

The State of the Black

Douglas Layne
Don Murphy

Character of the National Movement and the Intensification of National Oppression Under Imperialism in the '80s Crisis

The Afro-American movement is a multi-class movement. The national movements are the main allies of the working class in the struggle to overthrow U.S. Imperialism and establish worker's rule in the U.S. All classes, the working class, the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie suffer national oppression.

Black unemployment has risen from 750,000 in 1970 to over 1.6 million in 1980. Blacks comprise 12.0 percent of the workforce, 11.3 percent of those employed, and officially 22 percent of those unemployed. The unemployment rate for Black youth rose from 28 percent in 1979 to over 50 percent today. The jobs loss among blacks was experienced during the 1973-74 recession, which was the worst the nation saw in 40 years. Blacks lost their jobs at almost double the rate experienced by whites between the third quarter of 1974, and the second quarter of 1975, the worst part of the recession. Much of job loss among blacks at that time can be attributed to the high rate of lay-offs in the mass production industries, where a disproportionate number of blacks were limited to work. Moreover, as the recovery from the recession got underway, blacks were called back to their jobs at a slower pace than whites. At the same time, unemployment among black youth was rising at an alarming rate.

Today 30.9 % of all black families live in poverty. Sixty % of every black family living in poverty is headed by a woman. Eight million blacks live in poverty as opposed to 16 million whites. In the '60s blacks made considerable gains in white collar jobs, but entering the '70s with all the talk of "reverse discrimination" there was considerable decline in white collar jobs for blacks. In 1960 the number of black professionals increased by 180 %, where in the 1970s only 61 percent. The number of blacks in blue collar jobs in the 1970s rose half the rate of the '60s. In 1975 black women earned 56 % of the median income of white women in professional jobs as opposed to 66 % of the median income of white women in 1971. In clerical black women earned 69 % of the median income of white women in 1971. In the '60s the figure was 70 %. In 1969 the income a black family made as opposed to that of a white was 61 %. Between 1969-76 the ratio had declined in all regions of the country with the exception of the south. In the west, the ratio fell from 75 % to 63 %; 76 % to 67 % in the midwest; and 67 % to 61 % in the northeast. In the south the ratio for blacks went up from 57% to 59% in income.

While constituting 13% of the population, blacks suffer the highest rate of police murder. Of all persons killed by the police 45% are Afro-Americans. In cities like Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York black persons murdered by the police is over 70%. The prison population in the U.S. is over 70% Afro-Americans. In addition to 28 brutal murders in Atlanta, 12 fires were set in the black community of Baton Rouge, Louisiana including a day care center and an elementary school. In Mobile, Alabama a black man was lynched.



March against racism in Boston in December 1974. With the economic crisis bringing increased racism and national oppression, there is an urgent need for a united, multiclass response from the Black Liberation Movement.

The deepening economic crisis of the '70s exposed the illusion of "Black Progress." The 1970s began with a recession, 1969-71 and was followed by the '74-75 recession. During this period overall unemployment jumped by 82% (from 4.3 million to 7.8 million). Between 1973-75 the cost of living soared 21%. Double digit inflation became a permanent feature of the U.S. economy.

There is no question that the deepening of the capitalist destabilization will bring great hardship for the Afro-American masses. Reagan's economic program has already assured the destruction of CETA jobs for youth, and severe slashes in Medicaid and welfare which will affect millions of black and poor people. Black businessmen and women will increasingly be driven out of business, as the black auto dealers, only three years ago, the single most prosperous sector of black businesses are now holding on by a thread. An example of the intensity of the social and economic cuts and its effects on the masses of Afro-American people and small businesses have been projected by:

"Rims Barber, head of the Jackson, Miss., office of the Children's Defense Fund, a private advocacy group, ... that many grocery stores in poor black counties in South would have to close or raise their prices to make up for the loss of revenue from a reduction in food stamps. Hospitals, he said, would reduce their outpatient services to poor blacks because of the ceiling on funds from Medicaid, the health-care program for the poor, and some small black colleges might not be able to survive without education grants and loans.

