

COMMUNITY DIALOGUE #4

# REBELLION IN LOS ANGELES 1992: IN SEARCH OF BLACK LIBERATION

Saturday  
JUNE 20, 1992

9:30 AM — 4:30 PM

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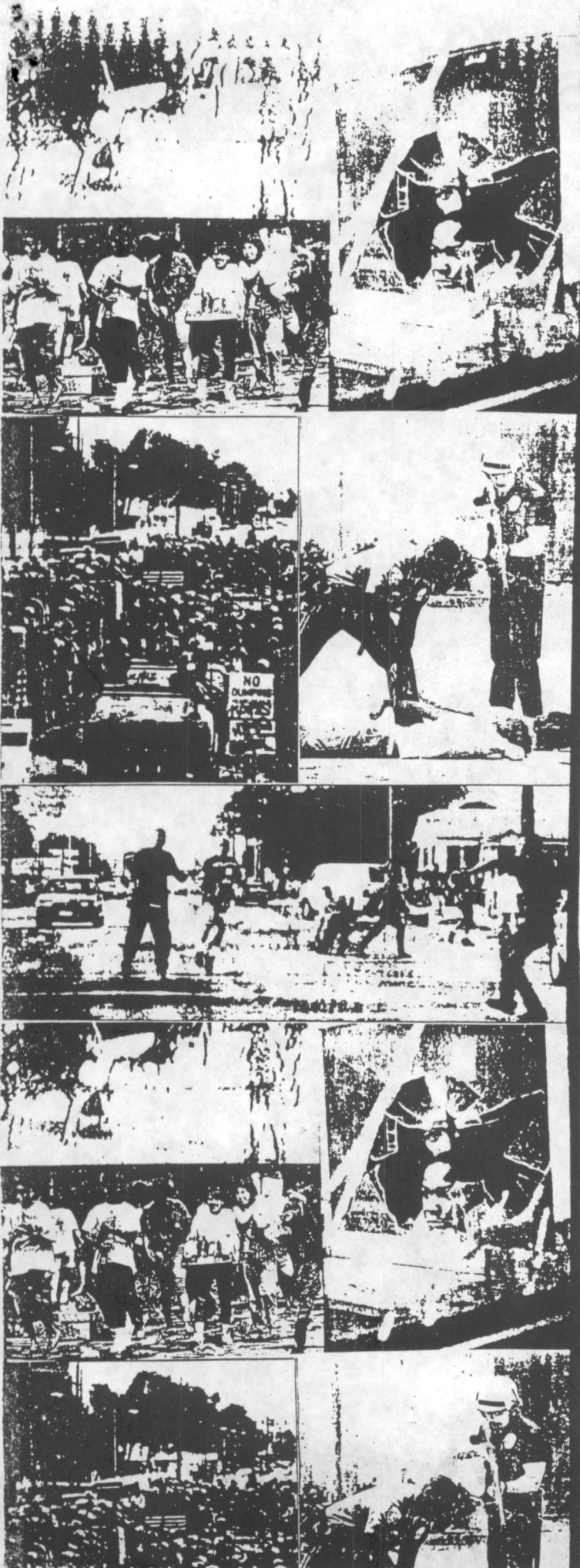
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Opening Statement to the 4th Chicago Community Dialogue  
June 20, 1992

Abdul Alkalimat  
21st Century Books

Brothers and Sisters  
Comrades and Friends

We have gathered to discuss a rebellion in which at least 60 peoples lost their lives and way over 200 more are hospitalized with serious injuries. This is a time to be serious. Times like these require one to take a stand.

Let us listen to the words of Claude McKay:

If we must die, let it not be like hogs  
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,  
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,  
Making their mock at our accursed lot.  
If we must die, O let us nobly die,  
So that our precious blood may not be shed  
In vain; then even the monsters we defy  
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!  
O kinsman! we must meet the common foe!  
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,  
What though before us lies the open grave?  
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,  
pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

Welcome to the fourth Community Dialogue. We established this new political institution to break the silence, with focused discussion and debate over the conditions we face in this city, in this society, all over the world. We aim for the community dialogues to be a forum to speak the truth, to raise our voices against our enemy in search for unity, a unified voice against a common enemy. Also we aim to be a common voice for the defense of friends, for defense of people who have dared to fight back. This is a time for clear thinking, and political courage.

