

Socialism and Black Liberation

**A Statement by a Black Revolutionary
from the Revolutionary Workers League**

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Introduction

I decided to become a socialist revolutionary several years ago. And soon after that decision, I joined the Revolutionary Workers League (RWL). The RWL was a small, basically white organization. They were organizing workers. They stated that only the united working class – black and white together – could bring about the revolutionary change necessary to free black people from racism and exploitation.

I made the decision to become a revolutionary with great reluctance. I made the decision to join the RWL with even greater reluctance. I really did not want to be a revolutionary or a member of a small white organization. But the racism and brutality of American society pushed me, as it will push thousands of other black people, into making these decisions. And after hard thinking about the experiences of the past struggles of our people, I decided that the RWL's program of black and white working-class revolutionary struggle was our only hope.

Like most black people, I was deeply influenced by the heroic black fighters of the 1960's and 1970's. In different ways, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, the Black Panthers, and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers were all important examples for me. The conclusions I reached about these black freedom fighters were very important to my decision to commit myself to the RWL.

Martin Luther King and Liberal Integration

Martin Luther King and the early civil rights movement probably drew more black people into active struggle than any other trend of the 1950's and 1960's. King had a two-part strategy: (1) Make alliances with white liberal leaders to pressure the government to grant equal rights for black people and integration into white society; (2) Use non-violent civil disobedience to put moral pressure on the government to grant change. King's approach was based on his dream that the American system could be peacefully reformed.

King's demands for equal rights and integration through peaceful action mobilized hundreds of thousands of black people in determined struggle. In the Montgomery bus boycott of 1956, some 40,000 poor black folks stood united for over a year, boycotting the public bus system until it was integrated. The Birmingham desegregation demonstrations of 1963 brought solidarity actions throughout the country, including a freedom march in Detroit that drew over 150,000 marchers. The 1963 march on Washington, for which King is best remembered, was instrumental in forcing through the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the most wide-ranging civil rights legislation ever passed. From 1964 to 1968, King worked increasingly with the labor movement to fight for better job opportunities and contracts for black workers. The Memphis sanitation workers' strike of 1968, during which King was assassinated, pulled together thousands of black workers and won a partial victory.

Through all this, King was working with the established white liberals – the labor bureaucrats, journalists and various politicians. He never openly questioned the authority of the government or the legitimacy of the economic system. His method was to pressure the government into granting reforms. But what a master gives, a master can take away. King never built an independent organization to win real power for black people.

The result was that even when King's movement was winning its greatest reform victories, the masses of black people continued to suffer in poverty. Civil rights did not pay the bills for poor black folks. And as King moved into the North in the later sixties, it became clear that many of his white liberal friends, who supported some changes in the South, did not want any change in their own back yards.

The riots of 1965 and 1967 showed how little the civil rights acts and "progress" in integration had done for poor black folks. The vicious police brutality throughout the civil rights movement also showed that King's philosophy of non-violence was based on a wrong idea. It made no sense to appeal to the morality of the racist Klan/police, like Birmingham Sheriff Bull Connor with his police dogs. It also made no sense to appeal to the government of the racist, capitalist ruling class, which had brutally oppressed black people for nearly 400 years. Our peaceful marches and sit-ins were answered with

bullets, attack dogs and fire hoses. We were defenseless. We had nothing but moral righteousness to counter the violent attacks of our oppressors. We shed our blood – and for what?

True, the white ruling class was forced to grant *some* concessions to the hundreds of thousands of black people who fought for an end to segregation and discrimination. The masses of black people wanted equal access to jobs, schools and all areas of American life. The civil rights movement won some gains in those areas, especially in the South.

However, most of our victories were only paper victories. Segregation and inequality remained rampant. Most of the gains we won were granted only as long as there were people fighting and dying for them, and only as long as the capitalist bosses felt they could afford such concessions. When the mass movement died down and the economy began to go into deep crisis, the capitalists simply took the gains back. Today, the affirmative action and busing plans fought for in the 1960's are virtually dead. We still cannot find decent jobs. Our housing and our schools are horrible. We are still constantly harassed by white cops. The Klan and the Nazis are more active than ever. We remain the most oppressed people in this society.

What Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement taught me was that true equality could not be won through reforms. It was not enough to have a few black people "integrate" into a racist society. What was needed was a total change of the social, economic and political system – a revolution. A policy of strict non-violence would only lead to our demise. We needed an organization that would fight for real gains and have the capacity to defend it against the racist violence of the ruling class.