"John Loeb, chairman of Hillman's, a Chicago supermarket chain, said that food stamps were used

to buy 35 percent of the food in his stores in the poorest neighborhoods. It is already difficult for supermarkets to survive in such areas, Mr. Loeb said, and "any cutback in the legitimate distribution of food stamps would be a further hindrance." (New York Times, 6/81)

Politically, the basic political right of any people, the right to vote is under attack as the Reagan administration has plans to "review" the Voting Rights Act of 1965. There is no letup in the genocidal attacks against Afro-Americans of the Atlanta type.

Thurmond is calling for a repeal of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The 1965 Voting Rights Act is a product of the Afro-American people's struggle. The 1965 Voting Rights Act prohibits literacy tests and other racial requirements in voting in Federal, state and local elections. The act requires that the Justice Department approves any change in voting rules for Southern Counties and State pre-clearance requirements. The law calls for Federal examiners to register voters and Federal examiners to watch polling booths in previous exclusionary counties. The repeal of '65 Voting Rights Act would leave all decisions to the State and Counties. For instance, in Wrightsville, Georgia, Sheriff Roland Attaway and white vigilantes had arrested and beaten blacks from Johnson County during voting and affirmative action campaigns in 1979 and 1980. The repeal of the Act would be a major legal set-back for the Afro-American people and legalize a wave of fascist attacks. 4,912 black elected officials were a direct result of the 1965 Voting Rights Act and the mass pressure to ensure it was enforced. The intimidation that took place in Wrightsville will definitely spread in many southern counties. New rules and regulations

will be developed to eliminate blacks from the voting rosters.

In April, 1981 over 10,000 people demonstrated in Mobile calling for an extension of the Voting Rights Act. Demonstrations also took place in Selma. Push and Jesse Jackson were active in these demonstrations. There is a tremendous outcry from all sections of the black community. "I remember the so-called literacy tests in the south and how," according to one local registrar in Selma, Alabama, "in 1964, a black principal at a local school couldn't read or write well enough to vote." "The Voting Rights Act is still life blood of the political involvement for blacks." (John Lewis, N.Y. Times, 3/11/81) Lewis' sentiment and experience reflect a broad cross section of the black community. The struggle for the extension of the 1965 Voting Rights Act can develop into a broad and militant political movement of progressive forces in the U.S. Ralph Abernathy warned the Congress about the handwriting on the wall: "To abdicate this responsibility (by not) extending the Voting Rights Act is to yield to mischief on conservatism and to set a crisis stage for social unrest." Vernon E. Jordan of the Urban League had this to say before a House subcommittee: "I do not trust white people in the South with rights. I did not before the Act. I do not 17 years later." The review of the Voting Rights Act is a blatant attack on the rights of Afro-American people. The bourgeoisie's view is that the gains that were made by blacks in the '60s have improved the overall conditions of blacks, and racism is not a burning question as it was during the time the Act was enacted. Representatives to repeal the Act indicate that the 1965 Voting Rights Act is discriminatory in itself in that it singles out certain counties and

Liberation Movement



March 7, 1965 march in Selma, Alabama to secure black people's right to vote is attacked by state troopers.

regions in the South. This reversal of the 1965 Voting Rights Act not only pits black people against each other, but would leave the doors open for further attacks in the name of "equality" — black people in America are now in the *mainstream* and have no need for this exclusionary type of legislation.

Internationally, the Reagan policy of open support for South Africa, and the continued attempts to isolate Cuba and Grenada have had a major effect among many sectors of the Afro-American community. Black land ownership has continued to fall, as the total net land owned by blacks has gone down by 50% from six million to three million in the six years period from 1973 to 1979. It is clear that the petty bourgeoisie will increasingly be driven into the working class and into the welfare offices. There is a large strata of people from the NAACP, Operation Push who have had fairly high level positions with the "Great Society" poverty programs such as the Office of Economic Opportunity and other government agencies that will be out in the cold when these programs are cut. Jesse Jackson's Operation Push-Excel Program is heavily dependent on government funding and most of it will be likely to be cut.

