

BLACK LIBERATION AND THE UNITED FRONT AGAINST IMPERIALISM:
SOME LESSONS FOR OUR CONTINUING SUPPORT OF THE
FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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BROTHERS AND SISTERS

COMRADES IN STRUGGLE

We welcome the opportunity to participate in this forum today and put forward our views on the fight against imperialism and all forms of national oppression, and the tasks of the American people in relation to the liberation struggles in Africa. In other words, we are here to talk about how we can contribute to the defeat of US imperialism.

The AHSA has its origin and history rooted in this struggle. It was created as an organized act of resistance to the imperialist-dominated African Studies Association (ASA). The disruption of the Montreal ASA meeting in 1969 and the first AHSA conference at Howard University in 1970 consolidated a significant sector of Black intellectuals and students in a united effort to deepen their study of the problems facing Black people, and to increase their support for the African liberation struggles. But this has only been a beginning. We have a long road to travel, a road that must be widened to include every major sector of the American people except that small vampire class of imperialists. Our future is bright, but the road ahead is torturous!

The purpose of this talk is to sum up some of the major lessons from our struggles over the last five years, to draw out from this guidelines for action in the context of strategic and tactical aspects of the United Front Against Imperialism (UFAI). In continuing our struggle, we specifically pledge our support to the May 28th, 1977 ALD March on the White House organized around

the two slogans: 1) US Imperialism out of Southern Africa! Superpowers Hands Off! and 2) Oppose Imperialism and all Forms of National Oppression from USA (United States of America) to USA (Union of South Africa)!

The broad context for this discussion is the turbulent and complex international situation. While the Post World War II revolutionary struggles throughout the world continue (class struggles within the imperialist countries, and national democratic revolution in Asia, Africa, and Latin America), the more recent development that threatens the entire world is the ominous danger of World War III. The threat of war is based on the contention of the two superpowers, US imperialism and Soviet social-imperialism. In particular terms, this view is based on the following points:

1. The world hegemony of US imperialism that was consolidated after WW II came to an end with its defeats in Korea (1953), then in Vietnam (1973-75). Internally, serious blows were struck by the militant Black liberation movement and the mass anti-war movement; also, the internal crisis of advanced capitalism in which over production, in a wild search for profits, resulted in stagnation (layoffs and unemployment) occurring simultaneously with inflation. And political scandals like Nixon's Watergate have weakened the US even further. US imperialism is indeed a paper tiger.

2. The Soviet Union, the first experiment in socialism where the proletariat held control for almost 40 years, has degenerated with the restoration of capitalism in the form called social-imperialism (socialist in form, imperialist in essence). Now the Soviet Union is based on the economic laws that govern all imperialist countries and therefore has the same inflation, crisis, unemployment, general social decay, and drive for imperialist expansion. While it hides behind the label of socialism and the memory of Lenin it is the source of confusion and counter revolution. The Soviet Union is a wolf dressed in sheep's clothing at the back door of every Third World country or movement.
3. The African continent has been the scene of intensification of struggle. The general thrust of the national democratic revolutions, being led by the anti-colonial wars of liberation in the south, have been made more complex with the intervention directly and indirectly of the superpowers and their lackeys. Many of us romantically long for the old days when the situation was clearer-- African people fighting European colonial aggression. Now things are more complicated. US imperialism is in blackface with the "shuffle diplomacy" of Andy Young, while the Soviet Social imperialists loom large as a Trojan horse concealing a new slavery for Africa.

Given this broad context, we can more clearly understand the necessary importance of learning lessons from our recent struggles. Moreover, these lessons should be spread widely among the masses so that we can better create a new history of struggle and not repeat endlessly a history of defeat by falling for old or new forms of deception, and counter revolution. In this context, I'm going to draw some lessons from African Liberation Support Committee, or ALSC. This will allow us to think together about the joint tasks of our current demands:

1. US imperialism out of Southern Africa, Superpowers
Hands Off!!!
2. Oppose imperialism and all forms of national oppression
from USA to USA!!!

The ALSC developed as a progressive leap, bursting forth from within the Pan Africanist movement. Pan Africanism had been characterized by the rebirth of the emigrationist back-to-Africa movements of Marcus Garvey, Bishop Henry Turner, Chief Sam, and Captain Paul Cuffee, and on the other hand, cultist attempts to create forms of traditional African culture under the conditions of an advanced capitalist society. This Pan Africanist movement was a reflection of a petty bourgeois class, mainly composed of a strata of youth, newly-arrived professionals--the products of government grants and agency work--and small traders and manufacturers of cultural handicrafts.

The Pan Africanist movement reflects the instability of this petty bourgeois class and its fear of the ruling class, trembling at the possibility of a fascist turn toward genocide. The goal was to get the hell out of here and get back to Africa, (either mentally or physically and there were countless schemes to do this, basically coming down to selective migration or mass exodus), or to pull together and re-create Africa on these shores (the schemes ranged from the imitative recreation of a traditional Yoruba village in South Carolina, to the ritualistic observance of some traditional African customs and the speaking of African languages).

