

Appeal to the Black Reparations Movement

Written by Black Workers League ID4123
Saturday, 12 January 2008 11:20 -

Appeal to the Black Reparations Movement: Join the Fight For Reconstruction in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast by the Black Workers League, Reconstruction Commission

The reparations movement is an important section of the African American liberation movement. It is made up of various political and ideological tendencies and class forces and represents the largest alignment of Black liberation organizations and activists inside of the US. It offers a basic framework for connecting the struggles of Black people inside the US to the struggles throughout Africa and the African Diaspora against the continuing super-exploited and genocide committed against our peoples, lands and communities by US and global capitalism.

Pan Africanists and internationalists must view reparations as a demand against US and global imperialism for the redistribution of the wealth amassed from the historical and continuing oppression of Africa and the African Diaspora.

The demand for reparations is core to the struggle for African American self-determination, national liberation and for building socialism in the 21st Century. This means that the reparations movement inside of the US must be anti-imperialist, mass based, and active in mobilizing Black people and allies for radical structural changes that address historical problems on national oppression, and that seek to alter the balance of power in favor of the struggles against US and world imperialism.

The continuing impact of the Gulf Coast disaster, resulting in the deaths of hundreds and uprooting thousands of majority Black working class and poor people, represents the most contemporary example of the US government and corporate violations of human rights against Black people inside of the US.

It has become a lens to view the national oppression of Black people throughout the country. It highlights the main features of this oppression - the under funding of the infrastructure, gentrification, state repression, political disenfranchisement, privatization of public services, busting of trade unions, massive unemployment, oppression of women, massive incarceration and forced dispersion. Taken together and in their intensity and scope, these atrocities represent crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and acts of genocide against Black people in the US.

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The reparations movement as an alignment of forces has no visible identity in building national or international support for the struggle for Reconstruction in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. It has not taken up this struggle as a primary focal point of its work.

Appeals to the US government to pass legislation recognizing reparations for African Americans, cannot be taken seriously by the masses or the government, when there is no active struggle by the forces of the reparations movement for democratic and human rights reforms connected to the struggle for Reconstruction in the Gulf Coast.

The lack of a program of action has led many to view reparations as a “pipedream” and a naiveté about the struggle against US imperialism. Instead of developing an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist mass consciousness, which is forged through struggle, reparations are being viewed by many, as a “paycheck” that would enable Black people to better compete within the capitalist system.

Rebuilding the African American Liberation Movement

Many had hopes that the reparations movement would be that section of the Black liberation movement, like the Black Power section was during the 1960s, to serve as the core basis for building the national Black united front bringing together the various organizations and tendencies around a program of action.

The World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) held in Durban South Africa in August 2001, provided a point of international convergence for Africans and other oppressed peoples of color throughout the world to begin developing an international framework for the struggle against structural economic, social, political and environmental racism as a key part of the struggle against global capitalism/imperialism.

The events of 9-11 and the increased international repression led by the US in name of the “war on terrorism” set back the momentum of the reparations movement that was developing in connection with the WCAR.

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This is a period with great dangers as well as opportunities for the anti-imperialist forces inside of the US, particularly the working class and oppressed nationality political and social movements that are organizing around critical economic, social and political demands.

All movements, particularly its revolutionary sections, must look for opportunities to mobilize the masses to break through the fears and to build mass confidence. The conscious elements must help to organize and give political direction to the spontaneous struggles. Alone, these struggles, especially if they remain local and unconnected, will not be able to survive or navigate through the increasing state repression and cooptation, the left sectarianism and opportunist, or limitations resulting from the lack of resources they will face.

The reparations movement as a national network of organizations and activists could play an important role in organizing Gulf Coast Solidarity Committees throughout the country, similar to the organizing of the African Liberation Support Committees during the 1970s that built support for the African liberation movements against colonialism.

Key Battleground of the Black Liberation Struggle

The struggle for Reconstruction in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast represents both a response to the system of Black national oppression that continuously subjects Black people to the harshest conditions of capitalist exploitation and social oppression, and is also part of the growing resistance of the U.S. working class to the domestic changes corresponding to the U.S. imperialist global strategy.

The struggle for Reconstruction in the Gulf Coast must be viewed as an emerging and leading zone of the struggle against African American national oppression and for self-determination. The struggle in New Orleans to defend and insure affordable housing is the leading flank.

It is one of the keys for the right of return of the Black majority to New Orleans. It can contribute to the development of a greater level of independent Black and working class led political and social organization in the Gulf Coast and nationally forged through this struggle. This could represent an important zone of contending power for the wider struggle for African American

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self-determination and against US imperialism.

A national Black liberation movement framework is needed to organize nationally and internationally to weaken the capacity of the US government and corporate forces to contain, divide, isolate and setback this struggle. National support is needed to help broaden the space for political activity in New Orleans and throughout the country through a combination of mass mobilizations, independent political action and international pressure.

The struggle in New Orleans must be seen as a key and strategic battleground of the struggle for national Black democratic and human rights and self-determination and against the increasing implementation and consolidation of anti-working class and fascist government and corporate policies carried out by agencies of the Department of Homeland Security like the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The struggles in Montgomery and Birmingham, Ala, the Mississippi Delta and Memphis, Tenn. in the 1950s and 60s for access to public accommodations, Black voting rights and trade union rights represented key Civil Right and Black power movement battlegrounds. They also helped to break the fears and paralyses of the broader left that were created by the McCarthy Period.

These struggles needed national support, and were critical to winning national democratic reforms. They also enabled the Black left that was helping to organize and lead some of these struggles in the South, to launch the beginnings of the Black Power that spread throughout the US. These struggles were decisive for strengthening the national will and confidence of Black people and their allies to struggle against the Jim Crow terror that was being unleashed, and to oppose the US war Vietnam.

This period saw the emergence of the 1960s national Black liberation movement and the formation of hundreds of local and national Black liberation organizations. This period produced new, younger, more working class and militant political leadership. National Black Power Conferences and Congresses were organized to serve as national venues for Black liberation organizations and activists to hammer out main political demands and campaigns.

Power Concedes Nothing Without a Struggle

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The demand for affordable housing in New Orleans shows that the US government will not grant basic human rights reforms or reparations to the Black masses without a mass and revolutionary struggle. New Orleans also helps to bring the struggle against African American national oppression into the international arena as a human rights struggle against violations that help to further raise the demand for reparations and that gives international forces and bodies at point of focus to call for US accountability to international standards.

The reparations movement must help to organize and give political direction to Black people in the daily struggles against national oppression; helping to build mass based power to win reparations along the way of our protracted struggle for self-determination, national liberation and revolutionary social transformation of US society.

If Black liberation organizations, networks and activists can't organize Black people nationally to build support for the struggle for Reconstruction in the Gulf Coast, the demand for reparations and self-determination loses its concrete meaning. It departs from the self-determination slogan that "We Are Our Own Liberators!"

Without Struggle, there will be No Reparations or Self-determination!

All Hands On Deck!

By the Black Workers League

Reconstruction Commission 1/11/08