Los Angeles 1992 has clarified once again that we have entered a new political situation. I will even go so far as to say that its strategic symbolic value is that it was a revolutionary rebirth to May Day (1992). The original May Day was tied to the fight for a redefinition of the work day, as a result of gains in the productive forces and relations within industrial production. Today the fight is for an even more radical rupture by redefining society around distribution (social reproduction) rather than (material) production. This is a revolutionary process required to conform to the current new economic reorganization.

Things are polarizing rapidly -- The Gulf War and now infamous Norriega Trial, was recently followed by Bush being humiliated, and US policies being rejected, in Panama and at the Rio Global Summit on the Environment. Life at the bottom of U.S.

society is even more in the grip of homelessness, joblessness, deep cuts or the elimination of various forms of welfare, the lack of medical insurance and neighborhood based medical care facilities, and police terror tactics such as severe beatings, torture, and even murder.

Los Angeles is generally regarded as the city that most embodies this polarization, and the struggles breaking out because of it. The class structure is set up for things to get pretty vicious. In the 1980's in Los Angeles, the % of people making over \$50,000 increased from 9 to 26%, while people making less than \$15,000 increased from 30 to 40%. Nationally, this pattern is quite similar, the richest 1% owning more wealth than the bottom 90%, with 75 million people living in poverty.

The Rodney King incident was a fuse for something that ran very, very deep, and was very, very powerful. A traffic violation led at least four police officers to viciously beat King, while nearly 20 watched (61 blows in 81 seconds). 15 months later, a month long trial ends in an acquittal for all charges, except one charge for one officer. The judge had moved the jury to a white bedroom suburb of LA, Simi Valley, home to thousands of LAPD officers. Of the 400 prospective jurors drawn from the registered voters of Ventura County (33% minority), only 6 were Black. No Black people were chosen for the jury, which while it did have one Latina and one Asian, its composition is more accurately reflected by the fact that nine of them had strong personal connections to the military, and three were members of the NRA.

Prior to this case, the legitimacy of the judicial process in LA was weakened considerably. The previous month a Korean shopkeeper was given a suspended sentence of 5 year probation and \$500 fine for shooting a 15 year old Black woman in the back of her head for allegedly stealing some orange juice. The decision in the case of this murdered young girl, Latasha Harlins, issued shortly before the King trial, was an outrageous green light for shopkeepers to shoot the poor. A Philadelphia survey has found that 50% of all people who shop in chain food stores shoplift from time to time. Clearly the class struggle is entering a new qualitative stage.

Then finally, the decision to release the racist thugs who attacked King was too blatant, especially since the incident was captured on video, the trial was televised, and the cast of characters was so classic, the poorly educated, heavily built Black male accused of attacking cops, and mainstream white cops sworn to protect the property and privileges of capitalism. Afterwards, the people at the trial had to be held off the cops, and later a demonstration attacked police headquarters and the LA Times, while also attacking people and property in an attempt to repudiate the decision, and the overall structure and practice of racist police violence, and finally to seek a moments relief in this deep deep crisis.

The collective response to the decision is likely to be one of the defining moments as we enter the 21st century. The collective violence that began April 29th in Los Angeles was a rainbow rebellion of the international working class against global capitalism in the US and its police forces. Lets break

this down into four basic points:

1. **It was a rainbow rebellion.** The 1965 Watts rebellion was a Black outburst, but in 1992 it was joined equally by Latinos and some whites. In 1970 South Central was 74% Black, but in 1990 it was 45% Latino. Since 1980 over 750,000 immigrants into the US have settled in Los Angeles, so that by 1990 40% of the population in LA was foreign born. Of the total population of Los Angeles County (8.8 million), 60% of the total is Latino, Black, or Asian. Of the first 8,000 people arrested in the City of LA during the rebellion, 50% were Latino, 36% Black, and 12% white.

2. **The rebellion was the international working class rising up against global capitalism.** LA joins with Tokyo to define the Pacific Rim axis just as New York and London rule the Atlantic Rim axis for global capitalism. Japanese capital controls most of the corporate real estate in down town LA, and LA is second in the US in bank capital and corporate headquarters. On the other hand, LA is the largest region of manufacturing jobs in the USA, although 1 in 7 people are on some form of welfare (1.3 million people). In South Central LA 17% of family income was below \$7,500. LA has the greatest number of homeless people, on the one hand, and the largest number of engineers and high tech scientific personnel on the other. It is estimated that over 45% of the aero-space jobs in the US are in the LA area, and that the workers in the garment industry are overwhelmingly undocumented women from Mexico and Central American countries especially El Salvador. It is estimated that the rebellion resulted in over a 20,000 job loss in the LA area.