While mass involvement was based on a positive rejection of oppression and exploitation, the concrete political solutions provided by the Pan Africanist movement have all proved to be dead ends!

The masses were spontaneously grasping for the anti-imperialist Pan Africanism of DuBois, though the major Pan Africanist ideologues raised most of their voices in the tradition of Marcus Garvey and because they did not focus the fight on imperialism, these leaders of the more recent Pan-Africanist movements have not led nor can they lead to the liberation of the masses of Black people. Indeed, today's Pan-Africanist movement is a repeat of what has happened before and we need to learn this lesson well, because we don't have the time to see it repeated again in the future.

Young people attracted to Pan Africanism were ready to fight for freedom, to fight for a better life, to fight against the system that was holding them down and holding people down in Africa as well. It was this determination to fight that enabled

the Pan Africanist thrust to be the staging ground for a groundswell of struggle and militant protests against US imperialism. From 1972 until recently ALSC has been the major national context for the unfolding of the various forces that have come forward in the Black liberation movement. Many of us here today have been involved in ALSC. In fact, at the height of the ideological struggle during 1974 ALSC sponsored a joint plenary with AHSA at the New York AHSA annual meeting in order to deepen the debate through the joint efforts of scholars and activists. When a spark of struggle burns bright, the light can lead the way forward for us all. As Mao Tse Tung taught us, "A single spark can start a prairie fire." And as Fannie Lou Hamer was so fond of singing, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!"

In general, the first major action around ALSC involved a very large and politically broad spectrum of forces. So in 1972, in Washington, DC, San Francisco, Toronto, Canada, and the Caribbean, over 25 thousand people united in mass demonstrations to protest US imperialism in Africa and to support the liberation struggles. This was a very positive development. But after the May 1972 demonstration, the broad coalition was disbanded and ALSC was formed around a network of nationalists and panafricanists who began to openly put forward their political views. At times these views not only avoided the question of mass struggle in this country, but openly advocated policies against the struggles

that the masses of people were waging. This is the source of two major lessons by negative example:

1. the masses are the makers of history, and
2. the correct strategy for all mass struggle is to unite all who can be united in the fight against imperialism.

We consider these lessons to be of great importance for the further development of revolutionary mass struggle in the USA. Any position that liquidates mass struggle in this country is providing assistance to imperialism. A good example of this is when some people in ALSC right here in Detroit seemed to be quite interested in fighting the policies of the major US auto companies in South Africa, but were not involved in nor did they acknowledge the necessity of fighting against these same imperialist corporations right here in Detroit. This is the kind of escapism that Pan-Africanism can lead to.

The line of these Pan Africanists was reactionary "to the bone" because it failed to subordinate their petty bourgeois class interests to the great history of auto workers fighting against these corporations. Nowhere in the USA can you find a better example of militancy and struggle in which Black workers have been in the heart of the struggle. To cast this history aside is to lean over and kiss Henry Ford on his ass!

Even the liberation organizations themselves told the founders of ALSC that the main way that progressive people in the USA can

help in the fight against imperialism is to develop a movement like the movement against US aggression in Vietnam.

In sum, the Pan Africanist position is wrong for three reasons:

1. it regards imperialism as a policy of foreign affairs rather than the monopoly stage of finance capital which follows definite laws of development independent of any given decision-making process;
2. it liquidates the main responsibility of people in this country which is to fight right here. In this way, we define the only good patriots of this country as anti-imperialist fighters, who by fighting here in the US meet our internationalist duty because US imperialism is a danger to everyone in the world;
3. it mechanically separates theory from practice, the objective motion of the masses from the subjective force of revolutionary consciousness. We must not place ourselves above the masses and lecture them on being correct, but immerse ourselves with the masses in struggle, and use concrete experience as the source and verification of what is true and false.

The other aspect of this erroneous line was to argue that only Black people should fight against national oppression, only Black people should fight to support the African liberation struggles. This is a self-serving fatalism because it attacks

"friends" as if they were "enemies," and is used to buttress the leadership of this petty bourgeois Pan Africanist elite.

Leadership in anti-imperialist struggle must be based on putting forward the correct line for fighting imperialism and having the respect and confidence of the masses based upon one's role in the concrete struggles.

This backward line tried to maintain racial purity as if being Black automatically made you anti-imperialist, and being white made you pro-imperialist. When white people came to join a protest march they wanted to turn them away. Our position is that for everyone the criteria is the same--agreement with the political line, and active struggle against imperialism. We need only to look at national liberation struggles and what shape they would be in if they applied a skin criteria to their friends and enemies to see how bankrupt this line is!

The history of ALSC is rich with lessons to be learned from these errors. In rejection of these errors, many forces within ALSC moved to join with the struggles being waged in their communities. This included struggles against police repression, against cutbacks in social programs, against attacks on the democratic right to quality education by phasing out Black colleges and Black studies, and support of local workers' struggles. This was an exciting period in which many young people came forward in the struggle. However, with this rapid increase in experience the lack of theory became a greater and greater source of confusion and lack of direction. So a call for

theory was put forward and people began to study. However, rather than approaching this in a dialectical way, the unity of study and struggle, of knowing and doing, the situation flip-flopped from all struggle and no study, to all study and no struggle. Incorrectly, the main task became one of waging the ideological struggle, of fighting for correct ideas in the abstract realm of theory.

