

# Unity Statement on National Oppression, National Liberation and Socialist Revolution

Freedom Road Socialist Organization

**1** We stand for the right to self-determination up to and including secession for the African American nation in the Black Belt South. This outlook is not based on strict adherence to the characteristic features ("a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture") once used by the international communist movement, but uses them as guidelines along with other features of African American social development and the subjective striving of generations of conscious African Americans.

We recognize that some nations develop differently than others and that the definition of the African American nation cannot rest on an appraisal of national development in Europe. The development of nations in Europe was one example of national development, but it was certainly not the exclusive path. In this respect we understand Azania (Black South Africa) to have experienced a unique national development. The Palestinian question, among others, points to the existence of a nation without clearly existing national boundaries. Likewise, the situation of the Québécois nation, the Kurds, and nationalities in Eastern Europe demonstrate that borders and states are mutable, particularly if they are the creation of imperialism.

While rejecting Zionist claims on Palestine and white supremacist claims to a white southern nation or northwestern nation, we do acknowledge the fact that the most advanced sections of the Black liberation movement, from the 1800s on, have demanded a Black Republic in the South. Most of these have been based on the historical evolution of the people on this territory coupled with the objective and subjective need for an independent state to guarantee the full development of the people and freedom from the worst forms of oppression.

Our political view supporting self-determination on the one hand explains how independence would strike a blow against imperialist rule and would

benefit all the inhabitants of the African American nation, Black and white. On the other hand, we also see autonomy of African American majority areas outside of the South as being a manifestation of self-determination. Autonomy would permit control over local government, educational and cultural institutions, police forces, and certain forms of business and commerce. The struggle for autonomy in these areas is part of the struggle for self-determination of the nation as a whole. Autonomy for the Black Belt, which would require state unity of the Black Belt, may be a transitional demand and stage in the struggle for self-determination.

While the territory of the African American nation is in the Black Belt, the people of the nation do not live in a compact mass. The people of the nation have been dispersed and reside in many other regions of the U.S. So when we speak of the African American people in general, we are referring to the people of the nation, South and North.

The large groupings of African Americans in cities outside of the national territory, while a part of the nation, are also an oppressed national minority where they reside. This dual status, so to speak, is somewhat unique in that they exist within the same state as the subjugated nation. In classic situations, the national minority lives within a state/nation that is not inclusive of their national territory.

The struggles of the African American people in cities and regions outside of the South have a national character and are critical to the overall liberation movement. Yet these struggles cannot be seen as more or less important than those in the national territory. In certain periods and in regard to certain struggles, the northern movements may be at the cutting edge of the national liberation movement. These struggles can provide rearguard support to the Black Belt movement. The national movement, however, must not continue its failure to highlight and support struggles in the national territory.

While supporting efforts that are based on either of the above, our main discussion among the oppressed nationalities and workers, and our main demand on the state, must be for the right to self-determination. This right must also include a plebiscite to decide this issue considering the fact that Black people were never given the right to decide what their relationship would be to the U.S. after slavery.

Should the African American people's movement, without the fetters of imperialist pressures, reject secession or autonomy for the Black Belt nation, the fight against white supremacy and racism will have lost no ground in that it is most rampant in the South and the willingness to give up privileges and attack racism is identical to that required of whites in order to stand for self-determination for African Americans. This condition too is a requirement for real multi-racial unity.

We join in the political and cultural struggles for democratic rights, full equality, and freedom for all oppressed nationalities in the U.S. As a result of historical developments since the annexation of Mexican land by the United States, there emerged an oppressed Chicano/Mexicano nation of Aztlán. Since annexation, there has been a continuous struggle for land and freedom (*tierra y libertad*). We support the right to self-determination up to and including secession for that nation.

Chicanos were forged into an oppressed nation by U.S. annexation and by their struggle against oppression, but they have been a people with indigenous roots in the Southwest for thousands of years. Every class in the Chicano nation is involved in some aspect of the struggle against national oppression and for equality and political power. The totality of these struggles represents the struggle of a nation for full democracy, meaning the right to land and political power. This is the strategic objective for the Chicano struggle. But presently our fight for self-determination should focus on three demands: the right to preserve Chicano language and culture, the right to local self-government, and the right to education under Chicano control. Self-determination also means the right of Chicanos to form their own organizations, to develop their own strategies, and to choose their own methods of struggle. We unconditionally uphold the right of the Chicano nation to self-determination. The struggle for Chicano liberation is important in its own right, and our support is not based on whether or not that movement is for socialism. However, we continue to believe that socialism, that is, full democracy and some form of public direction of the economy, is the best guarantee for complete liberation for the Chicano nation.

With respect to the Native American struggle, we support the demands of Native American peoples for respect of their sovereignty and their just demands for land and national development. In their struggles to continue to exist as peoples, we support their efforts to promote their native cultures, including history and language, as well as efforts at economic and political development. Additionally, we support their efforts at equal rights within the larger context of the U.S., including demands for democratic access to jobs, housing, education, and economic development. The educational record for the entire U.S. must also be clarified to recognize the contributions of the Native peoples and the genocidal practices perpetrated against them through white supremacist national oppression.

For a variety of historical reasons, the Native American struggle for land and sovereignty intersects with the struggles of the African American and Chicano peoples for national self-determination.

These struggles have not only intersected, but, as in the case of the Seminole wars in Florida during the 1800s, the struggles often joined together. We

therefore support the non-antagonistic resolution of land claims and other matters when they affect and/or there is an overlap between the Native people's struggles and the African American and Chicano peoples' struggles, respectively. These issues and demands are matters which can be resolved on the basis of mutual respect.

With respect to the Asian/Pacific Island peoples in the U.S., we begin by supporting the struggle of the Hawaiian people to full national self-determination. Their islands were taken over through a combination of aggression and subterfuge by Anglo interests. The Hawaiian people have every right to redress their grievances.

The Asian/Pacific national minorities also have a struggle for full equality in the U.S. They were often imported to the U.S. to work the mines, railroads, canneries, and fields as a near slave labor work force. They have been denied the right to their cultures, including the ignoring of their histories, language, and political power. They, along with other non-English-speaking oppressed nationalities, have additionally been subject to constant immigration harassment and other racist policies inconsistent with the treatment of European immigrants to the U.S. We support their demands for bilingual education, jobs, economic development, and housing (including affirmative action programs), political power and autonomy in areas of concentration, just immigration policies, and the promotion of their various cultural heritages.

We furthermore support the demand for the independence of Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico, a clear colony of U.S. imperialism, was overlooked by much of the international community when the process of decolonization was sweeping the planet. This was precisely because of Puerto Rico's strategic military and political importance to U.S. imperialism. The colonization of Puerto Rico has resulted in the transformation of an island which was agriculturally self-sufficient into an importer of agricultural products. The island has become a military base, industrial preserve, and tourist attraction for U.S. imperialism. In so doing, the national interests of the Puerto Rican people have been completely disregarded. We therefore support the historic demand of a significant section of the Puerto Rican people for full national independence and the withdrawal of all U.S. military bases from the island.

Additionally, we support the struggles of the Puerto Rican national minority in the U.S. to full equality. Irrespective of the resolution of the struggle on the island for national independence, the Puerto Rican national minority on the mainland must be supported in their democratic demands such as bilingual education, the right and ability to promote Puerto Rican culture, democratic access to jobs, housing, and economic development (including affirmative action programs), and the right to political power and autonomy in areas of concentration.

The oppression of African American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Native American, Asian American, and other minority nationalities gives rise to independent, multi-class movements which – because of their strategic interest in the complete elimination of white supremacist national oppression – have a revolutionary character. The differing historical situations of the oppressed nationalities of course give rise to very different movements, and there are many class, and even national, contradictions within and among them (contradictions which are exploited to the fullest by the dominant white bourgeoisie). In general, we aim to participate in the building of each movement as a broad united front encompassing all progressive strata and classes within each nationality, with the working class exercising as much leadership as possible.