Malcolm X and Revolutionary Nationalism

Malcolm X spoke to the need for revolution with more conviction and force than any other leader of the 1960's. Malcolm was never the leader of a mass movement. However, his ability to express the needs and aspirations of black people made him extremely influential with militant black people.

Malcolm first became well known as a spokesman for the Nation of Islam. As a Muslim, Malcolm's views differed from King's in two fundamental ways. First, Malcolm was a separatist, not an integrationist. Malcolm believed that racism was at the heart of American society. He believed that white people would under no circumstances agree to black and white equality. Therefore, struggling for integration was pointless. To Malcolm, we would only win real material gains and dignity if we separated from white people. Malcolm called for black self-determination and an independent black nation.

Second, Malcolm was a militant. He did not believe in non-violent civil disobedience. Malcolm believed that we had to defend ourselves and fight for our liberation "by any means necessary."

Malcolm was the first Muslim leader to popularize black nationalism as a political concept. But Malcolm's views on separatism and nationalism were not new to our people. Ever since Africans were first enslaved and brought to America, there have been movements to return to Africa or find other means of independence from the white oppressors. Leaders such as Cuffee, Trotter, Blyden, and Garvey fought for black separatism. Like Malcolm, they believed our culture and heritage was being destroyed. They thought it was impossible for the white oppressors to deal with black people as equals.

As a Muslim, Malcolm said that we should demand our own piece of land for an independent black nation-state. This would be payment for "310 years of slave labor." This idea had also been put forward before. Not only black nationalists, but also the Communist Party developed such a position during the late 1920's. They said that black people should have the right to form a nation in the "black belt" of the deep South. Black people formed a majority of the population in the area following the Piedmont, extending from Virginia through Georgia and Alabama into east Texas, at least up through 1930. The idea was that this area would become an independent black nation.

Much of Malcolm's inspiration for black nationalism came from Africa. In the 1950's and 1960's the African struggle for national independence was winning African self-determination and political separation from colonial rule. Malcolm felt that black people in this country should maintain a strong connection with the African struggle. We should view ourselves as "Africans" and adopt the African demand of national self-determination as our own.

The idea of forming a separate black nation never gained a mass following in America. Since World War II, black people have not been concentrated in any one area of America. Most of us now live in cities throughout the country – Detroit, Philadelphia, Newark, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Birmingham, etc. We work in factories and shops which are at the center of the American economy. We do not have a distinct territory or economy like the nations of Africa. To form a separate nation would mean a mass migration out of our homes and communities.

Also, the fact is that we build America. There is no America separate from our history of toil and struggle. We deserve our rightful share of economic and political power in this country. And in such a racist country as America, a separate black nation on this continent, without a revolutionary, anti-racist government in America as a whole, could only be a giant ghetto or reservation.

Finally, the masses of black people today no longer consider themselves "Nigerian" or "African" any more than white people consider themselves "British" or "European." Our roots are in Africa, but we have lived in America for nearly 400 years. Today we are black Americans, not Africans.

For all of these reasons, black nationalism as a political strategy was not what was genuinely appealing about Malcolm. Malcolm's real appeal – like Marcus Garvey's – was his appeal to our pride in our own identity, history, and future. He spoke openly to the fact that white people cannot destroy our humanity or intelligence. He exposed the myths of the "American dream." He made it clear that our oppression was caused by white racism, not our inferiority. He declared that white rule was only temporary, and that one day we would achieve power. He spoke to our sense of justice.

After Malcolm's break with the Muslims in 1964, he spoke more and more about the need to overthrow the profit system of capitalism and imperialism. He focused on the economic and political power of the white capitalists as the source of our oppression. Capitalism is inherently racist because all the major industries are owned by the capitalists, a tiny minority of whites, who exploit black workers and oppress all black people in order to make more money and maintain their power.

Malcolm was also an internationalist. He stressed that our struggle in America had to be linked to the struggles in Africa and throughout the world to overthrow imperialism. We should look beyond the boundaries of the United States to keep our oppression in its proper perspective.

Malcolm was a very militant and dedicated spokesperson for the black struggle. He was well read in our history and profoundly suspicious of white people. Yet, after his second trip to Mecca, Malcolm began to abandon the philosophy of black nationalism. In the last year of his life, he appeared frequently at white socialist forums. Not long before his death, he wrote:

"...when I was in Algeria in May, in Ghana, I was speaking with the Algerian ambassador who is extremely militant and is a revolutionary in the true sense of the word...When I told him that my political, social and economic philosophy was black nationalism, he asked me very frankly, well, where did that leave him? Because he was white. He was an African, but he was Algerian, and to all appearances, he was a white man. And he said if I define my objective as the victory of black nationalism, where does that leave him? Where does that leave revolutionaries in Morocco, Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania? So he showed me where I was alienating people who were true revolutionaries dedicated to overturning the system that exists on this earth by any means necessary.