And at the same time, Reagan's election has crystallized the development of a new grouping of "black conservatives" who have cast their lot with Reagan. They include Hosea Williams, Ralph Abernathy, C. Harry (editor of the Daytona Times) and J.A. Parker, who is the head of the Lincoln Institute, a black conservative think tank that is very close to the Heritage Foundation. The theoreticians of this group are Thomas Sowell and Sam Pierce. Ed Meese is very close to these black (sic) and he gave a major speech at the December conference of black conser-

vatives in San Francisco.

As a trend they are opposed to intergration, and rent control and in favor of the subminimum wage for youth. They are in support of Reagan "urban enterprise zones," the Kemp Roth Tax cut. Sowell (who is a former "Marxist" economist) recently said, "If you ask me if I think racism has disappeared I would say no. If you ask me to explain the differences between black and white incomes, I would give less weight to racism now."

As a strata, these black conservatives are about as comprador as you can get. They are in even closer agreement with the monopoly capitalists than the black mayors who have to struggle for federal programs to help deal with the cities they run, for no other reason than to insure they get elected again. The consolidation of this black conservative movement around Reagan is a further reflection of the increasing polarization of the Afro-American masses, particularly among the petty-bourgeoisie.

Historically speaking, these black conservatives are the grandsons of Booker T. Washington, who put forward the scandalous thesis that "blacks have to pull themselves up by their bootstraps." And they are the sons of the upper strata of blacks who U.S. Imperialism pulled around itself to oppose the Soviet Union internationally and to counter the progressive movements and communists. For example, when Paul Robeson and W.E.B. DuBois went to the UN with the petition "We Charge Genocide" to protest the lynchings and murders of black people, they used Ralph Bunch and Jackie Robinson to denounce them on "behalf of the Negro people."

In opposition to these black conservatives and the Reagan Administration, some of the petty bourgeoisie

politicians and civil rights groups have been speaking out more vigorously. The Congressional Black Caucus, denounced Reagan's economic program as "Robin Hood in reverse, stealing from the poor and giving to the rich," denounced the attempt to revise the 1965 Voting Rights Act as "ludicrous and criminal" and called for the dismissal of UN ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick for her meetings with South African military advisors earlier this year. The attack on the voting rights is so clear, that as stated earlier, even Ralph Abernathy, who is in the Reagan camp had to oppose it.

The following statement made at a recent Harvard conference is indicative of the pressure being placed on members of this strata. A black professor at Harvard, who is a liberal with some ties to the labor movement, said, "Reagan has defined the problems of America in strictly economic terms, and in this I agree with him. But from there on I disagree. He (Reagan) says the proposed budget cuts will restore the economic health of the U.S., but the \$40 billion cut in the budget is offset by a \$40 billion increase in defense spending, so what good will that do? I have been accused by some as being unpatriotic for saying this. And if this is the case, then so be it." And if this professor is being called unpatriotic for this statement, then John Conyers will certainly be called unpatriotic for calling for a cut in defense spending and an increase in social programs. And a man like Dellums who has pretty clear cut support for Cuba and national liberation movements in Angola will not only be called unpatriotic but a supporter of "international terrorism."

Crisis and the Afro-American National Bourgeoisie and Petty Bourgeoisie

A brief description of the situation in Durham, N.C. as told to us recently, illustrates the impact of the intensified oppression of the Afro-American petty bourgeoisie.

Durham has a large (relatively speaking) strata of National Bourgeoisie. They are the owners of NC Mutual Insurance, Wheeler Air Lines, etc., and sit on many boards of large corporations. This crowd has historically enjoyed a privileged position in this town and state in decision making, elected offices, appointments, etc. Politically, they have had close ties to the governor's mansion and have been an influential component in the state Democratic Party machinery via the Durham Committee on Black Affairs. Now this strata is fast losing its influence. An example of this is the loss of seats by their hand picked "approved" blacks on the city council. The city council went from one half representation to only 2 seats out of 13.

Historically, the national bourgeoisie has also had a great deal of influence on the black community. This influence has sharply declined. This influence was largely based on correct positions taken around civil rights and fighting for programs that could be of benefit to the total black community. Now they have been exposed as apologists and puppets for the bourgeoisie.

'A Widow, 81, Shrugs at Leaders'

"...She says that except for the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who was assassinated in 1968, black leaders are irrelevant to her life: 'I watch them on TV.'" (New York Times, 6/81)

In the past, they had been able to call the shots and speak for the black community. They cannot do this now. This has also weakened their position with the bourgeoisie.

The only motion among the national bourgeoisie is desperately trying to hold onto what little power they still have. Most of their attention is in the area of electoral politics.

The foundation of Afro-American national bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie is being severely undermined by the present crisis. This strata was able to develop their political and economic clout as a result of the "Great Society" program. Over 50 government programs opened the door to the rapid increase of black businesses with low interest government and private loans. The poverty programs and other social programs, open admissions, black studies, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (which saw the repeal of discriminatory electoral law), all these programs served to promote the advance of Afro-American national bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. In the 1960s the number of black professionals increased by 130%, and in the '70s by 61%. It was this strata that gained primary benefits from the Civil Rights and Black Power struggle.

But today, the economic crisis has undermined the basis of the "Great Society" Program and has created increasing hardship for national bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie as a strata in the Afro-American National Movement.

"Where did the money for the 'Great Society' come from? They just printed it up, and used the economic, political and military hegemony of U.S. Imperialism at the time to export the crisis abroad. How did this work? For example, through the Bretton-Woods agreement between the U.S. and Europe, which made the dollar the standard exchange in all the capitalist countries, the U.S. was able to force Western Europe to hold billions of inflated U.S. dollars to conduct any kind of trade, even between two European countries. The AID (Agency for International Development) program bet-

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ween the U.S. and Latin America forced Latin American countries to swallow more than 30% of all the steel produced in the U.S as one of the "strings" of U.S. foreign aid, steel that otherwise would have been sitting in warehouses adding to the crisis of over-production.

"But in no way could the partial concessions of the 'Great Society' alleviate the suffering of the masses of Afro-Americans, let alone put an end to national oppression. This is because there is no basis under monopoly capitalism for national freedom..." (*The 80's*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 37)

With many in the Democratic Party

Impact

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come dropped 5.5 percent, and 3.2 million people joined the ranks of the officially poor, one of the largest annual increases on record. According to the March 1981 Current Population Survey conducted by the Bureau of the Census, more than 29 million people in the U.S. were classified as poor in 1980, an increase from 11.7 to 13 percent of the nation's population. The report also noted:

The proportion of elderly persons living below poverty rose to 15.7 percent;

About half of all families below the poverty level in 1980 were maintained by women with no husbands;

There were 19.7 million whites, 8.6 million blacks and 3.5 million Hispanics who were poor last year. In each case, the total number of poor was higher than in the previous year.

More and more, the conversations one overhears on buses, in bars and at the breakfast counters are about the economy. In the Sept. issue of *Psychology Today*, the results of a survey show that for the first time in almost 20 years, more Americans are hoping for economic stability and no inflation than for peace. Also for the first time is a decline in people's aspirations for their children; from 35 percent in 1964 to 8 percent in 1981. Hopes for a better or decent standard

openly supporting Reagan's economic program, many Afro-Americans are leaving to join the National Black Independent Political Party (NBIPP), the National Black United Front (NBUF), others are calling for mass action. Hooks and the NAACP's leaders were forced to take a stand against Reagan's economic program. While there is motion away from the Democratic Party within this strata there is also a motion to revitalize the Democratic Party by some members of the Congressional Black Caucus, Richard Hatcher, Coleman Young, NAACP, etc. The NAACP's recent call for a Civil Rights and Labor Coalition is an attempt to rebuild the liberal coalition that dominated democratic politics in the '60s. This force is hooking up with the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) and

of living occupied the minds of 39 percent of those who were surveyed. The survey analysts explained that the decline in aspirations for children may be largely due to an acceptance of, or resignation to, new lifestyles for their children. But, "looked at more negatively," the article said, "what we are probably seeing among many parents is an acceptance of the inevitable, a realization that they can do little or nothing to change or seriously influence the life and career choices their offspring will take."

