Congress of Afrikan People

Imamu Baraka: From Mayor to Mao-Thought

The history of the struggle for liberation from racist oppression in the United States is the story of radical aspirations of the black masses repeatedly betrayed by the empty promises of demagogues, both romantic and cynical. The promise of black liberation aboard segregation by marching behind Martin Luther King's pacifist liberalism, the promise of black power in the cities through community control—all proved to be illusions, broken against the reality of the capitalist social order.

Superficially, the black power movement of the 1960s seemed to have achieved a distorted “success.” By 1974 there were black mayors in Newark, Detroit, Gary, Los Angeles, Atlanta and Washington, D.C. “community school boards” were set up in New York and elsewhere; black professionals found new job opportunities in “minority business” and poverty program neighborhood centers. But for the black masses this “success” was illusory: black incomes were again falling relative to whites; black depression continued, mean ghetto straw bosses, community control meant strikebreaking, and the cops of the black capitalist state continued to shoot down ghetto youth.

Following the waning of the black power movement, an amalgam of Pan Africanism and Mao Tse-tung Thought has lately gained popularity in radical black nationalist circles. And one of the most flamboyant sellers of Mao-tickets to subjectively revolutionary black youth is Imamu Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones). His central vehicle in the Congress of African People (CAP).

While CAP claims to be Marxist-Leninist-Maoist, it is Baraka’s picture that appears on virtually all CAP pamphlets and his picture that dwarfs those of Marx and Lenin in the organization’s Newark meeting hall. To understand why CAP is it first necessary to know its leader. After a brief flirtation with the left he head of the New York City Fair Play, for (Cuba Committee at one point), Jones “came home” to Newark in the mid-1960s as a well-conned black poet and playwright.

During the Newark ghetto rebellion of 1967, Jones was beaten by the cops and arrested but quickly released. He was far more valuable to the racist Democratic Mayor Addonizio as a sharpshooting anti-communist, blaiming “outside agitators” of the “white left” (SDS) for the outburst of ghetto anger. In his book, Black Awakening in Capitalist America, Robert L. Allen describes how Baraka was the willing instrument of the cops against the left.

“In his capacity as spokesman for the United Brothers, Jones actively sought to quell the riots which developed after the murder of Martin Luther King. He believed that Black control of Newark could be achieved through the bullet, not the bullet. On April 12, 1968 he participated in a demonstration with John Haynes Matthews, Captain Charles Kingney, and Anthony Imperato, leader of a local right-wing white organization. During the interview, Jones suggested that white leftists were responsible for instigating the riots.”

Jones was not just another black militant in Newark: he was a real political power in the city. His cultural projects were funded by the government, and along with the Prudential Insurance Company (which had one of its offices of a 1971 youth uprising in Ceylon and Coal) he launched a drive to build up a black (capitalist) political machine and open a black mayor in Newark. In 1968 he formed the Black Caucus for that purpose, and by all accounts it was Jones who was a key to Kenneth Gibson’s electoral success in 1970.

Baraka Against Unions

Having become a successful power broker, Jones now had to face “the responsibilities of office.” From the capitalists’ viewpoint he passed the test with flying colors. When the Newark Teachers Union (NTU) struck in defiance of court orders in 1970, more than a hundred union members were arrested and more than 30 convicted of breaking a reactionary no-strike law. While elementary school solidarity demanded support for the union under attack, black nationalists were concerned only with the illusion of “community control.” It was the Young Lords and “black community leaders” whose “representatives kept the schools open” (New York Times, 7 February 1970).

When the NTU struck again the next year, the school board did its best to recreate the atmosphere of the 1968 NYC teachers’ strike, mobilizing “community leaders” in the service of strikebreaking. Jones’ youth group attacked some of the picketing unionists. Fortunately, the attempt to pacify the city along racial lines was so transparently second-rate that it was largely irresistible: while the union’s president and 30 percent of his membership were black.

