and Leninist conception of the aristocracy of labor explains how racist and nationalist prejudices within the working class were hardened and deepened by differentiated material rewards.

As we have shown, materially based anti-Black racism and anti-immigrant nationalism took root among the early artisans and proletarians of North America. Marxist sociology is a study in relationships far more than is the social stratification approach of the academic social scientists. For us, for example, the working class can only be understood in relation to the capitalist class, a relationship mediated by property in the means of production. For academic sociologists, income levels and market position determine class itself.

With the Marxist understanding of the class, we can point to particular layers of aristocratic workers with relatively fixed, relatively high incomes. There are also relative degrees of aristocracy which are even more transient and which feature even smaller gradations of income and conditions. For example, the white Anglo-Saxon craft worker in New England in the first part of the nineteenth century might have looked down on the Irish laborer. At the same time, the miserably paid Irish laborer could lord it over the even more abysmally paid Black worker. The relationships were clearly aristocratic in degrees.

With this in mind, we can trace the reasons why chauvinism has had such a grip on large sections

of the working class, especially as the U.S. became more stable and prosperous with its growth as an imperialist power. We can also point out that the stake in the system felt by the comparatively large and relatively well-off layers of the American working class has been the basic source of liberal reformism as well as chauvinism inside our class. The presence of well-off workers activated the American Dream and narrowed the numbers of advanced conscious workers.

As a general proposition, the Social Democratic parties in Europe continued to mouth revolutionary internationalism at the turn of the century. Advanced consciousness was thereby contained and transformed to its opposite. This rhetoric covered an increasingly reformist practice which solidified with the outbreak of World War I. In other words, the development of aristocratic layers was responsible not only for chauvinism but the growth of centrist and reformist degeneration within the working class.

The return of economic crisis to the surface of events has been destroying the material braces imperialism has so carefully erected to protect and preserve itself around the world. Stalinism has crumbled. Traditional Social Democracy now peddles “free market” austerity, having been stripped of its ability to serve as a conduit for welfare state concessions. With a few important hold outs, the privileged labor aristocracy and the pumped up middle classes are disintegrating abroad and at home.

The material bases for the corruption of the working class are passing, and we are fast approaching the dawn of new struggles which give every evidence of being titanic. Such struggles are the seed-bed for the massive redevelopment of vanguard party consciousness and the basis for the recreation of a powerful internationalist and interracialist working class. It is vital that all oppressed people look to the proletariat and its party once again.

B. The U.S. Labor Aristocracy in Black and White, Today and Tomorrow

In addition to their other misconceptions concerning the Bolshevik analysis of the labor aristocracy, the Cliffites think Lenin meant that the sops gained by that stratum were gifts of the bourgeoisie — and they point to the lack of evidence for such charity. However, any fair reading of Lenin shows that he well understood that the purpose of the ruling class in conceding sops was to buy off anti-capitalist struggles and to secure a layer of agents to contain the rest of the working class. There is no question that if the class were united, all would receive more income (and the class would be able to make the socialist revolution!); therefore, even the hardcore labor aristocracy loses from division in that sense. However, in the absence of such unity, the benefits of the aristocrats do not disappear. This logic doesn't diminish the reality that the labor aristocrats recognize the benefits they receive in comparison to the superexploited today.

The Cliffites ascribe to Lenin still another idea he never had: the permanent existence of the labor aristocracy as a bought-off layer. They point to massive struggles of aristocrats at given times in history. Of course, Lenin often pointed out the transient character of the buying-off process; he knew that workers who lose their advantages can explode.

That kind of eruption is in the offing today, as the capitalist crisis deepens around the world. Capitalism's buffer zone, its border patrol, the middle class, is disintegrating. A layer at the top is

consummating its fusion into the bourgeoisie; the much more numerous strata below are disappearing into the working class and some even below it. So too, the labor aristocracy is being steadily eroded.

In the United States, the political manifestation of this erosion has been the so-called Reagan Democrats — blue-collar aristocrats who, together with beleaguered petty-bourgeois elements, have polarized to the right. This trend toward conservatism, inspired by economic dislocation and racial hostilities, represents in its own way a radical break from the legacy of the New Deal. But there is no necessary logic that makes such a transformation erupt to the right. The Hormel strike of a few years ago, the more recent class confrontations in Decatur and Detroit show an alternative propensity to the left on the part of the same sociological layer. The decisive elements in the equation are the role of the labor bureaucracy and the middle-class leadership of the Black caste. If their grip over their following remains strong, then the crisis-ridden labor aristocrats can be expected to deepen their polarization to the right.

However, there are relatively new factors on the scene that must be taken into consideration. As we have pointed out, even though the modern Black caste has been overwhelmingly proletarian in composition throughout its history, there has always been a petty-bourgeois or middle-class leadership stratum. We have also noted the substantial enhancement of the middle layer and its role — together with a greatly augmented Black labor aristocracy — as a result of the gains made in the 1960's and '70's. Although subjected to the recent capitalist assault, these strata still remain strong as compared to the past.

In the past, there was a Black labor aristocracy, but it was very small in relation to the Black working class and minuscule and weak compared to the white working class and its aristocracy. Writers even described government postal workers as part of the “Black bourgeoisie” because of their job security and pay scale — not high for whites, very high for Blacks. Today, Black middle-class elements and aristocrats are to be found in the private sector as well as in government employment. The appearance of Black faces in lower management positions, on the one hand, and in the labor aristocracy (and therefore after a while in the union bureaucracy), on the other, was necessitated by the events of the 1970's.

We have already pointed out that in the early '70's, white workers followed the lead of fighting Black workers in the burgeoning strikes that broke out as part of the world working-class upheaval. As well, Black workers played a militant and fighting role in the wildcat strikes rampaging through major U.S. industries.

That potential still remains. (There is a similar likely role for the greatly expanded Latino presence within the proletariat as well.) Once mass struggle occurs, there is every reason to believe that the presently deepening chasm between white and Black workers will be bridged. The fate of Black workers is no longer dependent on white workers taking the lead in the class struggle, as it was historically. Trotsky's prophecy that Black workers will be a decisive leading force in the American socialist revolution will come to pass.

Let us remember how careful American capitalism was to build up its buffering middle-class layers within the Black population as a consequence of the upheavals of the '70's. With the need

to sell the ghetto masses on austerity and to undermine and take back gains from that era, it still has needed those restraining layers.

Capitalism, has had to attack the economic gains of the labor aristocracy in general, in addition to its devastating assault on the more impoverished sectors. It is accelerating the attack on poor white workers and unemployed as well as on poor workers of color. As the turn by the big bourgeoisie to Clinton after the Los Angeles rebellion proves, they wish to proceed very carefully before alienating and attacking the Black middle strata. Clinton stood as much for a strong military build-up of forces capable of smashing riots in the future as did Bush, but as a Democrat he was able to shed a few crocodile tears for the Black plight. A naked assault on the ghettos, especially given the glaring racism involved in the brutal police beating of Rodney King, would have been a declaration of race war that the Black labor aristocratic and middle strata could not have ignored.

As the direct attack on welfare has proved, the ruling class must deepen its attack on the poorer layers of the class. Whites as well as Blacks are thus hit, but “welfare” equals “Blacks” as far as racially motivated white labor aristocrats are concerned. At the same time, the bourgeoisie has avoided a full-fledged confrontation with Black employed workers; its attack is still cloaked to a degree. Forcing welfare recipients to become slave-wage workers serves the capitalists’ need to extend exploitation and further divide the class. It is also a careful way to undercut all other wage levels, including that of the Black and white aristocrats; its careful character is revealed by its indirectness. Enacting the workfare bill also opened the way to launching assaults on Social Security and Medicare which will hit aristocrats, Black and white, as well as the poor.