Another surprising finding of the survey was that, despite the "strong anti-communist rhetoric of the new administration, (people distinguish between their hopes for peace) and fear of 'the threat of communism or aggression by a communist power,' which has declined steadily, from 29 percent in 1964 to 13 percent in 1974 to 8 percent in 1981."

The *Psychology Today* survey was conducted less than a month after Reagan took office, before the assassination attempt, before the May 3 demonstration, before the 500,000 strong Labor Day demonstration in Washington D.C., and before all of the many other demonstrations protesting the budget cuts and intervention in El Salvador took place nation-wide.

The giant is awakening, and all the little strings of the Lilliputians cannot restrain the force of this giant, the masses of the American people.

Americans for Democratic Action that supported McGovern to take control of the Democratic Party. The call for mass activities is in part to pressure the Democratic Party to stick to the "Great Society."

Although this strata is much more active, their fundamental nature has not changed. For them the Liberation of Afro-Americans can be resolved only if they support monopoly capitalism. But because of the motion, this group is part of the united front.

The present political and economic crisis has created the basis for the broadest and most sustained movement of the Afro-American people in the history of the U.S. Already movements of international support, such as the beginning of a U.S.-Grenada friendship association, and the renewal of Southern African support work has begun in the black community in addition to the college campuses. This movement, the struggle to defend the democratic rights of the Afro-American people and the attempt of the bourgeoisie to impose fascism will objectively be revolutionary, and the starting point for revolutionary change.

"The very position the proletariat holds as a class compels it to be consistently democratic. The bourgeoisie looks backward in fear of democratic progress which threatens to strengthen the proletariat. The proletariat has nothing to lose but its chains, but with the aid of democratism it has the whole world to win."

"It would be a radical mistake," Lenin wrote, "to think that the struggle for democracy was capable of diverting the proletariat from the socialist revolution or of hiding, overshadowing it, etc. On the contrary, in the same way as there can be no victorious socialism that does not practice full democracy, so the proletariat cannot prepare for its victory over the bourgeoisie without an all-round consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy." (*Problems of the Communist Movement*, p. 240)

The united front will at times include people like Vernon Jordan and Andy Young. This is the scope of the movement on the horizon. All political groups without exception, are reviewing their program, strategy and tactics in preparation for the movement that will certainly develop. We must endeavor to lead the movement, and rally the opposition of all classes and strata, however momentary in opposition to the bourgeoisie. This is the task of the proletariat. This is not done by demanding that people first agree to socialism. "The philosophy behind it is related to the question: what are the issues that affect the masses, that they are willing to move on, instead of the other way around — what affects us and what we think are important, independent of whether it's the most important or not." "Lenin said that to make revolution, the vanguard is not enough. You must win over the vast majority. However, he didn't say what they will be won over to."

"Lenin demonstrated that the winning of influence among the people was linked with the Communist Party's ability to work with them, that this was an art that had to be mastered. The core of this art is that the Communist Party accepts the people as they are, with all their prejudices, without fearing their bias, without taking offense at their backwardness, at the fact that they as yet do not understand its policies and slogans. The Communist Party cannot count on "very virtuous men and women reared in special hothouses and cucumber frames." It looks for the way to the minds and hearts of the people, gradually leading them to understand its policies. In providing the people with leadership the greatest danger is the temptation to engage in wishful thinking, to believe that what is clear to the Party is clear to the people, to overestimate the consciousness level of the masses, to take only their revolutionary zeal into account and forget their prejudices and illusions, and the influence of the

capitalist system and of bourgeois ideology. Lenin insisted that prejudices should be recognized as such and that it was vital to "soberly follow the actual state of the class consciousness... of all the working people"... (*The Art of Political Leadership, Problems of the Communist Movement*)

We must advance a program that speaks to the interests of all classes and strata of the Afro-American people who suffer national oppression. A program, that through mass struggle, will turn this movement into a tremendous force in opposition to the bourgeoisie.