So I had to do a lot of thinking and reappraising of my definition of black nationalism. Can we sum up the solutions 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 the black people in this country." (From Malcolm X Speaks, George Breitman, ed., New York: Merit Publishers, 1965, p. 160)

This shift was very impressive to me. I knew from personal experience that most black folks did not seek absolute separation from white people. And it always seemed impossible that in America black people alone could overturn the capitalist system. What we seek is equality, dignity, and freedom from oppression. And what we need to win these is a unified struggle of all oppressed and exploited people.

By the end of his life, Malcolm X himself saw the possibility of fighting for black and white dignity through joint work with revolutionary whites. When he was struck down in Harlem in 1965,

Malcolm was still formulating how real unity could be accomplished. He did not yet have a concrete program for making a revolution. That task was left for the future revolutionaries.

The Panthers and Black Power

Malcolm deeply influenced a number of black revolutionary organizations of the 1960's. The black Panthers and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers were politically the most important for me and for many poor and working-class black people. But the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was also influential. SNCC led southern voter registration drives in the early 1960's. It became a symbol of black power after Stokely Carmichael became its leader in 1966. SNCC was more important to more middle-class college students than to workers.

The Panthers, the League, SNCC, and the whole black power movement was built on the separatist trend in Malcolm's thought. But they also built on the revolutionary internationalist and anti-imperialist trends in his thought. They moved toward the view that in order to be truly anti-racist, it was necessary to become socialist.

The Panthers were best known for "picking up the gun." Like Malcolm, they believed that nothing short of a violent revolution would win real gains for black people. The Panthers understood and publicized the fact that the whole American state – the laws, the cops, the courts, the jails – do *not* give justice. The state simply enforces the racist rule of the white capitalist bosses. The Panthers encouraged black people to arm ourselves against the racist state apparatus.

The Panthers had a ten-point program for black liberation. The Panther program included such demands as full employment, decent housing, an end to white exploitation of the black community, reparations for the exploitation and mass murder of black people, an end to police brutality, freedom for black prisoners, and the right of black people to be judged in court by juries of other black people. The program spoke to the need for revolution and for the expropriation of business and housing under community control.

There was a belief underlying the Panther program that the black community was like an oppressed African nation. The methods of the African liberation struggle could therefore be applied to the black community. Black people could be liberated through community control of community resources and armed struggle. Fred Hampton sometimes spoke of building "socialism in one community." But the black community needed the economic power of the whole American economy to prosper. In reality it was impossible to separate the black community from the rest of society in the way a colony like Angola or Mozambique could be separated from a colonial power such as Portugal. This was a confusion in the Panther outlook.

Further, the Panther program failed to provide a real concrete strategy for black community organization, or a link with the black working class. The Panthers movement relied too much on the gun and publicity, and too little on solid community and workplace organizing.

To actually win some of the just demands of the Panther program would have required constant education and organization in the community. It would have meant beginning with a few dedicated organizers and building on their example. The Panthers never provided the black community with consistent, grass-roots leadership. Rather, they chose to try to inspire black people to act. They substituted heroism and gun-toting militance for painstaking organizing. The tragic consequences of that approach are well known to us all.

The Panthers understood the power of the state. But they underestimated how swiftly and brutally the capitalists would act to smash their small movement. The state could do this because the Panthers did not have a powerful base in the black working class and community. The Panthers picked up the gun before they had the majority of black people organized. The result was that they were systematically exterminated, at no real cost to the capitalists. Those who survived dropped out of the organization or sold out. If the Panthers had built a mass base, they could not have been destroyed so easily.

I, like so many other black militants, was impressed with the boldness and courage of the Black Panthers. The Panthers attracted a number of serious, revolutionary black youth. That these courageous

brothers and sisters were murdered before the people as a whole were ready to move was heartbreaking to me.

The main lesson of the Panthers was that before we put our youth up against the capitalist state in armed battle, we must have brought the struggle to its final stage. The active majority of workers in this country, white as well as black, will have to support the idea of making a revolution. Millions of working people will have to be out in the streets, ready to take state power. We will have to have our own well-organized defense guards and militias. Only then will we have the power to win over the ranks of the capitalist army. Only then will we be able to take on the capitalist state and win.