The intent to move against the Black middle strata is revealed by the attacks on affirmative action. The dominant sectors of the bourgeoisie still hide the knife by claiming to favor the program — while gutting what little remains of its content. Significant elements of the bourgeoisie are openly hostile. The handwriting is on the wall. Affirmative action regulations and laws are not themselves of decisive importance. Such programs were a liberal counterthrust to a possible struggle for full employment at the time they were passed. But they did benefit some minorities and some women. However, since their teeth in the form of quotas were removed long ago, they helped even fewer people. Nevertheless, their elimination would be a major symbolic victory for the right wing. It would be another important step in the campaign to eradicate the gains of middle-strata Blacks, Latinos and women.

The bourgeoisie is acting carefully because it recognizes the explosive potential not only of the besieged labor aristocrats but that of the Black masses they help restrain. The relentless-but-cautious assault has been going well from a capitalist view. Of course, the capitalists have had to restrain the Gingrich “revolution” from going too far too fast. The danger was too great that it would nakedly reveal to the white aristocrats and petty-bourgeois elements its favoritism for capitalist interest. There was also the danger that the right wing’s racism would break open into a pitched battle that would force the Black leaders to fight back. Either the devastation of the Black middle strata, or the exposure of the leaders’ compromising attitude as a complete failure, could weaken capitalism’s social, economic and political defenses against the legions of the poor Black working class. Then, as they know from the past, all hell can break loose.

That much the “moderate” political representatives, as well as the more socially-aware “estab-

lishment” spokesmen of the ruling class, can see. Some even grasp that Los Angeles was a class revolt that involved Latinos and whites as well as Blacks, in addition to its being a response to a race attack.

The ruling class has proceeded carefully since the early ‘70's not to provoke the combination of a long and bloody foreign war, a deteriorating economy, an angry working class and rebellious minorities. Such is the depth of the crisis, however, that the coming economic devastation of the working class must far eclipse that of the 1930's. Thus it is no accident that the wraps are beginning to come off and the inevitable class confrontation is drawing closer. The seeming calm of the moment hides the enormous pressure of the stored-up frustration, fear and angry hostility of the working class that can erupt with a vengeance tomorrow.

C. The Big Bang

The political, social and economic base for American imperialist expansion rests on the racist caste division. As we have pointed out, capitalism’s ability to divide the plebeian movement in the South, deny Blacks the vote while keeping them in debt-ridden peonage and attach the white populist forces to the defense of a conservative Democratic “Old South” stabilized the power of the national ruling class.

Even in the 1930's, the New Deal rested on this arrangement of power. The white agrarian populist elements in the South as well as the reactionaries voted Democrat and helped install FDR in the White House. Dixie was a vital element in maintaining a Congress formally organized by that party but actually dominated by a conservative and racist Republican-Southern Democratic axis.

The Democratic Party itself was dominated by Wall Street’s liberal minority during the 1930's and afterward. Its voting base was heavily working class but was organized by urban machines on the basis of ethnic rewards, in counterposition to class-conscious organization and demands. Ruling-class finance, the urban Catholic machine and the Old South maintained a rocky alliance based on the defense of property relations and quid-pro-quo payoffs. It worked.

The danger to political stability came from the industrial working-class upheavals of the depression years. That movement succeeded in organizing unskilled production workers outside of the South into powerful industrial CIO unions, as opposed to the old aristocratic craft-divided AFL unions. As we have indicated, only the restraints imposed by the Communist Party and its popular frontist misleaders in the CIO prevented the militant workers from breaking out of the Democratic Party and launching their own party.

The CIO unions welcomed Black workers, but in the 1930's Blacks were not yet a decisive factor in Northern industry except in a few cities. During and after World War II, large numbers of Blacks streamed northwards into the major industries. This migration became the basis for a major shift in the balance of racial forces in the United States. Black workers had become a primary threat to the system, even if at first it didn’t look that way. Blacks began to switch to the Democrats after having been non-voting Republicans in the South — in the late 1920's, even before the New Deal. The Democratic machines were the urban party designed to trap

immigrant and migrant workers.

