

TO GIVE VOICE AND FORM TO THE "RADICAL" PERSPECTIVE (1)

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A Paper Prepared for the Black Radical Congress Seminar
University of Toledo, September 18-20, 1998

THE PROJECT

The composition and operational environment of the Black Radical Congress (BRC) require that i re-phrase one of the questions to be addressed by this Seminar -- a question which is also the subject of this paper:

What political project best captures the potential to create and to sustain a broad anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist movement for national liberation and socialist development?

In a way, the question has already been answered: It was answered when BRC organizers began to discuss how best to counter the widespread disorientation among liberals and progressives. (2) The question was answered when the "Call" for the BRC opened by stating that new thinking, new vision, a new spirit of resistance, and a new movement of "Black radicalism" were required.

The BRC Principles of Unity answered the question, proclaiming the purpose of the BRC to be "to establish a 'center without walls' for transformative politics"; to push for a vision that links all struggles; to "strengthen radicalism as the legitimate voice of Black working and poor people, and to build organized resistance."

And, the question was answered in The Objective Situation (#13, #24, and especially #25, which stated the need "to rebuild Black radicalism as a current in every struggle and on every battlefield"), and most importantly, by those who responded to the Call, and made a commitment to build the BRC. People responded because a structure like the BRC is needed to aid in the rebuilding (i.e., reorientation and reorganization) of all revolutionary forces within U.S. borders. We responded to the Call because the "single issue" for us was the opportunity to unite, to coordinate our strengths, and develop, spread, and practice "radical" (i.e., revolutionary, and socialist) politics.

All of the above "answers" serve as the basis for my suggestion that the continuous and comprehensive expression of the "radical" perspective is "The Project" that will best capture the potential to generate and to sustain the movement in question. The Project requires that priority be given to the development of the BRC (already a type of revolutionary-democratic front or network) as the institutional framework through which to unite and coordinate the activities of BRC members, toward the goal of making 'radicalism the legitimate voice of oppressed peoples,' and to build people's institutions that will challenge and topple capitalist hegemony.

Realization of the potential of any other "single issue" is actually dependent upon the embrace of the "radical" perspective. And, the Project can't help but to engage the BRC in the praxis of political economy, and in every form of class struggle -- particularly, in political struggles, and in the formation of people's organizations -- while leading all oppressed classes and strata in revolutionary-democratic struggles, laying the foundations for socialist oriented social development. (3)

The Project is based on a common program designed to:

- 1) further develop and disseminate the "radical" perspective (ideo-theoretical development -- an all-encompassing and ruthless critique of capitalism, and promotion of a vision of the new society), and
- 2) inspire action programs, testing the perspective in practice, making the vision concrete. The programs are primarily undertaken by BRC members (organizations and individuals), but with other programs designed for joint action, and still others undertaken by BRC "central components".

OTHER ISSUES: THE NEED FOR PERVASIVE ORIENTATION

What can make a major difference for most other issues, and ensure that a struggle for economic security for everyone not remain within the context of bourgeois hegemony, is the development of revolutionary and socialist consciousness, and the construction of people's organizations that begin to challenge the U.S. state for control of the economic and political bases of power.

We don't know whether or when any single issue will arise with a mobilizing and transformative power similar to issues that arose in the 1960s. What we do know is that struggles around all issues need to be inspired by a "radical" perspective that connects all issues to each other, to underlying cause, and to desirable solutions.

If we begin, now, to do the theoretical and practical work required to develop and test the perspective on all "battlefronts," some "single issue" is more likely to arise -- and more the result of conscious struggle and not a spontaneous surprise. If so, we'd be in a better position to play a decisive role in its development, and to coordinate it as part of a strategic, comprehensive campaign to topple empire and transfer all power to the

people.

What if, in the past, We'd talked more about the need to take over public transportation, rather than merely struggle for a seat on the bus? How are future auto worker strikes likely to develop if a "radical" perspective pervades the society, encouraging auto workers (and everyone else) to think not merely about better wages and benefits, or of keeping the plant in the U.S., but to think about taking the industry out of private hands and into public ownership? What's likely to happen when tens of millions begin to act on the belief that economic security for everyone requires that everyone own the means of production, and that everyone directly participate in the policy formation and decision making of the governing political institutions of an emerging new socio-economic order?

The challenge to the BRC is this: To encourage people to question the legitimacy of "the system"; to aid the people in the development of coherent, critical analyses of the issues and struggles that they engage on a daily basis; to help them create a new way of understanding how the world works.

The best way to realize the potential for a broad, anti-capitalist movement, is for the BRC to raise its voice, and stamp its vision, on all issues and struggles.

CLASS STRUGGLE(S)

Working people in the U.S. know that they are "workers," and some of them may even consider themselves members of a "working class" ("in-itself"), but they don't know or act as if they should be digging the grave for the capitalist system, i.e., not enough of them consider themselves active participants in "class struggle" as most of us understand this term.