The experience of the Panthers was important for maintaining a perspective on what would really be needed in America for a revolution. It was not enough just to talk about "black power" – a phrase that meant many things to many people – and pick up a gun. Black militants had to be linked with a source of real power. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers correctly identified that source of power: the point of production, the factories, the working class.

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers

The league of Revolutionary Black Workers centered their organizing in the Detroit auto plants. The league viewed the working class as the real center of power for revolutionary change:

"A union of workers is power. They can, if they so decide, control the economy of a country as large and powerful as the USA simply by calling a general strike." (From "Inner City Voice," Nov. 1969, in Dan Georgakas, *Detroit: I do Mind Dying*, N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, p. 83)

But the League shared with the Panthers a black separatist perspective in the working class. They believed that all white workers were basically bought off by U.S. imperialism. According to the League, the white ruling class exploited black workers and the colored peoples of other countries and divided the spoils with white workers. The League saw the racial line between black and white workers as putting the white workers on the side of the white bosses.

This concept created a consistent contradiction in the League's work. The Detroit auto plants, like most plants in basic industry, have a thoroughly mixed workforce of both black and white workers. White workers, while given some privileges by the bosses to divide the workforce, cannot escape the effects of low wages, layoffs, terrible health and safety conditions, speedup, forced overtime, and foreman harassment. These conditions affect all workers in the plant, and when they get bad enough, they push white workers into following any truly militant leadership, black or white. The League rejected the support of white workers, in some cases discouraging white workers from staying out of the plants during strikes. This severely weakened the League's base, not only among white workers, but also among black workers, who were more inclined to work with militant whites. The black working class has never had as strong separatist leanings as black middle class intellectuals or the black power movement's leaders. Particularly in times of real strikes and upsurge in the class struggle, most black workers look for the maximum possible unity to strengthen strikes or struggles. All workers know that such unity is essential to victory.

The other trait that the League shared with the Panthers was adventurism. The League oriented toward wildcat strikes – illegal strikes organized on the shop floor without forcing union authorization. Since the League had not taken over union leadership, workers who walked out had no protection. After every League-led wildcat, large numbers of League militants were fired. The League also tended to glorify individual acts of courage, such as physical assaults on foremen. This also got many of their militants fired.

The result was that the League was a short-lived organization. The League's forerunner, the Inner City Voice, began making contacts with black auto workers in 1967, and helped lead the 1968 Dodge Main wildcat. That wildcat brought about the formation of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM). Over the course of 1968-1969, the Revolutionary Union Movement idea caught on throughout Detroit, and a number of RUM caucuses were formed. There were RUMS at the Eldon Avenue Plant (ELRUM), Jefferson Assembly (JARUM), Mack Stamping (MARUM), Cadillac (CADRUM), Dodge

Truck (DRUM II), Mount Road Engine (MERUM), Ford Rouge (FRUM), United Parcel Service (UPRUM), the Detroit News (NEWRUM), and other Detroit-area workplaces.

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers itself was formed in June 1969 to oversee and unite the caucuses. But almost as soon as the caucuses were formed, illegal job actions and individual confrontations with management decimated the League's ranks. By 1971 – only two years later – the League was almost dissolved as an organizing force. Divisions had already emerged in 1969 between people who wanted to rebuild the plant caucuses and a group around James Forman, who wanted to launch a national Black Workers Congress. In June 1971 a group around Ken Cockrel split and began to turn to more community activities and reformist politics. After these splits, some individual worker militants remained active in the plants and participated in the 1973 wildcats. But the League itself was dead.

Still, the League's view that black workers should be in the vanguard of the revolutionary movement to overthrow capitalism was very important. The league called itself Marxist and sought to provide a Marxist analysis of black oppression. It pointed to the historical exploitation of black people in America as a result of the white capitalists' need for black labor.

American society is based on the private ownership of all the means of production – the factories, hospitals, stores, offices, and even the land – by a tiny group of white capitalists. The vast majority of the population, black and white, is working class. As workers we own or control none of the means of production. All we really own is our ability to work, our labor power. To survive, we sell our labor power to the capitalists. The capitalists try to get our labor power as cheaply as possible. Even in the highest paying unionized factory jobs, we barely make a living wage. All the profits of the capitalists are derived from our labor. If we did not work, nothing would be produced. Society's wealth is produced by the working class, but we receive very few benefits from our labor.

The black community is overwhelmingly made up of workers. We have always been the most exploited and systematically oppressed group within the working class. We have always been forced to do the worst and hardest jobs. We have suffered from the racism of the white bosses. Sadly, we have all too often suffered from the racism of our white coworkers, too.

From the first day a black slave was brought to this country, we have been instrumental in building America. We built the capitalist factories, railroads, ports and cities. We cleared and developed the cotton plantations. And we have always done the worst, most backbreaking jobs. To this day the American economy is absolutely dependent on our labor.

The League saw the power of black people in our power as black workers. But in the spirit of "black power," they tried to deny the fact that, no matter how powerful we are as black workers, we cannot shut down the entire economy or make a revolution without white workers. In most cases it is impossible even to organize a union without unity between black and white.

It was a mistake for the League to identify white workers with the white bosses. There is an "aristocracy of labor" in the United States that has been partly bought off by imperialism. And that labor aristocracy is the main base of the sellout leaders of the unions – the labor bureaucracy. But even the labor aristocrats are having a hard time of it. As the capitalists lay them off and cut their real wages, even they are beginning to fight back.

The leadership of the union movement is completely committed to capitalist rule and opposes all militant action by the workers. White bureaucrats, like Doug Fraser and Ray Williams – but also black bureaucrats like Marc Stepp and Tom Turner – all play this role. These bureaucrats have a certain following among the ranks. Many white workers, but also black workers, are duped into going along with their sellout policies. But the overwhelming majority of the working class, both black and white, can never be duped into complete solidarity with the bosses. The bosses exploit all workers too much for that to happen. When the conditions get bad enough, the vast majority of workers will struggle against the union bureaucrats, the bosses, and the capitalist system as a whole.

Most of the militants from the League dropped out of political activity after the League's split in 1971. But those who remained in the worker's movement came to this same conclusion. They began to work with Marxist organizations that included white workers and revolutionary intellectuals. They began

to emphasize the class line between the workers and the bosses more than the race line between black and white workers. Anyone who stays in the working class and wants to fight for change comes to this position sooner or later.

This was the position that I came to. Black people must play leading role in the class struggle between the workers and the capitalists. Only in this way can we overthrow the racist system of capitalism and imperialism. The working class needs unity between black and white to wage an effective class struggle. It is the obligation of all true revolutionaries to fight for that unity. As black revolutionaries, we have the obligation to struggle with militant whites, instead of just dismissing them as hopeless racists and turning our backs on them. There can be no real "black power" without workers' power. The Revolutionary Workers League (RWL) is the only organization currently in existence that provides the leadership necessary for the attainment of this goal.

A Brief Background on Black Oppression

The Revolutionary Workers League (RWL) is a Marxist organization. As a Marxist organization, the RWL analyzes the oppression of black people from the standpoint of the material causes of that oppression. The RWL puts forward a program of practical measures for the liberation of black people, based on the material conditions of this society.

All workers are exploited and oppressed by the capitalist system. But black workers are, in Marxist terms, "superexploited" and "specially oppressed" beyond capitalism's general exploitation and oppression. Black workers have the worst, lowest paying jobs. We have inadequate housing, health care, education.

Beyond superexploitation, black people face racist oppression. We face institutional racism – the systematic discrimination which keeps us in the lowest portion in this society. And we face individual racism – the discrimination of white people viewing and treating us as inferior.

The distinct nature of the exploitation and oppression we face is rooted in the legacy of slavery. The enslavement of black people was a foundation of American society. It is the most important fact in our black experience. It makes our oppression different from the oppression of any other people.

Slavery made us the most exploited laborers in this country. It placed us at the bottom of the workforce. It segregated us, legally and physically, from the rest of society. Yet our slave labor was the backbone of the American economy. We have always performed some of the most important and profitable work for the American ruling class.

Slavery also established the patterns of brutal abuse and vicious racism against black people. The enslavement and degradation of our people is one of the greatest atrocities in the history of humanity. As slaves we were treated and viewed as animals. We were deemed biologically inferior to whites. The racist rulers created a society in which our black skin was made into a badge of inferiority. We were looked down on, regardless of our skills or our accomplishments.

Yet, for better or for worse, slavery also made us into black Americans. Our African identity and heritage were largely destroyed. Slaves were brought from many different parts of Africa. Different African peoples were mixed and distributed throughout Latin America, the Caribbean, and North America. We were forced to develop our own patterns and traditions. These were based on remnants of different African traditions, our collective response to the conditions of slavery, and the influence of the white rulers. As black Americans we were confronted with a special struggle. We had to fight not only for a decent living, but also for freedom, equality, and proper recognition in the society which our own labor had built.

Surprisingly little was changed by the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. We were "free," but we lacked economic or political power. Within a decade after the Civil War, Jim Crow laws, black codes, and state-supported Klan violence institutionalized the segregation that had existed under slavery. We were still denied legal rights and access to decent housing, education and public facilities. Literal slavery on the plantations was changed only for the debt slavery of sharecropping. Most black people could not

escape the plantation system until the period from World War I to World War II. For those who moved north in the "great migration," the reality of poverty and racist segregation moved with them.

The line that had separated slave labor from free labor remained in the form of a sharp line between black and white workers and farmers. The southern populist movement of the 1890's was never really able to unite black and white workers. The white craft unions of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) excluded black people and all production workers. Prior to the 1930's, only radical labor movements, such as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the Communist Party (CP) consistently fought against racism and for unity of black and white. But these movements were very small. Black organizations such as the NAACP, the Urban League, the African Blood Brotherhood, the Universal Negro Improvement Association, were also never able to make significant gains for black people.

It was not until the organization of the big industrial unions in the 1930's that some progress for black workers was made. For the first time, production workers were organized into unions. Black workers were among the unionized workers. This brought the first important impulse to breaking down job segregation, at least in the hardest industrial work. The higher wages and benefits, relatively greater job security, and contract rights to non-discrimination afforded by unionization were the greatest single improvement in black people's living standards and rights since Emancipation.

But the unions quickly fell under the control of racist labor bureaucrats. Black workers remained, even those in the unions, in the worst jobs. The unions did far too little to combat racist hiring and promotion practices. They did virtually nothing to deal with the racist segregation off the job.

It would take another great influx of black workers into the big unions such as the UAW, Steelworkers and Rubber Workers, in order to bring further change. This did not come until the late 1950's and 1960's. It was also during the 1950's and 1960's that mass demonstrations of the Civil Rights Movement began to force systematic legal changes. But none of these partial gains have solved the basic poverty and racism black people face.

Overcoming White Racism and Overthrowing Capitalism

The Revolutionary Workers League believes that the only way to overcome our oppression is to overthrow capitalism. The key to eliminating superexploitation of black workers is expropriating the capitalist' wealth. We must take over all the major industries, banks, and land. To prevent a new class of bosses and exploiters from emerging, we must make this property collective property. It must be publicly owned and worker-controlled. The government must then plan the economy so the basic needs of the people can be met. Black workers must have a leading role in such a workers' government and economy. Jobs, housing, health care, utilities, education – all these things must be guaranteed rights of the people. With a well-planned collectively owned economy, everyone could be guaranteed a life of plenty. The RWL calls such an economic system a workers', or socialist economy. We need to replace capitalism with a workers' economy to put an end to the superexploitation of black people.

The struggle to eliminate racism will be more complicated. Racism has been built up over many generations. It will take time, even after a revolution, to fully eradicate racism. Still, there are material cases for racism and material means for wiping it out.

Institutional racism has always arisen from the fact that the capitalist rulers can make a greater profit by working black people harder and at lower pay. Slave labor was the most profitable way to build up the plantation system. Superexploitation of black labor brings extra profits to the monopoly corporations. The bosses also know that fostering racial divisions between black and white workers weakens the struggle of all poor and working people. Such division makes it easier for the capitalists to maintain control.

The systematic racist practices of the white capitalist power structure can be eliminated by overthrowing capitalist rule. Getting black people into true political power, and promoting truly just policies under a workers' government can eliminate institutional racism.

Individual racist prejudice among white people is a harder problem. It has many causes. One is simple ignorance. White people live in communities largely segregated from black people. The capitalist-controlled education system and media put forward racist stereotypes of black people. Most white people are ignorant of the history and reality of black people. Such ignorance makes them susceptible to the prejudices consciously fostered by the white bosses.

The principal material basis of racism among white workers is the competition the capitalists foster between white and black workers for a decent living. The capitalists use this competition to strengthen white prejudices against black people. They give white workers material privileges and advantages over black workers. Whether it is better wages, a chance at a better job, better housing, better educational facilities, whatever – the bosses try to give white workers a few extra crumbs to hold on to. The bosses give white workers a little extra and then say, "Stick with us and you'll be all right. But watch out for black people – They're out to get what little you've got." The bosses use this strategy to divide and weaken the working class. White racism is the greatest single weakness of the American working class.