In regard to the African American movement, we also support, when the necessary conditions prevail, the formation of a national revolutionary front. This front would be a united front of the national revolutionary movement that brings together mass organizations as well as revolutionary organizations which can agree on a common program for freedom. While having a Southern orientation, the front, by necessity, would reach out to all national revolutionary forces in the African American movement in all geographic locales.

We work for a revolutionary socialist trend based on the working class within each national movement. We also work for unity among the national movements, and for anti-racist unity with the multinational workers' movement and all progressive social movements.

The African American movement in particular has played a leading role throughout U.S. history, carrying forward the demands of other progressive social movements cloaked in the garb of Black Rights. Although we have members and contacts working in each of these movements (African American, Chicano/Mexicano, and Asian American), we must learn from and respect the people's organizations that are engaged in the struggle on the ground. Our continued participation and examination of facts and trends will further inform our views and political program concerning these vital revolutionary questions.

**2** We support and encourage the independent organization of oppressed nationality revolutionaries and progressives, where they have determined it to be necessary. At the same time, we believe that a revolutionary leadership for this country must be multinational. We are committed to building a multinational socialist organization with viable oppressed nationality leadership and internal mechanisms to ensure equality in its functioning. There is no principled justification for the existence of all-white revolutionary organizations

which do not, from their inception, seek to become multinational.

We support an African American communist party based in the South. The party should be national-territorial based and not racially-nationality based. The composition would be overwhelmingly Black. As a party fighting for national liberation and socialism for the African American nation, it would include whites who live in the territory but would be shaped by the Black working class experience.

Under conditions of a socialist U.S. in which self-determination had been exercised by African Americans, resulting in the creation of an independent Black republic, an African American communist party would have to be independent in order to guarantee the integrity of the party as well as the sovereignty of the national movement itself. This fact has been demonstrated by the failures and problems in the USSR with the various communist parties in the different republics.

It would be essential to build an African American communist party should there be an independence movement of the African American people. It would be as incorrect to attempt to have a multinational U.S. revolutionary Marxist party leading such a struggle as it would be for a U.S. communist party to attempt to lead the Puerto Rican struggle for national independence. While it would be important for a close collaboration to exist, the independent elaboration of a strategic and tactical line would be essential.

Should there not be an independence movement of the African American people, an African American communist party may arise in the South regardless. We would support the existence of such a party, participate in building it, and attempt to build a collaborative relationship between it and any multinational organization or party which exists in the rest of the U.S. At the same time this would not displace, though it would certainly modify, the tasks of building a multinational revolutionary Marxist party.

**3** The main internal obstacle to the success of multinational progressive and revolutionary movements has come and comes today from white chauvinism, not from the nationalism of the oppressed nationalities. Owing to years of deep and intense psychological pressures from the institutions of white supremacy, the African American people, in the 1960s and again in the 1990s, are engaged in a Black consciousness movement which is essential for self-identity and self-esteem. This new Black consciousness movement, including the resurgence in interest in Malcolm X, Afrocentric clothing, and educational curricula, is overall positive and one of the driving forces of today's revolutionary Black nationalism.

**4** The U.S. state was founded as a colonial settler-state, and its psychological outlook and capitalist economy were in opposition to non-whites and based on the slave trade, the genocidal wars against the Native American population, the annexation of Mexican lands, and the importation of Chinese labor. National oppression is at the heart of U.S. economic, political and ideological traditions, and the oppression of the African American people in particular has been central to the U.S. class struggle.

In this country national oppression takes a specific form: more than simply the domination of several nations and nationalities by an oppressor nation, in the U.S. it entails the subjugation of all people of color by the majority white (or Anglo-American) nation, headed by the white imperialist bourgeoisie. National oppression in the U.S. is white supremacist national oppression. And the privileges usually extended by the ruling class of an oppressor nation to all classes of that nation also take a specific form: in the U.S., national privileges are white privileges.

