

Capitalism and Racism

An Analysis of White Supremacy and the Oppression of Peoples of Color

Black Autonomy Federation

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Contents

Race And Class: The Combined Character of Black/POC Oppression	3
Autonomy as a revolutionary tendency:	4
Anarchism + Black Revolution = New Black Autonomous Politics	4
Black Autonomy is not separatist:	7

Race And Class: The Combined Character of Black/POC Oppression

If an effective resistance is to be mounted against the current racist offensive of the Capitalist class, the utmost solidarity between the poor and workers of all races is essential, but especially among various peoples of color. My position has always been one that rather than the usual road of a white dominated path to “unity”, as laid out by the White left, I believe an alliance of oppressed peoples of color is really the way forward in this period. This does not mean that we do not have group differences or will always agree on individual issues between various non-white ethnic and racial groupings. But our shared history of oppression and desire for liberation equip us for a new type of unity and lays a path to unite with advanced elements of the white working class.

We must point out to those white people who say they oppose the system: that the way to defeat the Capitalist strategy is for white workers to defend the democratic rights won by Blacks and other oppressed peoples after decades of hard struggle and to fight to dismantle the system of white skin privilege. White workers should support and adopt the concrete demands of the Black/POC movement and should work to abolish the white identity entirely. These white workers should strive for multicultural unity and should work with Black/POC activists to build an anti-racist movement to challenge white supremacy. They should stand in absolute solidarity with the liberation movements in those communities that arise. (This must be done in tandem with any wage demands, but most white radicals dismiss this as “divisive”).

However, even though we call on white workers to support our struggle, it is also very important for them to recognize the right of the Black movement to take an independent road in its own interests. That is what self-determination means. It does not mean deferring our struggles to that of white radicals or other segments of the white community, with the hope of some mindless “unity” in the future. It has not yet even been proven that the most progressive or “radical” whites are up to the task and since racism is so deep, that they would be able to break away. But we offer them a way forward, in support of and as part of a new movement.

But if such a Black movement does become a social revolutionary movement, it must ultimately unite its forces with similar movements among Native Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans and other oppressed peoples of color, who are in revolt against the system. Such a united movement of activist peoples of color could radicalize even broader sectors of the white society, such as students, youth, laborers and others, thus undermining the consensus upholding white support for the government across class lines.

This is what we believe has the most potential for happening again, radical autonomous movements acting as revolutionary “incubators” of broad-based struggles, although it is not enough to call for mindless “unity” as much of the white left does. Their “unity” just means white leftist control and leadership of the overall struggle.

So we cannot sit around waiting on white working people to join our movements, or running to join white-dominated organizations. White people are still not in the same desperate circumstances as Blacks, Latinos or Native Americans, nor want to see the system defeated now as long as it serves them.

Autonomy as a revolutionary tendency:

Because of the dual forms of oppression of non-white workers and the depth of social desperation it creates, Blacks and peoples of color must strike first, whether their potential white allies are available to do so or not. This is self-determination and that is why it is necessary for oppressed workers to build independent movements to unite their own peoples first. Malcolm X was the first one to really explain this. This self-activity of the oppressed masses of color when it reaches the radical stage is inherently a revolutionary force and is an essential part of the social revolutionary process of the entire working and poor class.

Anarchism + Black Revolution = New Black Autonomous Politics

Although Anarchists do not believe in vanguard political parties, the reality is that because of the peculiarities of the United States of America's social development and especially racial slavery, Africans in America and other peoples of color with a shared history, are predisposed to lead at least the beginning states of a social revolution, thereafter enlisting or being joined by its potential allies in the white working class. African Americans constitute a "class vanguard", a class capable of radicalizing society with its struggle against racism and capitalism. Most white radicals at least give lip service to understanding this, especially since the Black Power and Civil Rights struggles unfolded in the 1960s, although they still hang onto the "white working class hero" ideology of the past, to try to deflect these issues with a backward class argument. We cannot simply wait around for white people to "get it" and become active in our cause.

Even though Blacks and people of color are a "minority" of the total population, there can be no successful social revolution in the United States without Black and non-white people not just taking equal part in a white dominated movement, but in fact leading the way. The U.S. class system is based on racialized social, economic and political oppression. With such a race and class divided society, to ignore this basic fact is a sellout or capitulation to white supremacy. Rather than reducing all contradictions to class alone, like most white radicals continue to do, we must understand the workings of racism as part of the structure of overall oppression.

In fact, for white radicals to ignore this means that they themselves are engaging in white chauvinism of the worst sort and betraying the very idea of social revolution. Though they think they should lead everybody or have all the answers, United States social history has proven too many times that white middle class radicals cannot even lead working class whites, less known the captive nationalities to freedom. Because of their almost total ignorance about race and class issues, white Anarchist radicals don't even know what questions to ask and therefore can't come up with the right answers. So we organize in our own name and for our interests in a Black/POC Autonomous movement, rather than depend on them.

The new autonomous politics is made up of the Libertarian Socialist core of Anarchism and many of the tenets of revolutionary Black nationalism, such as was stated and practiced by the original Black Panther Party. This combination of elements makes up something so new that it has not been fully defined before now. We will attempt to more sharply define what it is that we have been talking about for so many years and also place it within an historical context so that it can no longer be dismissed as an eclectic mish-mash" or "corruption of (both ideals)" as the

purists would claim. Yet, it should not alarm Anarchist ideological “purists” when we speak of an autonomous movement of Anarchists of color.

First, the early Anarchist movement in America always reflected the cultural, social and political ideals of the community that produced it. Thus, we had a Germanic-dominated Anarcho-Syndicalist tendency during the 1880’s called the International Working People’s Association, which was strong in Chicago, Pittsburgh and a few other industrial cities; a Jewish Anarchist movement in New York and other cities during the 1900’s-and lasted until the 1980s, wherein some whole newspapers were printed in Yiddish; an Italian movement also flourished in New York, New Jersey and other urban areas in the 1920–30’s and so on. One European ethnic group after another produced unique American Anarchist social movements, which culturally and politically reflected those communities.

So the question then becomes why should anyone be surprised to learn that there would be Anarchist movements of Pacific Islanders, African Americans or Latinos among other peoples of color? In talking about Anarchist ideals and autonomous movements, we are not talking about “orthodoxies” which cannot be revised, we are talking about ideas which will be picked up, used by millions of oppressed peoples and adapted to their purpose and circumstances. But many of the white Anarchists have shown nothing but fear and loathing.

Black Autonomy is not Black Nationalism. We believe in self-determination, but not any form of racial superiority. We do not negate class differences between rich and poor within any nationality, those among us who seek to be our neo-colonial masters, the “Negrosie,” are our enemies as much as the European racists. We do not seek to build a nation-state for our own separate peoples. We subscribe to the major tenets of Anarchism and anti-authoritarian politics, although we redefine many of those to deal with our oppressed condition and ideas of liberation.

Interestingly, it was Fred Hampton and the Chicago branch of the Black Panther Party, which first conceived of a “Rainbow Alliance” of revolutionary organizations of various ethnic and racial groups way back in the late 1960s. Hampton was no integrationist and although he remained a strong Black revolutionary, Hampton began to unite white radicals, with progressive elements of the Black community, Latinos, Asians and others into a grassroots political movement to organize in their own communities, and then unite their local political associations into a citywide grassroots alliance. He openly referred to this as a dual power institution to challenge the established white power structure and empower the poor masses of the Daley political machine. However, he was assassinated in December 1969, before he could really put his program into play. And yet it is something that still needs to happen.

We go further now and say that there should be a movement built of autonomous peoples of color, linked to the Anarchist movement, but existing as an independent tendency. There have been short-term alliances between ethnic and racial groups, but there has never been a real attempt to actually create a revolutionary organization of peoples of color. But what is needed is a radical break from the narrow race nationalism of “our people first and only” to a new radical consciousness of race and class, which embraces those peoples of color and oppressed peoples of diverse ethnic backgrounds that share views of autonomous political action. Many Black nationalists and doctrinaire white radical groups alike would be opposed to this, for reasons of their own.

But the Anarchist purists and Black chauvinists both will just have to shudder, because a new movement is on the verge of happening now and there is nothing that anybody can do to stop it. There are anti-authoritarian activists of color of every ethnic group and hue, who are taking the

first slow steps towards building a tendency within the Anarchist movement, or even venturing out as autonomous anti-authoritarians. They have taken those ideals which I and others have put out there and made them into a class weapon reflecting the African, Asian, or Latino experiences on this continent and thus taken the first steps to free their peoples and their class.

This great sector of oppressed colored humanity has said we have had enough: Enough racism! Enough poverty! Enough degradation! Enough oppression! They also know they will have to fight their own fight, if they want to be free. Nobody from the white world is coming to save them. Although they know the revolutionary project to defeat this system of capitalism and enslavement requires millions of other allies who will help them, it is people of color who will decide the agenda, the timetable and the tactics for obtaining our liberation. Too long have others spoken for us without our best interests at heart.

The new Black/POC autonomous politics differs from European Anarchism in that we know that we are oppressed as a distinct people and as workers. Currently, European-dominated Anarchism places its greatest contradictions with the State alone, with the state's ability to hold back a free lifestyle and yet this is exactly what we cannot limit our critique to. This is a white world-view based on many members' privileged background in capitalist society. Some Anarchists and other white radicals argue that we should not "buy into" any race differentiation at all, less known ideals of autonomy. To them we say: yes, we realize that historically constructed "races" have been created under this system, which determines both manner of life and death under this system and that the State upholds this race/class system.

Yes, we know that it is no accident that it is this way. Yes, it is also true that individual white workers have not commissioned racism and we do not perceive all white people as enemies. However, we also know how this system really works for white supremacy, and that all classes of whites have been the beneficiaries of our oppression, and that white class collaboration-ism is part of the social control mechanism of the state. The fact is that it is the whites who should be the ones deconstructing whiteness and confronting white racism, while we fight for freedom and liberation in our own way!

Therefore, we vehemently disagree with the Socialists, Communists and those Anarchists who say that the oppression of all workers is identical under this system. This does not reflect reality at all.

We say that we are a class of super-oppressed people of color historically downtrodden equally because of our racial oppression under this system, not just our social class as workers. Even a cursory glance at history and everyday social reality proves that one's place in this racist society rides on the outcome of their skin pigment or ethnic makeup. So racism is a class doctrine, used by the state for social control of workers of color. In fact, racism is the actual class relationship in North American society.

I have pointed out before that so-called "white" people are a contrived super-nationality designed to help the capitalists keep workers of color in their place and safeguard the status quo. So rather than see the white industrial working class as a potentially revolutionary class, instead we see it as an opportunistic, collaborationist body which must be redefined and reorganized if is to constitute a reliable ally for workers of color and have any ability of fighting in the interests of a new working class. As it stands now, they are fighting for white rights, not for the rights of the entire class of the poor and workers.

As Autonomous workers of color, we of course disagree with Marxists and other so-called radicals who claim that an authoritarian political party and strong leadership cultism is necessary to

produce a social revolution. But we go further and say that neither they nor the white Anarchists can lead us as a people of color (or even themselves) to our freedom, even though they have been conditioned as Europeans to command and rule over people of color and the lower classes. We vehemently reject their mis-leadership and authoritarian rule over us, or their old ideals of white industrial workers as a proletarian class of saviors.

Black Autonomy is not separatist:

However, we also have differences with the Black (and other race) nationalists, although we may share many basic ideas with them on cultural autonomy. We also believe in and treasure many of the traditions and history of our peoples, but believe it must be demystified and made into a culture of resistance, rather than personality cults or escapism from the reality of fighting racism and the state. Further, we categorically do not believe in any “race nationalism”, which demonizes white people and advocates some sort of biological determinism. We are not xenophobic; so do not entertain any race mythology about European peoples as either a superior species or as devils. And although we recognize the necessity of autonomous struggles in this period, we can work with white workers and poor people around specific campaigns. Our major point of our differences is that we are not seeking to build a Black nation-state.

In fact, we believe the same class politics of “haves-and-have-nots” will show itself within any type of Black nation-state, whether it’s an Islamic, secular New African, or African Socialist state, and that this will produce an extreme class differential and economic/political injustice among those oppressed peoples of color. We can look at a succession of dictatorships and capitalist regimes in Africa to let us know this. We believe that a bourgeois class and political dictatorship is inevitable and that a people’s revolution will break out under such a Black Nationalist government.

Look at what is happening today under the former Apartheid government, now under Black rule, united with the White capitalist class. The Black bourgeoisie and business class have been elevated as the nominal ruling class, while the same economic forces are exploiting and oppressing the African working class and poor. Millions are homeless, unemployed, exploited at low wage, labor jobs, and are landless. Capitalist Black Power has not freed Black people even after apartheid has been defeated. Can the capitalist imperialist financial institutions take any less control of a Black nation-state in America? Sovereignty is not an option in such a world dominated by this system. A new Black nation-state on a North American land territory does not mean freedom anymore than do the ones in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

We also believe that under the capitalist system that now exists, most manifestations of Black nationalism have never been a truly revolutionary doctrine, but rather such movements have asserted themselves most forcefully as a defensive doctrine for the protection of the Black middle class. It is not even a movement to fight white racism, but rather an interest group politics which can battle for equal political power for Black business people or the professional class under this system, not to remove it.

So, a Black nation-state is not the answer to our problems as an oppressed people, in fact it leads us back to slavery, just as it has not led to freedom for any of the world’s people. Just flag independence. It replaces the white master for the Black master. We are not immune from the laws of social change; the state is an oppressive institution by its very nature.

In addition, those who argue for a Black state almost never tell how it will be obtained and many of their arguments that have been presented are intentionally vague and fanciful. Who really believes that America will just grant an Islamic state to the Nation of Islam, or give up five Southern states to the Republic of New Africa just because a small faction calling itself a “government in exile” exists and advocates for it? Who can even prove most people want it in the first place? Why, it would require years of a bloody struggle and a major organizing drive. And what are we to do until that great day comes (?); the Black Nationalist groups never tell us, but we can presume we are to blindly follow behind their leaders and pay our dues to their organizations. This is opportunism and treachery, leading us down a blind alley.

In addition, the only revolutionary nationalist group to even talk about conducting a plebiscite to find out what form African people in America believed our freedom should take was the Black Panther Party. They recognized that it was up to the masses to make such decisions, not vanguard organizations in their place. Like the Panthers, we believe that even before racism or capitalism are defeated, we can begin now to wage a protracted struggle against capitalism and its agents and that the only nation-state we should be concerned with is the corrupt American state still oppressing us and most of the peoples of the world.

In common with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the leading militant organization of the earlier civil rights period, Anarchists believe that the role of the organizer is not to lead people, but to empower them and let them take over their own local struggles. We also believe that such communities are virtual colonies or semi-colonies, which are under the military and political control of the state. But we do not believe that a national liberation movement alone can free us and that the real task is to dismantle capitalism itself. Our liberation struggle is part of a broader struggle for total social change.

Many middle class Black nationalist groups are tied to the Democratic Party or Ralph Nader’s Green Party and do not offer any real radical alternative. Firstly, we do not believe in conventional or electoral politics in any form and reject coalitions led by liberals and social democrats. Finally, like the Panthers of the 1960s and contrary to today’s Nation of Islam and the Afro-centric movement, we believe in a class analysis and understand that there were historical, socio-economic factors that accounted for both slavery and racism, not because whites are “ice people”, “devils” or other such nonsense. The main motive was money, the enrichment of Europe and the “New World”. This capitalist system produces racism/white supremacy. It is this capitalist system that must be destroyed to get rid of it.

Therefore, this is who we are, autonomous peoples of color, fighters for Anarchism, self-determination and freedom for our people and all oppressed people. The Panthers proved how dangerous Black revolutionaries can be to this system, now we will finish the job of putting capitalism in its grave. No freedom without a fight!

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