Capitalist competition and the extra privileges given to white workers lay the foundation for racism. The capitalists then exploit white worker's general ignorance of black people by having their schools, media, churches, politicians, etc. put forward racist stereotypes. All this combines to create racist attitudes in white workers. These attitudes have become deep-seated. But the real causes of these attitudes go back to the basic needs of capitalism.

If we eliminate capitalism and therefore the material basis of racism, then we can eliminate racism itself over time. Whites are not born racist. The future generations born under a socialist society will see racism as a primitive and vicious by-product of capitalism.

To accomplish the overthrow of capitalism, black people need the support of whites. It is all too obvious that with only about a tenth of the population, black people could not make a revolution alone. If there is to be a revolution, white workers will also have to develop a revolutionary outlook.

Fortunately, this is something we can confidently expect. All workers are oppressed and exploited by capitalism. All workers objectively need a socialist revolution. This provides the basis for a multi-racial struggle against the racist capitalist system. To build such a struggle, revolutionaries must fight against every manifestation of racism and discrimination at the same time give leadership to black and white workers who want to fight against capitalist exploitation. Black workers must unite with white workers in order to overthrow capitalism. But white workers must also unite with black workers. This means white workers must be willing to support our struggle for our equality and accept militant black leaders as part of a united, multi-racial working-class leadership. On that basis we can have unified working class struggle against capitalism.

RWL and the Fight for Black Liberation

Wherever we can, the RWL fights against every sort of racism – from the denial of food stamps to individual black workers, to filing grievances on racist promotion practices, to defending black people against Klan/Nazi terror. Any group that calls itself revolutionary must fight for immediate and partial gains for black people.

A revolutionary organization must also have broader demands which link the struggle of black people to the struggle of all workers and poor people against capitalism. Some of the key demands that the RWL fights for include the following:

1. *Jobs for all.* We demand secure jobs and decent incomes. More jobs can be created by shortening the work week to 30 hours without reducing pay – "30 for 40." We also need a massive public workers program at union wages. All wages must have full cost-of-living allowances to protect against inflation.
2. *Free, quality health care for all.* Nationalize the health care industry under workers' control. Free child-care, abortion and birth control on demand.
3. *Low-cost, quality housing for all.* Nationalize large-scale rental housing and put it under tenants' control. Immediately upgrade all public housing. No evictions, no foreclosures.

4. *Control prices through democratically elected price committees.* We want community workers' councils to have the right to examine the books of all companies to roll back prices. Guaranteed energy, transportation, food, clothing and other goods at low, stable prices.
5. *Free, quality education for all, from elementary school through college.* Open admissions, no tuition, no tracking. Worker-student-teacher control of education. We demand more black teachers and a curriculum that gives a true history of black people and of the racist capitalist system. Support busing and real affirmative action programs.
6. *Stop police brutality and racist murder.* We should organize armed self-defense committees, linked to the unions. We must defend ourselves against state/Klan violence. No dependence on the cops or courts – for labor/black defense. Free all class-war prisoners and victims of racist frame-ups!
7. *Throw out the labor bureaucrats.* For union democracy and membership control of the unions. We demand class-struggle black, women's and youth leadership in the unions. No more sellouts! We want militant union action to win jobs and justice. Organize the unorganized. Bring the unemployed into the labor movement.
8. *Stop imperialist attacks on the oppressed neocolonial countries.* No draft, no military recruiting. Abolish the military budget – not one person and not one penny for the "defense" of imperialism. Abolish taxes on poor and working people. Abolish the CIA/FBI.
9. *Open the capitalists' books.* Nationalize failing corporations, without compensation to their wealthy owners, under worker's control.
10. *Build a workers' party,* based on the unions, black community organizations and other poor and workers' groups. The workers' party must fight for *a multi-racial workers' government to expropriate the capitalists* and build a rationally planned economy based on human needs, not profit.

The RWL fights for demands such as these in all its arenas of work. The RWL now concentrates its work in the unions. As a Marxist organization, RWL looks to the working class to lead the socialist revolution. We look to black workers, as the most militant and politically conscious section of the working class, to be in the vanguard of the workers' movement. For these reasons, we put an emphasis on the industrial unions. The unions are the only mass organizations of the working class. And in industrial unions such as the UAW, the United Mine Workers, the Steelworkers, the Teamsters, and in the service unions such as the SEIU, there are large numbers of militant black workers.