3. **The rebellion brought on the massive use of police forces.** During the 1980's in California there was the largest prison construction program in the country, building 15 prisons and increasing official capacity from 35,000 to 96,000. The LAPD has only 8,000 officers but they are armed with high power equipment including 75 combat helicopters and 9mm weapons as standard issue. The LAPD had anticipated the rebellion by setting up an overtime fund of about \$1 million, but they pulled back and let it begin without any strong measures. (Was this "War Games?") Almost 30,000 armed troops were involved before it was over: 8,000 LA county sheriffs, 8000 LAPD, 6000 national guard (veterans of the Panama invasion), 4000 marines and army (veterans of the Iraq invasion), 1000 federal officers (including FBI, Border Patrol, Bureau of Prisons, Immigration and Naturalization, Federal Marshalls, Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms, the Texas Rangers, and others.) At least 60 people were killed (Blacks - 42%, Latinos - 34%, and whites 21%) and several hundred have been seriously wounded.

4. **The rebellion is giving birth to a new debate,** including a proposal being circulated under the alleged authorship of a joint command of Cripps and Bloods. There are two community based coalitions in LA that have been waging campaigns against police brutality that have programs, and all over the country new life has been breathed into political discourse. This debate is over what happened in LA, and how progressive forces should move after LA.

Let me repeat my position on what happened in LA: The

collective violence that erupted on April 29 in Los Angeles was a rainbow rebellion of the international working class against global capitalism in the US and its police forces. This Community Dialogue has been set up to debate and clarify this general conception.

After all is said and done today, this community dialogue will be summed up best by our political motion, the strategy and tactics we employ to move beyond the spontaneous violence of the rebellion with consistent programs of action, political line and organization. I think that the main point is this. The mass rebellion of Los Angeles in 1992 was a grass roots vote of no confidence for the current Black leadership, the current Latino leadership, and the options presented by the US political mainstream. After LA is different than before LA, Revolution is possible once again, once again there is a mass demand for revolutionary leadership. The masses have once again marched ahead of the intellectuals, but it is clear that intellectual clarity and planning is required to go any further.

Who dares to take up the challenge? Who will dare to fight the beast and win? The responsibility we face is to build institutions of community dialogue in every city in this country, and help give birth to this new revolutionary process of unity and struggle, intellectual debate and social activism.

We once again ask you to play an active role in this dialogue. We will be here all day so everyone will have ample time to make statements, to raise questions, and to propose concrete plans for unity and struggle.

Before going any further we would like to express our gratitude to the Director of the Carter G Woodson Regional Library Center, and the staff of the Vivian Harsh Collection, especially Michael Flug.

Here we would like to have everyone join us in a moment of silence to give tribute to Ed Manning, a librarian here at the Vivian Harsh Collection who many may have seen at previous Community Dialogues, who supported our efforts but has recently died. And, while we remember Ed, let us also remember the hundreds - no, thousands of people being murdered through IMF World Bank barbarism or the fascist thug culture of Inkatha, the Haitian military, the military governments of Nigeria and Ghana, and Neo-Nazi skinheads and fascist electoral advances all over Europe. In our moment of silence let us recommit to taking names and in the end taking full revenge!

## THE FUTURE AFTER THE LA REBELLION

Presentation to the 4th Chicago Community Dialogue  
June 20, 1992

Abdul Alkalimat  
21st Century Books

BROTHERS AND SISTERS  
COMRADES AND FRIENDS

The challenge to be the last speaker on a day long symposium like this requires accepting special responsibilities. By this time we all know the basic facts of the Rodney King Case, and we have heard some specifics about the struggle in Los Angeles. Further, we have heard about how the Los Angeles case compares to Chicago, and the national and international situation in general. At the end of this kind of a day we should now be formulating what we believe and what we're gonna do. This is a concentration of what all thinking, progressive mind people are doing at this time, at least what everybody ought to be doing as a result of such a epoch defining political event.