But there were the days before when Baraka became a “Marxist-Leninist-Mao-Tse-tung thinker.” Now CAP’s newspaper, Unity and Struggle, “frankly admits” errors and makes “ruthless self-criticism” of its past mistakes (which ones?). Now they are all for the class struggle, but the April 1975 issue of Unity and Struggle is preparing once again to line up against the teachers who were faced with massive layoffs in Newark:

“If the Newark teachers go out on strike will they be striking for all the workers and for a just cause or will they be being used by Shanker and his bosses. Nelson Rockefeller?

“Do all the support the struggle of workers against corrupting board officials, and the capitalist system in general. But at the same time do we not support the game used by the capitalists to divide the workers whether it be an anti-community teachers strike in Newark or a race war like the one that was started in Boston.”

So for all its “ruthless criticism” of “narrow nationalism” in the past, for all its denunciations of “Jasclst” Gibson who is now seen as a “tool of capitalist rule,” CAP still lines up with the bourgeoisie against the workers’ struggles! For this tragedy of Black power is that the masses of us are not adequate—having in the past excused such betrayals as the ruthless suppression of the riots in Newark—we will no doubt soon be hearing of the continued on page 10.
Baraka...

(continued from page 7)

"two lines" which make a struggle against layoffs "objectively reactionary." CAP's "Revolutionary Nationalism"

The Congress of African People is not the only opposition which has traveled from cultural black nationalism to "Marxist-Leninist-Maoist"-Pan-Africanist. Baraka, pan-Ad Winterbotham's leading advocates of the seven principles of Kwadwo (Maulana Karenga, Baraka, Pan-African Congress at a protest in 1974 declared the socialist rhetoric of Nyerere and other African leaders. But while "African socialism" is the ideology of petty-bourgeois bureaucracy seeking to transform themselves into a capitalist class under conditions of extreme backwardness, the recent popularity of socialism among U.S. blacks represents in part a subjectively left-wing response to the manifest bankruptcy of "black power.

Yet the very abstractness of the new rhetoric was its major attraction for leftist-moving black nationalists, making it possible for slick, cynical opportunists to use the "Marxist-Leninist-Maoist" nationalism whose "socialism" was still very much anti-U.S.-CAP not only in a "revolutionary nationalism" which declares: it is the Congress of African People's view that black people are an oppressed nation in the United States as against that of Nyerere and other Africanists like Baraka to elaborate a "socialist" which rigorously distinguished between "nationalism." It declares: "It is the Congress of African People's view that black people are an oppressed nation in the United States" (Black Scholar, January/February 1975). This position paper sees that blacks are situated in key industries in the U.S. and lack the economic-territorial basis to secede, yet CAP still calls black people a nation. This is nothing but the old cultural-nationalism up in which is the U.S.

Blacks in the U.S. are a color/race caste segregated at the bottom of the working class. The opposition of black workers in the country's industrial structure will give them a vital role in building a united revolutionary Vanguard. Moreover, the struggle for the democratic rights of racial minorities and against the special oppression of black people must be a major component of the proletarian revolution in the U.S. The forging of a black Trotskyist workers party is the only means to prepare the overthrow of capitalism which is at the root of black oppression. It is therefore time to break with that black state—whether in Africa, the old "Black Belt" of the South or northern ghettos. Workers must act now.

And while Garveyism was able to demonstrate good sense in returning the crown and its statement should have been respected in the face of an inevitable attack by vastly superior forces, when it could only lose. But their experience with imperialism, the Cambodian government likewise had every reason for inspecting in the box like to the domestic equivalents of such reactionary African socialists" as Leopold Stengel. CAP not only in a "revolutionary nationalism" which declares: it is the Congress of African People's view that black people are an oppressed nation in the United States as against that of Nyerere and other Africanists like Baraka to elaborate a "socialist" which rigorously distinguished between "nationalism." It declares: "It is the Congress of African People's view that black people are an oppressed nation in the United States" (Black Scholar, January/February 1975). This position paper sees that blacks are situated in key industries in the U.S. and lack the economic-territorial basis to secede, yet CAP still calls black people a nation. This is nothing but the old cultural-nationalism up in which is the U.S.

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Facing the Future ... And the Past

...Boston Busing (continued from page 12)

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The Future Facing the Past

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