In the unions we build independent caucuses which fight for leadership on the basis of anti-racist, class-struggle programs. Our work focuses on black workers. We work to develop militant black workers into our caucus and union leaders. But we also work with white workers. We fight to overcome any racist tendencies they may have. Within our caucuses, white workers learn to accept black leadership. We take up issues pertaining to shop floor grievances and union democracy. But we also demand that the unions use their power for political purposes.

RWL-supported caucuses have waged campaigns to support South African workers' struggles against apartheid. We have attempted to force the unions in which we have a presence to build a mass labor and black community demonstrations and defense squads to fight against Klan/Nazi terror and police violence. We have demanded that our unions take action to fight the recent rise in racist terror exemplified by the Atlanta murders. We have tried to force our unions to publicly speak against social service cutbacks and regressive tax hikes which punish the poor. We fight for a break with the Democratic and Republican parties of the bosses and for the formation of an independent workers' party to fight for a workers' government.

Outside of the unions, the RWL is developing a more active orientation to the black community and black students. We are involved in the struggle against cutbacks of affirmative action and minority student grants and programs. We fight for the defense of busing programs and their extension into the suburbs. We have built coalitions against Klan/Nazi violence, in which we have tried to link the black community with the organized working class. We have organized among unemployed workers and have attempted to build unemployed committees tied to the unions. We defend workers against utility shutoffs

and evictions. We defend workers against racist frame-ups. We are organizing among gay people – in Detroit, primarily among black gays and women to defend against racist and sexist harassment of black gays and women.

Currently we are working to build a class-struggle caucus within the National Black Independent Political Party (NBIPP). Our caucus will fight to make the NBIPP a militant, anti-capitalist organization completely independent of the Democrats and Republicans. We want the NBIPP to establish firm roots in the black community and in the working class. We want the NBIPP to have an action orientation so it can grow and attract militant black workers, youth, students and community activists. The NBIPP must orient toward the black working class if it is to grow and take a leading role in the movement for a mass workers' party.

The RWL's highest priority right now is winning militant blacks to a revolutionary perspective. The RWL must win black workers to our group in order to be politically effective. We must develop black leadership in our group in order to be able to win black workers and lead a revolution.

Black workers are particularly qualified to provide leadership to the whole working class. We are generally the most militant section of the American working class, because we are the poorest and most oppressed. We have the least to lose of any American workers. This gives us the strongest will to fight. By making us the most oppressed section of the class, capitalism puts us in a good position to give leadership to the whole working class to overthrow capitalism and racism once and for all. Under a multi-racial leadership, in which black militants will play a leading role, the whole working class in the United States and internationally can win freedom from the chains of capitalist wage slavery and oppression.

The Revolutionary Workers League is a Leninist and Trotskyist organization. We believe that we must build a highly disciplined, international leadership for the workers' movement. We must organize an international vanguard party to coordinate and lead the struggles of all the oppressed. In the coming period it will be critical for us to build links with the workers' movements in the neocolonies. Our goal is to build an international organization which is truly representative of the world's population. Except for Japan, the advanced capitalist countries, such as the U.S., Germany and France, are mainly white. Even in these countries, however, people of color will play a more leading role than the numbers alone would indicate. But on a world scale, people of color are the large majority. Therefore, our goal must be to build an international party – and indeed, an international government – largely led by people of color.

The RWL's task is to build an international vanguard party, while at the same time building an integrated American vanguard party. To accomplish either goal we must win black revolutionaries to our perspective and our party.

Black workers are the most oppressed and overall the most politically advanced workers in America. There will be no revolution in America without the leadership of black people. This is why it is so crucial that black people become involved in the organizing that the Revolutionary Workers League is doing.

As black people we cannot separate our destiny in America from whites. Black and white unity is our only hope for liberation. Separation from truly revolutionary white people only delays the prospect of achieving real working-class unity.

No alliance with white people is easy. Even among revolutionaries, we must struggle against racist tendencies which are the inevitable result of an upbringing in America. But if the organization involved has an active perspective to develop black leadership and fight against racism in its own ranks, then the alliance is possible. The RWL has such a perspective and has demonstrated it in practice. All the comrades – white and black – of this organization have shown themselves to be real assets to the revolutionary struggle and genuine fighters for black liberation.

For all these reasons I appeal to my sisters and brothers to join me in revolutionary organizing. It is time for our long night in America to end. We must take control of our destinies. We must carry on the heroic fight of black fighters before us and bring our historic struggle to victory.

July 2, 1981
Detroit, Michigan