The philosophical basis for this process is the distinction between the objective and the subjective. A lot of us over the last years have been talking in revolutionary terms. This was seen as our peculiar form of subjectivity, that's why people granted us the right to speak in such terms and tongues, although they seldom saw it as being an actual expression of their own lives.

Since the masses of our people were relatively quiet and passive, many of our debates got caught up in the differences between one good idea and another good idea: Afrocentricity, Marxism, Feminism, Liberation Theology, Panafricanism, whatever. The LA rebellion demands that all of these subjective differences be redefined on the basis of a new objectivity. It's not what people think they're doing that matters, as much as what they actually do. In fact most times intellectual clarity comes after the fact anyway. So, to sum up the philosophical moment, I would say it is the necessity to move from old subjectivities to a new objectivity.

I have organized this presentation around four postulates that sum up the revolutionary lessons of Los Angeles 1992. These are general lessons to define the road to revolution. We need a summation process of where we are and have been if we are to create the future. We have to clarify our language and logic by bringing our ideas into coherence with the new objective reality, because we have to understand it if we want to change it.

1. **Rebellion** in the 1990's is a positive act of resistance and should be supported.
2. Social revolution in the US is a historical **necessity**,
3. The revolution we want is **possible**.
4. The forces for our revolution must be mobilized, organized, and deployed as soon as possible.



## REBELLION:

I guess my first thoughts about LA went right to heart of the matter - any action that strikes a blow at oppression and exploitation is great. But as the debate continued to unfold it became clear that this issue had unleashed a debate. People got killed, property was destroyed, and the current leadership was not followed at all. Was this a rebellion? Was it a good thing? We might well have this same debate about the slave revolts. Should we uphold Nat Turner - after all he and his comrades killed men, women and children. Yes! of course the slave revolts were righteous, necessary and obviously possible. So what about LA in 1992?

Most reports indicate that people who lived any where near the areas of poverty all felt that they were not only justified in what they did but that they felt good about finally getting back at the system in some way. This is in sharp contrast to the mainstream notion that this was a riot carried out by illegal acts, by criminals. The mainstream approach includes as the main solution to reestablish law and order, with as much police enforcement as they deem necessary.

Of course it is this very law and order that Black people and all other poor and exploited people are alienated from and have to fight. Increasingly there are laws that govern all aspects of our lives, and judicial or police practices that violate specific cultural practices to dominate and instill conformity with mainstream cultural codes. A lawyer was removed from a case by a judge because he insisted on wearing a strip of Kente cloth because the judge alleged that such an act might prejudice a jury. Increasingly there are attempts to implement new ways to limit intellectual and artistic freedom of speech. How many times have rap artists had to publicly defend their right to freedom of speech against attempt at censorship.

Finally, and overall the main point is that **the police forced the issue** by not only primarily defending the store owners, but kicking people in the ass for the fun of it, the sadistic pleasure of hurting people the ruling class and their intellectuals have defined as criminals and being bad, evil, deserving of severe forms of punishment.

These are the condition that end up making violence inevitable. Rebellions occur when all other measures have failed to work. Malcolm X ran it down in the sixties, during the last harvest of urban rebellions, the ballot or the bullet. Even he argued that there was a chance to settle things through elections, but after 27 years of trying that, the people have spoken, and they seem to reject whats been going on and cry out in ways that demand attention. Los Angeles was a violent turn away from the tactic of the ballot toward the bullet.

The LAPD forced people to respond. From the days of Parker through the end of the Gates administration the LAPD has been a bastion of racist repression. In the 1970's, over 15 Black people were killed after being subjected to a special choke hold advocated by the LAPD. Chief Gates remarked that the reason was probably that Black pole had an anatomical fault and their deaths couldn't have been helped.

Further people in LA are armed, and during this rebellion over 5,000 guns were stolen and added to the public arsenal. The gangs were highly publicized due to their connection to cocaine and the drug market in general, but guns are part of a much larger cultural life of California, especially southern California.

There were three main dynamics within the rebellion: focus on commodities, focus on oppression, and focus on attacking the state, especially the police. There were many stores that got hit, but the pattern was to attack Koreans with useful things, necessities of food and cultural consumption. Korean entrepreneurs had become the managers of the ghetto economy and they carried out their task for imperialism in the most disrespectful and racist manner. The rebellion struck out at the closest form of oppression, the face of evil that they encountered on a daily basis.