Some of you might remember the height of the ideological struggle that went down in 1974. This was the time when study groups were bursting forth all over the country among people who had been attracted to the work of ALSC. But with this sharp confrontation of views, increasingly people began to worship books and spew forth quotations like Moses with the Ten Commandments rather than deepening their ties with the masses in summing up their experiences.

The result of this was dogmatism and it merely furthered the errors already mentioned. This so-called revolutionary force turned into a hard little sect; this trend which appeared to be "left wing" revealed its "right wing" essence. They abandoned the masses of people. This also provides an important lesson on how to handle different kinds of contradictions. The dogmatists failed to make distinctions between enemies and friends, between incorrect ideological and political lines and the genuine commitment and desire of people to struggle against imperialism. These sham pseudo-Marxist Leninists take two different things

and treat them as if they were the same. The genuine Marxist-Leninist approach is to make a concrete analysis and solve qualitatively different problems with qualitatively different approaches. So we fight the enemy and unite with friends--enemies are the imperialists and their lackeys and the friends are all of the exploited and oppressed masses. But at this stage of our struggle the masses are under the ideological and political hegemony of Bankrupt Bourgeois ideas, influenced by wild utopian Pan African schemes. We must fight and repudiate these poisonous lies and distortions. But at the same time we must unite with the legitimate desire of people to fight back. The key slogan is unity-struggle-unity. If anyone is so dog ass that they refuse to fight imperialism in unity with anti-imperialists of all nationalities, then they are reactionary relics of history.

Now let me toss bourgeois etiquette aside and focus on this forum right here. The forces I represent stand in direct contradiction (fundamental disagreement) with the ideological and political line put forward by the other two panelists--Haki Mahabuti and Stokely Carmichael. But while I'm bold enough to openly state this and I am prepared to systematically defeat their bankrupt ideas right here--we also stand ready to build unity in specific conditions around a militant campaign of struggle. Our commitment to freedom, our desire to destroy imperialism, and our struggle to liberate Black people and the whole society from all

forms of oppression forces us to take this stand. We stand for the unity of the many to defeat the exploitation and oppression by the few. I challenge Haki and Stokely to say the same!

But the record speaks for them. Haki deserted the fight by withdrawing from ALSC and dropping involvement in mass struggle, yeah, on uniting the masses in direct protests and demonstrations against this imperialist system, he opted out. Stokely, on the other hand, actually cut out of the country and has now returned to carry on as a die hard, holding fast to a position of Black separatism, escapism, utopianism, and a reactionary political stand made palatable with the sweet seduction of an emotional rap, a reputation of old war stories, and pleas for racial unity.

This forum is important because you can compare the lines put forward and make a clear determination. I am ready to debate the basic issues facing Black people, the basic problems of all exploited and oppressed people in this country where ever--most especially in the heart of where the masses are being mobilized for the national ALD 1977 demonstration. We want the broadest political unity possible, and so do the masses. I am therefore issuing a public challenge to Stokely to openly debate in Washington DC early in May--then the masses will have a clear choice.

The basic issue is quite clear. US imperialism is our enemy. When we look at smiling Jimmy Carter's teeth more and more of us think of "Jaws," and the role of imperialism's lackey, Andy Young

is more transparent every day. So why can't all of us unite to attack the main enemy, the main source of all exploitation and oppression? Further, where do you stand? We might not agree on all points, but can we unite in struggle, concrete struggle against the imperialists?

We must fight back with our greatest force--the united force of all the exploited and oppressed. Then we are millions strong. Otherwise, we follow false-faced lies and quietly prepare for our graves. We say HELL NO! Stand up! Unite! Fight back!

On May 28th there will be several thousands marching strong in Washington DC aiming their anger and attention at the political symbol of the state power of US imperialism, the White House. Let us join together with sectors of all exploited and oppressed to rally

round the two main demands. US imperialism Out Of Southern Africa! Superpowers Hands Off! Oppose Imperialism and All Forms of National Oppression From USA to USA!

In the end, we must pull together in one mighty fist, one strategic united front against imperialism, the core of which are the movements of oppressed nationalities and the working class led by the party of the working class, to smash US imperialism. This march can be a new beginning for many of us, and build a bridge between the workers movement and the Black liberation movement. We stand ready to build that bridge and work for the unity of the class and national forces it will take to be victorious over this

decadent system. Our efforts can't be limited to lecturing in a class room, nor can it be limited to a speech at a forum such as this. The test is what we build in struggle, what we build concretely by uniting forces, by struggling out differences and reaching higher levels of unity, by learning from the experience of striking blows at imperialism.

Now is the time for unity!

Now is the time for militant struggle!

Now is the time to sing out across this land in a mighty chorus, a chorus of voices from all nationalities, in revolutionary harmony!

US imperialism out of Southern Africa! Superpowers Hands Off!
Oppose Imperialism and all Forms of National Oppression from USA
to USA!