Objectively, class struggle unfolds in all issues and struggles, but the oppressed classes and strata lack the subjective factors needed for fundamentally transformative politics, i.e., revolutionary organization, and socialist consciousness.

Each of the individual and organizational members of the BRC are engaged in class struggle on a daily basis. Through the BRC, We seek to fulfill the major task for this period (stage?) of struggle: To engage the class struggle in its highest form, through the construction of a broad-based political institution which assumes and promotes the stand of the most revolutionary class vis-a-vis all issues and struggles.

Emphasis upon political struggles, and organization, is necessary because:

- 1) economic issues can't be fully resolved until there is a seizure of political power;
- 2) the oppressed classes must have their own organization(s), through which to promote and fight for their own interests, and to defeat those who rule;
- 3) participation in political struggles gives the oppressed classes greater opportunities to raise their class consciousness, sharpen their organizational skills, and to gain experience in

joint action with other organizations, classes, and strata.

The Project also engages the BRC in the ideological form of class struggle, which is of decisive importance under any circumstances, but especially so for this time and place, i.e., in "the belly of the beast," where the oppressed classes are still too heavily influenced by the ideology of the exploiting class, and during a period which demands that higher stages be reached through the development of democratic struggles inspired by a revolutionary orientation.

In Blood In My Eye, George Jackson reminded us that:

The whole situation can be reduced to a minority ruling clique engaging the people's vanguard elements for control of the masses. The ruling clique approaches its task with a "what to think" program; the vanguard elements have the much more difficult job of promoting "how to think."

A "how to think" program is one that explains "how the world works" from a materialist, as opposed to an idealist, standpoint. It explains the relation between "thinking" and "being" with the use of the dialectical method, and rejects mechanical and metaphysical methods. A "how to think" program uses the science of political economy as a major weapon in the general analysis and critique of the capitalist system, and as a weapon in the particular process of development of the "new radicalism," to analyze concrete issues as they arise in day-to-day struggles.

The first thing that makes it difficult to promote such a program is when "vanguard elements" are unable to articulate its content and design. Or, if they don't know where, or how, to begin putting the program to the test of practice. Others will fear the anticipated consequences of promoting such a program.

The next area of difficulty is based on not understanding or not caring -- that the program can't be promoted "from above" and without links to grassroot practice, as indicated by Antonio Gramsci, in his Prison Notebooks:

Marxist philosophy itself must be seen as a collective activity, involving not only the dissemination of ideas from above, but also the extension of critical intellectual activity in close links with the political practice of the movement, among ever-broadening sections of the population.

The challenge for the BRC in this respect is this: Not to just use the tools or display them among ourselves, but to share them with others. Or, to use the tools in a way that encourages others to grab hold of them, accept them as their own, become skilled and prolific in their use. We want everyone to be able to speak with a "radical" voice. Making this real is what the Project -- the BRC -- is about.

The consciousness of the oppressed classes must be developed

largely through struggles between opposing ways of viewing the relationships between people, and between people and nature. The BRC, and each of its members, must engage the people in struggles over ideas, essentially by conducting a thorough critique of all material and non-material elements of bourgeois culture.

As class struggle unfolds, in each of its forms, in all issues and struggles, conditions are created to advance the struggles for democratic rights toward the struggle for socialism.

REVOLUTIONARY-DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLES: LINKING SOCIALIST ORIENTATION TO CONCRETE ISSUES AND PEOPLE'S INSTITUTIONS

National liberation and socialist revolution won't fall from the sky, but require conscious development of subjective forces. These, in turn, must evolve through struggles based on concrete conditions, and the tasks that arise from them.

National and class struggle can only be crystallized through a sustained battle for democratic rights, in which the most revolutionary of the oppressed classes plays a consistent and leading role -- fighting not only for itself, but uniting with and fighting for all other oppressed classes and strata; fighting not only for all other oppressed classes and strata; fighting not only for democratic rights, but for national liberation and socialism.

The BRC, assuming the stand of the most revolutionary class, provides revolutionary orientation for these democratic struggles through the activity of its members as well as through BRC "central components," and serves as a pole around which all oppressed classes and strata, all democratic forces, can unite in struggle against the U.S. state.

The critical element in revolutionary-democratic struggles is the link established by connecting theory to practice -- by developing the orientation and systematized ideas about the need to abandon capitalism, with a vision of a revolutionary, socialist future that begins to take shape through the development of "new people," and the structures created to challenge existing property relations, and to serve the interests of the people.

THE PRACTICAL OPERATION OF THE BRC: "HOW IS THE WORK TO BE DONE?"

It's most important that We think long and hard about what the BRC is, and what it isn't. As We set the goal(s) for the year 2000, We must be clear about what We want the BRC to be, and about what it should be, taking the long range interests of the people and the needs and demands of the struggle as the criteria, and using the lessons of history and recent events to inform our decisions.