But as spontaneous uprisings are discussed, even explained as a logical response to particular forms of exploitation and oppression, the simple fact is that spontaneous violence will be smashed by the organized police forces of the state. In fact, the stronger the spontaneous action becomes, then the greater the military clamp down will be, and therefore failed rebellions lead to intensified repression, and in the end fighting for freedom if failed gives birth to its opposite. In this game the stakes are high.

The end of the rebellion has brought great repression into LA, and is resulting in police sponsored legislation all over the country at the local, state and federal levels. Every major battle increases the stakes of the war. Therefore while LA should be celebrated, we have to be sober about learning our lessons and contributing to fighting at higher levels of political development.

It seems the greatest question being raised by the rebellion that will influence the direction of future struggle is "Who can provide leadership as we move into a historical period of revolutionary struggle. The lesson to sum up is that the rebellions are a starting point for this new period of struggle.

#### NECESSITY

Now we have to be clear that this discussion of revolution is not a sneaky return to the subjective. I have argued that the rebellion ends the last 27 years of electoral reformism, it negates all old subjectivities and forces us to return to analyzing the material world in an objective manner. Return to the source, as Cabral points out, has to be to the facts of experience, to our objective experiences.

The objective starting point for this period is that there has been an economic revolution in society and it is this material reality that is forcing the process for a transformation of the social organization of society. With the new technologies and its transformation of job specs, along with the global utilization of labor power utilizing improved transportation and communication underscored by extremely low wages and job bene-



fits, more and more former workers will be excess baggage, with no hope of ever having stable employment again ever in life.

Most of the society we live in was set up to facilitate the smooth running of the industrial economy, and of course the history of Chicago is rooted in this very process. But things have changed making most of Chicago late, out of date, and in desperate need of repair. Imagine the betrayal of Mayor Daley and his lackeys to propose the restructuring of the heart of Chicago around gambling and nonproductive hustles, finance and recreation. Before the people were educated to work in industrial production and had lives with meaningful futures. Now Daley proposes a move that can only benefit the owners since this form of service industry such as in Atlantic City or Los Vegas usually exists in communities trapped in poverty.

Another feature is the move in Chicago to strike a fatal blow to public education and bring in the voucher based for-profit schools to serve and reinforce the bipolar society, the poor that live in "forbidden zones" and the rich that live in guarded/gated enclaves.

There is also the liquidation of public housing as a legitimate form of subsidy for working people who require assistance in maintaining a decent home. While it is being phased out, changed, and/or upgraded for families with stable incomes (from demolition to tenant management) large sections of it in every major city stand vacant while thousands roam the street as the homeless poor.

All of us here can recite a similar breakdown in health care, public transportation, the streets and highways, the parks and the lake front, etc etc.

This all adds up to a deep social crisis. This crisis is of limited concern for the ruling class. There is no interest in solving problems for these people since they are of no longer any use to them. In fact, what we can see is a pull to the right by the capitalist ruling classes all over the world. Perot, Bush, and Clinton all can be placed on the right.

If we only looked at the ruins of the old system, and that includes many of the people in our own community, we might give up, or think that the future we want is not possible. This however, is not at all true.

#### POSSIBILITY

Since the assassinations of Malcolm, King, and Kennedy, and the dirty tricks of Nixon and Watergate, a growing number of people have lost all hope that politicians can be honest and that the government is fair and just, based on democratic principles. The government is a business that serve certain interests, much of it clogged in the bureaucracy which appears to have its own interest, but the fact is that they ultimately serve the ruling class through control mechanisms: domination of political parties, candidates, campaign contributions, media, etc.

The people who are suffering in this society have long sense stopped participating in the voting process. This force that has been alienated is large and dangerous to the government, because

it doesn't feel loyal, nor responsible for the way things are. Think of the youth culture reflected in hip hop and rap, initially Black and now in every aspect of youth all over the world. Ice T, Ice Cube, NWA and Sista Soul-jah are on the cultural cutting edge of the rebellion.

What makes it possible to talk about revolution is not that people are suffering, but why they are suffering and whether or not there is the basis for solving their problem. The rising new economy if organized properly will be able to provide a comfortable material existence for everyone. It is possible for everyone to have a house, food and everything else that is normal in the US.

## NOW

It all comes down to right now, it all comes down to basing ones analysis and action plans firmly within the objective reality of poor people, the working class, including those employed, homeless, jobless, on or off welfare, and many others. The Black middle class can no longer represent the masses of Black people for they have reached their historical limits as Black mayors, generals, and heads of schools, agencies, and businesses. The crisis is forcing the Black middle class to polarize and for the first time since the 1940s develop a strong republican wing.