The Need for a Multi-Class Coalition Party

In response to the deepening crisis many streamlets of struggle on a local level and national organizations are developing. Locally organizations such as the Johnson County Justice League, in Wrightsville, Ga., the Peoples Coalition Against Racism on the West Coast, and the Martin Luther King Student Alliance are sprouting up. A coalition was formed after the brutal lynching of a black youth in Mobile, Alabama and they mobilized 10,000 people to oppose the repeal of the Voting Rights Act and to denounce the increase of violent attacks against blacks. Nationally several organizations have been formed or are in the process of formation. This includes the National Black United Front, the National Black Independent Party, and the National Black Workers Organizing Committee. These and other mass forms are developing not on the basis of a common ideology but on the basis of common immediate interests. What is needed in the Black Liberation Movement is a forging of a mass coalition party among the Afro-American people. There is already discussion of this type of organization in many quarters among revolutionaries and reformists as well. There is presently discussion between NBUF and NBIPP and there was a workshop at the recent NBUF conference (July 4) on the relationship between NBIPP and NBUF. The leadership of the NBWO also agree that the formation of such a party is an urgent need of the BLM.

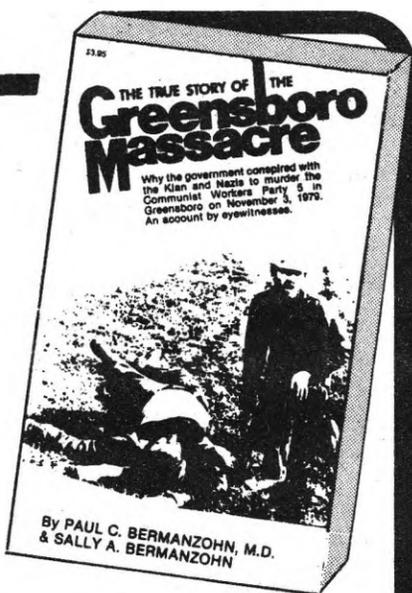
Historically, the largest united front organization or party of this type was the National Negro Congress, which was formed on the initiative of the CPUSA. More than 250 prominent Afro-Americans including members of the CPUSA signed the initial call. Among them Lester Granger of the National Urban League, Dr. Alain Locke, writer and one of the most widely recognized representatives of the Harlem Renaissance, Ralph Bunche (at Howard University at the time), A. Phillip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, James Allen of the CPUSA and the poet Langston Hughes. The opening convention was attended by over 5,000 delegates and visitors and some 585 organizations from 28 states, including 246 trade unions and 80 church and civic groups took part in it.

It has been stressed many times that the significance of the crisis of the '80s is that for the first time in 30 years communists have a chance to lead the struggles of the U.S. people. And since the motion is already moving in the direction of forming such a coalition party, the question for us is *how do we position ourselves in such a way to exert the greatest influence on that process?* The process of positioning ourselves to guide this, includes but is not limited to, positioning ourselves in the NBIPP, developing direct Party work in the Afro-American national movement, developing the institute to create public opinion for our line in the BLM. We cannot be idealist about bringing such a coalition into being. There are many particular questions to address. What it will take is unclear. The main point here is to establish a conception of what is possible and what is objectively needed. The conditions for the formation of such a coalition party are favorable and this is what class struggle demands at this time.

Nov. 3, 1979 — U.S. Treasury agent Bernard Butkovich and police informer Edward Dawson organized a Klan-Nazi terror squad that assassinated five anti-Klan demonstrators in Greensboro, N.C.

March 27, 1981 — U.S.-backed security forces slaughtered 1,500 El Salvadoran refugees. The U.S. government has pumped millions of dollars to the military junta which has murdered over 10,000 people.

From El Salvador to Greensboro the list of crimes against the people is growing. Miami, Atlanta, Buffalo, Three Mile Island, Love Canal are warning signs to all that what has been forced on people thousands of miles away is beginning to happen at home. Just as the El Salvadoran people fight daily against government repression so must the American people.



Read the *True Story of the Greensboro Massacre*. This dramatic eyewitness account of the Nov. 3 murders details the government's involvement in right wing death squads and the shocking court verdict which freed Klan/Nazi murderers.

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