The need for reorientation comes into play here, to avoid the waste of energy, the confusion and frustration that come when the wrong goals are set, and when their anticipated outcomes aren't realized.

By what means do We plan to measure the progress of the BRC? By the number of times the BRC is mentioned by the U.S. media? By the number of people attending the next congress, or some march and

demonstration in NYC or D.C.? Or by the ever-increasing number of individuals and organizations involved in local and national struggles that articulate "radical" solutions for the causes of their misery?

The BRC is, at present, essentially a front or network, composed of individuals and organizations representing a range of political tendencies. It needs a structure and operating procedures (and program) suited to:

- 1) the purpose for which it was formed, and
- 2) the composition of the formation.

Key factors are: The need to maintain unity (through joint action and criticism); to coordinate activity (primarily occurring in local communities); to maximize the potential represented by the combination of resources, experience, and political will.

My understanding is that when the BRC meets in the year 2000, the primary aim is to lay a more solid foundation for an institution that will provide continuity for the comprehensive expression of the "Black radical perspective." The things that We do between now and that meeting should help us accomplish that goal. Between now and then, We will have had experience (theoretical and practical) upon which to lay this foundation with much assurance of success.

Let's say that the BRC was created for the purpose of developing, spreading, and practicing "radical" politics (i.e., to provide revolutionary orientation for democratic struggles; to thoroughly critique capitalism and imperialism; to inspire socialist development, largely through the creation and practice of people's organizations which challenge the U.S. state for power).

The consciousness and organization of the oppressed classes is developing on the base of existing organizations (members and non-members of the BRC), and the issues they take up, the struggles they conduct, day-to-day. Thus, the BRC has to determine how to fulfill its purpose through:

- 1) the mass-based activity of its individual and organizational members;
- 2) "central components" through which joint activity on local, regional and national levels is conducted, and coordinated.

So, what kind of "central components" are needed in order to:

- 1) further develop the perspective;
- 2) coordinate its spread, so that it influences "everyone" and enters into every area of social life;
- 3) assist and help strengthen existing organizations (in theoretical and practical respects), and inspire the creation of new, mass-based organizations and/or institutions that become centers of people's power?

The components could include:

- National, regional, and local "coordinating committees," whose duties would include, but not be limited to:
 - a) involving youth in study and struggle;
 - b) "institutional outreach," to link the BRC and its purpose, to churches, associations of professionals (e.g., social workers, journalists), media outlets, etc.;
 - c) to serve as centers/focal points for the BRC and the perspective; to hold forums and other events.

- National, regional and local study/research groups, linked to the "Battlefronts" and/or to existing issues and activities of BRC members. These would especially serve to link the systematized development of the perspective to practical struggles, and to the development of a conscious revolutionary class.

- The creation of at least one BRC theoretical journal, and one mass-oriented newspaper. Both of these could be linked to the existing publications of BRC members (e.g., a "BRC News Service"). Such a component could include among its concerns the creation of an audio-visual capacity, as well as the production of software and CD's.

Let's build the BRC as the institution necessary for providing continuity for, and comprehensive expression of, the "Black radical perspective"! ReBuild!

... [A] civilization maddened by its own perverse assumptions and contradictions is loose in the world. A Black radical tradition formed in opposition to that civilization and conscious of itself is one part of the solution. Whether the other oppositions generated from within Western society and without will mature remains problematical. But for now we must be as one.

Cedric J. Robinson
BLACK MARXISM: THE MAKING OF THE

BLACK RADICAL TRADITION

NOTES

1. The title for this paper was inspired by this passage from Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy*:

They have only to give an account of what is happening before their eyes and give voice to it. So long as they seek science and merely make systems, so long as they are at the beginning of the struggle, they see in poverty nothing but poverty, without seeing in it the revolutionary, subversive side that will overthrow the old society. From this moment, science, produced by the historical movement and linking itself to that movement in full consciousness, has ceased to be doctrinaire and has become revolutionary.

2. "We realized that in the absence of a strong black radical perspective, many progressives and liberals have found themselves moving to the right or becoming completely disoriented." Salim Muwakkil, quoting Abdul Alkalimat, "Black Radicalism: Where Do We Go From Here?", *In These Times*, July 12, 1998, pps. 14-16.

3. "... If we do not employ the phrase 'revolutionary democracy' as a stereotyped ceremonial phrase, as a conventional epithet, but reflect on its meaning, we find that to be a democrat means reckoning in reality with the interests of the majority of the people and not the minority, and that to be a revolutionary means destroying everything harmful and obsolete in the most resolute and ruthless manner." V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 337.

"We cannot be revolutionary democrats in the twentieth century, and in a capitalist country, if we fear to advance towards socialism." *Ibid.*, p. 360.