**5** White supremacist national oppression has two sides, one of which is the subjugation and exploitation of the many minority nationalities in the U.S. From the Southern planters to the robber barons, from Wall Street to the Imperial Valley, in agriculture, industry, mining, transport, communications, and service, the U.S. ruling class has reaped enormous profits from the toil of oppressed nationality labor. The forced reduction of living standards, the deprivation of public services, the extortion of high rents for substandard housing, and so on, all add to the direct economic benefits of national oppression for U.S. capitalism.

The other side of national oppression in the U.S. is a historically evolved system of social control over the entire working class and other oppressed sectors (such as women). The systematic bourgeois policy of preferences for white labor (and white people generally) is directed not just against the oppressed nationalities, but against all workers and the people's forces as a whole. Simply put, capitalist production is profitable, and the institution of white supremacy helps ensure the continuation of that profit.

Compromise (whether conscious or unconscious) with the institutions of white supremacist national oppression is not simply "one among a number of shortcomings of labor." It constitutes the key political and ideological weakness of the workers' movement in this country. The strength of white chauvinist ideology, its deep roots within labor's ranks, indicates that its influence does

not stem merely from the inherent appeal of any set of ideas. The main significance of white supremacy for white people lies in a system of white-skin privileges, a system of preferences for white people in employment, land usage and ownership, housing, immigration, and society in general.

This system propagates ideas of European superiority (Eurocentrism in analyzing all historical and social phenomena) and other racist ideologies, and forms the material basis for white supremacist thinking and for actions carried out by some backward sections of the white masses in defense of national oppression. It is this material bias which largely accounts for white labor's receptivity to the widespread propagation of racist ideology through the media, schools, religious institutions, and other ideological apparatus. This ideology in turn reinforces the system of oppression and privilege.

By imposing relative advantages on the white workers, the bourgeoisie binds them to capitalist policy and drives a wedge between the white and oppressed nationality sections of the working class. Historically this home-grown form of bourgeois rule has been quite successful; the political effects of the racist differential represent the main obstacle to the development of a working class movement for socialism. We therefore stand for the complete abolition of white national privileges in every sphere of U.S. society.

**6** The bourgeois policy of discrimination for whites does not in any way alter the fundamental fact of exploitation suffered by white workers. Nor do the interests of the masses of white workers lie with white supremacy. Many, especially in past generations, have experienced discrimination first-hand as impoverished immigrants.

They are exploited by capital, harassed and brutalized by the police, and miseducated in capitalist schools. They are kept healthy only insofar as they contribute to the expanded reproduction of capital. And they are weakened in their daily struggles against these conditions by compromise, whether conscious or unconscious, with an entrenched system of preferences directed at whites. To the extent they compromise with that system, they are prevented from making common cause with oppressed nationality labor, from changing their lives and the world.

**7** Unfortunately, from the original "union label" of the San Francisco cigar makers in 1859 to the anti-affirmative action lawsuits and charges of "reverse discrimination" today, the history of the U.S. workers movement is replete with examples of sections of white labor defending outright the racist differential,

and still more of the masses of white workers' passive acquiescence in the system of preferences.

The dominance of white supremacist thinking over the South and its labor movement has been responsible for its failure to grow even in periods of larger numbers of workers belonging to unions in other areas of the country. In a period of major decline of the entire movement, the South still remains the least organized. This condition has had a dramatic impact on the conditions of the entire working class, and on the African American workers in particular. The survival of the U.S. trade union movement depends largely on its ability to challenge white supremacy and organize the South as well as on the political empowerment of its African American populace.

Among the advanced capitalist countries, the U.S. can lay claim to the weakest of labor movements and the most isolated group of revolutionaries. The trade unions have been unable to break away from the capitalist political parties and have remained dominated by an entrenched labor aristocracy whose main source of strength historically has come through its defense of relative advantages for white labor.

Consequently, we support the creation of a labor party which gives special attention to the fight against racism, white supremacy, and national oppression, or of a mass or people's party that encompasses labor.

## 8

Because the mass of white workers (unlike the labor aristocracy) have no objective class interest in white supremacist national oppression, and because the privileges imposed on them by the capitalists are ruinous not only to their long-term struggle for socialism but also to their daily fight for economic and political reforms, they can be persuaded to recognize, confront, and attack this pillar of bourgeois rule.

Like everything else in our socialist project, winning white labor to making solidarity with its sisters and brothers of color will be a tough row to hoe, demanding patience, courage, imagination, wide tactical experimentation, and respect for the views, traditions, and revolutionary potential of the entire working class. This does not mean, of course, that we should conciliate with chauvinism and white supremacy when it rears its head in the workers' movement.

White revolutionaries in particular cannot wait for history, the economic crisis, the "fascist tide," or exemplary struggles of Black people to do this painstaking work for them. They have a special responsibility to organize white workers against all forms of national oppression and to combat racist ideology among them.

That work is impossible without drawing distinctions among the white workers. Although the following is not a thorough class analysis, it helps to

recognize that white workers today can be broken down into three groups with respect to national oppression.

The first, which includes many people absolutely but is relatively very small, comprises workers who believe in and practice the idea that "an injury to one is an injury to all," and who recognize an unjust pattern in the past and present treatment of oppressed nationality peoples. These workers most often have long experience in an integrated work force or have grown up in integrated communities.

The second grouping includes the overwhelming majority of white workers. It is very heterogeneous, but with respect to this issue, it consists of people who generally acquiesce (consciously or unconsciously) in the system of preferences for white labor. Many believe that "there's good and bad in every race," and this fair-mindedness can be built on. Many also have a basic idea of class solidarity which can go a long way in certain struggle situations. But this class consciousness is fundamentally skewed, because the middle white workers usually believe that racist discrimination is something in the past and they are indifferent or hostile to current oppressed nationality struggles for equal rights. This middle grouping can be influenced and led to act by more progressive workers of all nationalities, but today – like white society as a whole – it is more receptive to the ideas (if not the actions) of the right.

The third grouping among white workers, like the first, is relatively small – though unfortunately not small enough. Characterized by its active defense of privileges for white people, this grouping is, of course, largest in the South and Southwest. It is much broader, however, than its fringe elements such as the KKK or neo-Nazi sympathizers, including many people who often make use of legal channels and the traditional union apparatus to further their racist goals. This grouping is significant in the North as busing and affirmative action battles have shown.

These distinctions go beyond the common left notions that white workers are irretrievably racist, or, on the other hand, that their racism is a petty problem compared to their objective status as exploited producers of surplus value.

**9** From the strategic point of view, the oppressed nationalities are more than "allies" of the multinational working class: their struggles must merge. The relation of these struggles goes beyond alliance against a common enemy, with each force focusing its attack according to its own political interests and priorities, and with each partner in the alliance supporting the "special demands" of the other. Instead, the direction of the main blow of the working class movement's struggle for socialism must be the same as that of the autonomous national movements: against white supremacist bourgeois rule.

The political programs of the national movements may vary widely, from the consolidation of full democratic rights to national independence; they may not necessarily coincide with the workers' program of socialist revolution and working class rule. But their demands, far from being separate "special demands," must become the class demands of the entire proletariat and be placed at the center of its own class strategy.

In the same way that we understand that merging the struggles means that the struggle for socialism must adopt the demands of the national movements, we understand that the development of the two movements will not be parallel or at the same level of intensity. The African American movement, for obvious historical reasons, is well ahead of the workers' movement but should not be held back in order to help the workers' movement come abreast so that they both challenge imperialism and the state at the same time. This would be ideal but may not happen, and any efforts to artificially set this up must be rejected as crass chauvinism.

10 U.S. imperialism abroad has always been inextricably linked with white supremacy, and its rise at the turn of the century continued the colonial traditions of enslavement, genocidal wars against indigenous populations, annexations, and hemispheric domination. Aggressions against Grenada, Panama, Nicaragua, and Iraq are clear and recent examples of this tradition which must be stopped by the progressive and freedom-loving people of the world. The right of the U.S. to rule over people of color throughout the world has been popularly conceived of as an extension of the right of white people to subjugate people of color at home. The democratic aspirations of the majority of peoples of the world are diametrically opposed to domination by the so-called white race.

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