Significant sectors of Black workers moved to the left during the Great Depression, but once again the development was contained within the Democratic Party largely as a result of the CP's influence. The growing presence of a volatile urban Black working class in key wartime and post-war industries and government work, and an increasingly strong presence in the big cities spelled enormous danger for the system. The CP could only provide a stopgap answer for capitalism. During the Second World War, large Black movements demanding equal employment opportunities developed — despite the efforts of the CP, which opposed Black and working-class actions as disruptive of the “war effort.” Roosevelt and the Democrats, intent on winning the imperialist war, were able to make temporary concessions to Blacks to keep them largely within a party still propped up by Southern racism.

The major impact of the destruction of the Solid South as the bedrock of American stability in the post-war period was partly hidden by the prosperity and the Cold War. The effects are now becoming clearer every day. The stopgap force that played such a major role in containing the Northern working-class and Black struggles, the Communist Party, has also collapsed. When the coming working-class explosion occurs, we can expect various small centrist pseudo-revolutionary groups to expand and to try to play a similar constraining role. However, their vacillating nature makes them a much weaker force than was the CP, which in the 1930's and '40's was such an important prop maintaining the stability of the system.

The combination of the Cold War, McCarthyism, the prosperity and vastly increased governmental intervention into collective bargaining and into the unions, solidified the power of the labor bureaucracy. However, the deepening crisis and the rollback of working-class gains has considerably reduced the power not only of the unions but of the bureaucracy itself. It is still a potent force, but at least for now it lacks credibility among the workers it leads. Once again it will depend on the support of pseudo-revolutionaries when the crisis matures — just as the CIO chieftains depended on the aggressive organizing capacities of the CP during the '30's.

The race-caste walls in the United States were never smashed but they were decidedly weakened. The major structural fact keeping the South in the hands of reaction was the race-caste division. The major fact keeping the national working class divided was the race-caste division. As the economic and social crisis deepens and the underlying vulnerability of American capitalism becomes more apparent, the only salvation for the system will lie in the attempt it inevitably must make to reinforce the weakened caste walls between the races.

Inexorably, profit-hungry capitalism must take back all of the gains ceded to the working class in general and people of color in particular. It must drive superexploitation of Blacks and Latinos to the limit while it reduces the white working class to poverty. To do this it must attempt to rebuild the racist fires into the old bloody conflagration. It must reinforce and re-legalize segregation and the caste line.

But there is still a huge concentration of Blacks in industry; and with the inevitable attempt of U.S. capitalists to reinvigorate manufacturing at home, this will likely expand. Thus the task of restoring segregation will be formidable and would have to approach genocidal proportions to

come near success. If the capitalist system is allowed to continue, its now cautious ruling class will inevitably embrace the most vicious forms of barbaric fascism.

Marxists have the obligation to relentlessly expose the trade union bureaucrats and the middle-class misleaders of the oppressed peoples of color who restrain the most potent sectors of the working class. At present, the mildly activist pretensions of the Sweeneys are exposing themselves; nevertheless, without a revolutionary alternative the bureaucracy is far from dead. Likewise, the liberal ex-integrationist Black leadership headed by Jesse Jackson has been shown up as hopeless, at least for the moment. However, while Farrakhan and the religious and cultural nationalists are now politically impotent, they are far from being exposed as neo-segregationists. And in the case of these Black misleaders as well as the labor bureaucrats, there is the future danger represented by their left tails, the middle-class and labor aristocratic pseudo-Marxists. Mass action in the form of the ghetto rebellions was instrumental in the achievement of past gains. It is just as vital today if the attack on the working class and people of color is to be halted. However, the limitations on what can be achieved by such community-based acts has been proven. The revolutionary communist strategy for the coming struggle favors the working class-based form of mass action which originates at the point of production.

For all the demagoguery of the so-called activist labor leaders clustered around Sweeney and all the fiery rhetoric of leaders like Jackson and Farrakhan, they flee from the idea of the mass action of the proletariat. The eternal quest for “stability and order” by the ruling class is based upon its overriding fear of the threat posed by a working class getting out of hand. The working class, white as well as Black, has demonstrated its fighting ability. Today, even though it feels itself to be weak, it actually has at its disposal a mighty weapon that could turn the whole balance of class power around in short order, the power to withhold its labor and to stop production. The working class could lay down its tools and launch a general strike. It could choke profits and bring the whole system to a halt just like that! It is no accident that the general strike has been a powerful weapon used recently by fighting workers in South Africa, South Korea, France, Bolivia and elsewhere around the world, as they begin to turn back the bourgeois offensive.

Lane Kirkland, the former leader of the AFL-CIO once said in response to a demand from the ranks, that he would only call a general strike in response to something really big. The destruction of the unions and the living standards of the workers was evidently not big in his mind. Ed Koch, the racist former mayor of New York City, called the general strike a “nuclear device.” And it is in fact a devastating weapon, one we have in our hands as a class. That is why all the misleaders are so afraid of it.

Black workers no longer have to wait upon whether or not white workers will lead a struggle or not. Black — and Latino — workers are now strategically placed in major industries and in the dominant cities. Their militancy and their actions can be a decisive pole in what the white workers do. Black workers taking the lead in shutting down industry and transportation, demanding real jobs for all, a decent standard of living and an end to racism could not only rally the entire workforce around them but attract the masses of oppressed and the multitudes of unemployed to their banner.

Authentic communists know that mass actions such as the general strike do not automatically

mean socialist revolution. But we also know that when the proletariat does see its enormous power, it becomes aware of the fact that it doesn't have to accept the existence of the racist capitalist state as an eternal fact of life. Revolutionaries fight for the general strike and the idea that the working class, conscious of its power, will take state power and create a new world.

As Karl Marx pointed out long ago, it is by virtue of such struggles that the proletariat "fits itself for power." The working class, at its current level of understanding, is not able to create a better world. The class struggle is the great school in which the working class learns that its interests have nothing to do with bending the knee to exploiters. It is where workers learn that accepting capitalism's logic, that we must claw each other — race against race — because capitalism demands scarcity is not only self-defeating, it is anti-human idiocy. The class struggle is the arena where we become truly human.

As Leon Trotsky pointed out in the 1930's:

It is not the spirit of combination among parliamentarians and journalists, but the legitimate and creative hatred of the oppressed for the oppressors which is today the single most progressive factor in history. It is necessary to turn to the masses, toward their deepest layers. It is necessary to appeal to their passions and to their reason.
(*Whither France.*)

He also asserted that "on the road of the international revolution,"

The program of the permanent revolution, based on the incontestable historic experience of a number of countries, can and must assume primary significance for the liberation movement of the Negro proletariat. ("Closer to the Proletarians of the 'Colored Races!'", *Writings 1932.*)

The perspective of permanent revolution demonstrates that the only way to smash the race-caste barriers is through a successful socialist revolution. It emphasizes that socialism is not possible in one country; revolution must be placed on the agenda throughout the world. In our time, the history of Stalinism in the East and the colonial revolution in the global South bitterly confirms this necessity. To this end, authentic Marxists have to fight for revolutionary class consciousness and its embodiment, the vanguard parties of a re-created Fourth International.

The U.S. Black struggle of the 1960's and '70's helped spark revolt throughout the world, among workers of all colors and conditions, especially the young. Today, the world is objectively even more united and interpenetrated. Today, authentic communists reject the cynicism of the fashionable "middle-class Marxist" left. We know that the next explosions will transcend even those of the past, once again declaring the power of the working class of the world. It is up to advanced American Black, Latino and white workers to do their part. This time a strong revolutionary alternative must exist so that the poisonous growths of race-caste division aren't merely pruned but are killed once and for all time. Only the re-created vanguard party, united under the banner of proletarian interracialism and internationalism, can lead the struggle to finally destroy this hideous growth, root as well as branch.