What is important is that Black people have been voting for democrats since they fully grasped the depression slogan "Jesus leads us and Roosevelt feeds us." Black support for Democrats have been decisive, and have provided the margin of whatever victories they have had in the last 30 years. The critical issue is what have been the rewards of such a pattern?

But we have a new phenomenon of the rising republican swing for the new Black middle class. The old Black middle class forces are mainly democrats, rooted in the fight against racism as an independent group of self employed entrepreneurs and professional, including the elites heading the institutions within the Black community, especially the church, social and fraternal organizations, and service agencies. The new forces, being educated in integrated elite schools as a result of civil rights victories, and serving within the government and private industry, operating within the mainstream, represent the extent to which the new high tech information based economy is willing to absorb some Blacks into positions of responsibility and privilege. (This covers Clarence Thomas and his friends) The main point is that in both cases, the old Black middle class democrats or the new Black middle class Republicans, the main job of the Black middle class is to manage the affairs of the Black community and to suppress all forms of revolutionary motion. In this past this has mainly been as distributors of services or income, but increasingly the services are within the so called criminal justice system and welfare has been drastically cut back. This places the current political campaign in context.

The two main political parties reflect the last century of capitalist development in the USA. For our purposes it is important to begin at the time of the great depression. The

danger of revolution stalked the land and capital intervened through the administration of the benevolent millionaire FDR. The main motion was to strike "a new deal" in the USA, utilize Keynesian deficit spending to re-employ workers to continue building the infrastructure of the national industrial economy. While one wing of the capitalist world swung to fascism the other struggled to keep liberal capitalism afloat.

It seems to me that it is necessary to understand the dialectic between these two faces of capital, because while one face may dominate it is necessary to understand that the other faces continues to exist. The civil rights movement and the Kennedy-Johnson administrations were sandwiched in between the fascist politics of the 1950's and the rightwing shift of the 70's and 80's. The fascist elements were forced to retreat after the 1950's because US capital remained competitive and relatively detached from the folly of Euro-colonial entanglement in the third world and Black people led a movement to redefine the society based on the end of the sharecropping system of the south. But, by the end of the 1980's, US capital is in deep crisis from its imperialist rivals, from its neo-colonial entanglements in the third world, and the fundamental social polarity that seems likely to continue breeding collective violence and challenges to the legitimacy and power of the state.

This is the crisis that we face today, among the capitalists can the liberal capitalist position win against the fascists. The polarization in the society has not yet forced a full disclosure of the fascist tendencies, preparations are clearly underway. It is clear that more and more main stream dialogue is taking up these themes, genocide, fascism, and the end of democracy, or for that matter the end of history. As I read events that are unfolding around us we are being presented with three basic plans in this current campaign: Clinton is holding out for a friendly rhetoric, and some benevolence with his fiscal conservatism, while Bush is holding fast to his version of Reagan's trickle down "voo doo" economics. Both see the government as essentially the arm of the rich, the issue is how benevolent to be. On the other hand, the most blatant motion toward fascism is coming from the Perot camp, again the direct intervention of the capitalist class.

We now know that the ruling class has never been retrained by the constitution. Certainly not Nixon with his dirty tricks and Reagan's with his blatant and illegal "government within the government," utilizing Bush as his hatchet man from the CIA who was the "bag" man in more than one of these nefarious capers, as Vice president, and now as the warrior president with shooting victories in Panama and Iraq, and political victories in Eastern Europe especially the Soviet Union.

I don't think anyone here would argue against the prediction that something like LA will happen again, and that there will be more violence spread throughout this country, it will be mainly among poor people but it will involve all races and nationalities. The crisis is what to do to support the rebellion. And, also, how to help move from rebellion to revolution.

The first point is that one must study and deepen one's understanding and commitment to the four main revolutionary

principles.

1. Rebellion in the 1990s is a positive act of resistance and should be supported.

2. Social revolution in the US is a historical necessity.

3. The Revolution we want is possible.

4. The forces for our revolution must be mobilized, organized, and deployed as soon as possible.

The second point follows that Charlie Parker tune *Nows the Time Brothers and Sisters, Nows the Time*.

**NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE**