

Answer to 'Muhammad Speaks'

Was African Liberation Day 'escapist'?

By MALIK MIAH

In the June 1 *Muhammad Speaks*, Brother Lonnie Kashif levels a serious charge against the thousands of Blacks who demonstrated in the streets in more than 30 cities May 26 in solidarity with the liberation struggles in Southern Africa. He charges that these demonstrators were into "Pan-African 'Escapism,'" attempting to "escape" from the real day-to-day problems Black people face in America.

Is there any truth to Brother Kashif's charge? Is there a relationship between the struggle of Afro-Americans and the liberation movements on the African continent? Are demonstrations like May 26 irrelevant to the struggles Blacks are waging here?

These questions are not new to the Black movement. In fact, they were discussed more than 50 years ago with the rise of the movement led by Marcus Garvey after World War I. The Garvey movement had hundreds of thousands of members in the U.S., the Caribbean, and Africa. It promoted Black awareness, which included support for the African revolution.

Marcus Garvey's publication, *Negro World*, was banned in the French colonies and British West Africa because

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it indicted European imperialist rule in Africa and championed struggles against colonialism.

Garvey did not separate the struggle of Blacks in America from what happened to their brothers and sisters around the world.

Malcolm X

In the 1960s, the figure best exemplifying the interconnection of the Afro-American struggle with the colonial revolution sweeping Africa, Asia, and Latin America was Brother Malcolm X.

After Malcolm left the Nation of Islam he traveled twice to Africa and the Middle East to meet with African leaders.

In 1964 he founded the Organization of Afro-American Unity. Malcolm viewed the OAAU as a fighting instrument of Black communities from Harlem to Watts, as well as an instrument of Pan-African solidarity and action.

Unlike Brother Kashif, Malcolm considered solidarity with the African struggle against U.S. and European imperialism to be an important part of the struggle here.

A look at how the present movement arose, and the significance of the actions held thus far, also refutes Brother Kashif's charge of "escapism."

In the fall of 1971, three Afro-American activists went to the liberated territory in Mozambique held by FRELIMO (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique). Among them was Owusu Sadaukai, then head of Malcolm X Liberation University in Greensboro, N.C., and now co-chairman of the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC).

They held discussions with the guerrilla leaders on how Blacks here could aid their struggle. After these discussions Sadaukai, along with the Youth Organization for Black Unity (YOBU—a nationalist, primarily student or-



Militant/Baxter Smith

Demonstration of 3,000 Blacks on May 26 in New York City. An ongoing action campaign against U.S. complicity with oppression in Southern Africa can both aid the liberation movements there and advance the Black struggle here at home.

ganization based in North Carolina) and other Pan-African nationalist organizations, issued the call for the first African Liberation Day demonstration, held on May 27, 1972.

The focus of the first demonstration was captured in the slogan, "We are an African people." Applying many lessons of the antiwar movement, the organizers sought to build the broadest action possible. They welcomed support from a wide range of people, including Charles Diggs of the Congressional Black Caucus, Imamu Baraka of the Congress of African People, Angela Davis of the Communist Party, and Andrew Pulley, vice-presidential candidate of the Socialist Workers Party.

The actions, which focused on Washington, D.C., and San Francisco, were quite successful. More than 20,000 people marched in D.C.

May 26 actions

Based on the success of these actions, local demonstrations were called for May 26 of this year. These actions brought into much sharper focus U.S. complicity with Portuguese colonialism and the white-settler states of South Africa and Rhodesia.

The signs, slogans, and speakers at the demonstrations also tied in national and local issues—like police terror and Watergate—to oppression and exploitation in Southern Africa.

The May 26 actions were organized in a nonexclusive manner, embracing the participation of Blacks from liberal, Democratic Party, nationalist, and socialist organizations. Because of this united-front policy, attempts at exclusion did not go over in most cases.

For example, the New York ALSC defeated an attempt by certain sectarian nationalists to drive out women and socialist activists, as well as activists of other nationalist tendencies.

In contrast to previous experience in the Black movement, women played leading roles in ALSCs. The New York ALSC chairperson was a woman. So were many of the activists. Their role, which reflected the impact of the women's liberation movement on the Black struggle, helped cut across the reactionary prejudices against women activists held by some Pan-Africanists.

Along with coordinating the build-

ing of actions around the country, the ALSC national office in Greensboro, N.C., launched the United African Appeal to raise funds for the liberation organizations in Southern Africa. It raised more than the \$40,000 goal.

Student movement

Black students and student organizations were the driving force behind African Liberation Day. YOBU played a big role again this year.

The Black student movement as a whole experienced a downturn after 1969, when it reached high points such as the struggles at San Francisco State College and Cornell University. But activities around African Libera-



MALCOLM X: Saw Afro-American struggle linked to African revolution.

tion Day, along with other factors, have prompted a modest revival.

ALD has begun to cut across the pessimism generated by government repression of previous struggles, some of which were led to isolation and defeat by ultraleftism. In addition it has contributed to undermining the authority of those Black student leaders who have been bought off and are collaborating with campus administrators to keep things cool.

Harnessing the energy of the Black student movement and turning the campuses into organizing centers will be key to the ALSC's ability to reach out and organize the Black community in a sustained campaign against

U.S. support for Portugal and the white-settler regimes. This process will also help educate and detonate into action white students and others over the issue of Southern Africa.

Such a campaign has the potential—if massive enough—to force the U.S. to cut off certain aid to those regimes.

The development of this struggle would bring Black people and others squarely up against government policies, raising their political consciousness and sharpening their opposition to U.S. imperialism—right here at home.

Gulf and Polaroid

A step in this direction is the campaign projected by the national leadership of ALSC against Gulf Oil and Polaroid, which will be discussed at an ALSC national steering committee meeting this month.

Activity initiated by a handful of Black workers at Polaroid in the Boston area exposed this "equal-opportunity employer" back in 1971. Polaroid tried to deny any complicity with the apartheid regime in South Africa, but the workers documented their charge that Polaroid cameras were used in the hated passbook system. The company felt compelled to run full-page ads in major newspapers and to send a team of supervisors to South Africa to whitewash its operations. Afterward, Polaroid claimed it got its South African distributor to raise the wages of its African workers.

If Polaroid was exposed and compromised by a campaign in just one city, think of the impact a nationally coordinated education and action campaign could have.

A mobilization of Harvard students led by the Pan-African Liberation Committee last year exposed how Harvard University, through its investments in Gulf, was helping the Portuguese colonialists wage war in Angola, where Gulf has a big oil operation.

Through meetings, teach-ins, pickets, and other activity on a national scale, Black people and others will come to understand why Gulf and Polaroid should get out of Southern Africa, and why the U.S. should pull out of NATO and end all military and financial aid programs to Portugal and the white-settler regimes.

Key to this campaign will be ongoing activities that can take the momentum generated this spring over into the fall.