Why Black People Are in the Situation They're in Today—And Their Continuing Potential as a Powerful Force for an Emancipating Revolution

In my last message, I called attention to this:

The revolutionary potential of Black people was powerfully demonstrated in the 1960s. But there have been big changes since the 1960s—in the situation of Black people within this country, and in the country and the world overall.

These big changes have not been caused by the all-too-real racism among too many white people, or by a conspiracy among a small number of mysterious and powerful people. And they are not the result of some god's "will" or part of "god's plan." *They flow out of and result from the fundamental nature and dynamics of the system that rules in this country and dominates in the world as a whole: the system of _capitalism-imperialism_.*

Since the 1960s, because of changes in the economy overall, and as a result of the struggle against discrimination and oppression, there has been a significant growth in the Black middle class—and an increase in the Black bourgeoisie (Black people—including those who have amassed large amounts of capital through sports or entertainment—with investments and income in the multi-millions). The *capitalist ruling class* of this country, at the head of a system *thoroughly grounded and steeped in _white supremacy_,* sees this development of the Black bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie (middle class) as important in undercutting and derailing the kind of revolutionary aspirations that characterized Black youth and others in the 1960s. And this has gone hand-in-hand with conditions of greater desperation for significant sections of Black people.

Over this same period, in this country there has been a huge loss of higher-paying production jobs in manufacturing. This has negatively affected large numbers of Black men (and hit them harder than white workers who previously held these jobs), with the result that many Black men today are forced into lower-paying jobs, and large numbers are actually locked out of the formal economy, with some propelled into hustling and crime. This has fed the growth of gangs and violence among the masses of Black people in these conditions, in particular the youth.

At the same time, while there has been an increase of Black women in the professions, there are also many Black women working in low-wage jobs; and the decline of manufacturing employment has been associated with higher poverty rates for Black women and Black children, in part because this increases the numbers of these women who are single parents. (For more on all this, see the article *Imperialist Parasitism and Class-Social Recomposition in the U.S. From the 1970s to Today: An Exploration of Trends and Changes,* by Raymond Lotta, which contains very important analysis of major changes in the U.S. economy overall, as a globalized capitalist-imperialist economy, and the consequences for masses of people. This work by Lotta can be found at revcom.us.)

Along with these major changes within the U.S., there have also been big changes internationally since the 1960s which have had a serious negative effect. Back in the 1960s, and into the 1970s, there was then a whole wave of anti-imperialist national liberation struggles in the Third World (Asia, Africa, and Latin America), notably the victorious Vietnamese people's liberation war against U.S. imperialism. Until the death of its revolutionary leader Mao Zedong, in 1976, China was a powerful socialist state, providing a living, liberating alternative to this system of capitalism-imperialism. All this provided inspiration, encouragement, and support to oppressed people—and people rising up against injustice overall—throughout the world, including Black people and others within this most powerful imperialist country (the USA). It combined with and strengthened the optimism that was felt among Black people then, as they broke free from the open ("Jim Crow") segregation and Ku Klux Klan terror that Black people had been subjected to for 100 years even after slavery was formally ended through the Civil War in the 1860s. In particular, Black youth in the 1960s were determined that they would no longer put up with the brutal and degrading oppression that had been imposed on previous generations, and "revolution was in the air" among many of these Black youth (and others), as represented especially by the Black Panther Party, whose founders saw the struggle of Black people for liberation as part of a struggle of all oppressed people against the imperialist system.

But, in the time since then, socialism has been overthrown, and capitalism restored, in China; and, in the Third World the powerful wave of national liberation struggles of the 1960s (and into the 1970s) has largely been replaced by the rule and influence of various reactionary and corrupt forces in the Third World, seeking a better position for themselves within the world as it is—dominated as it is by the system of capitalism-imperialism.

All this has had a definitely negative effect on people throughout the world, including in the U.S.: lowering people's sights; reinforcing the viewpoint relentlessly propagated by the ruling class that there is no alternative to this system, and therefore all you can do is strive for a better place within this monstrous system—with the crudest expression of this the orientation of getting ahead of and beating out everyone else, by whatever means.

During this same period, the effect of imperialist domination in the world, and especially in the poorer countries of the world, has made life unliveable for masses of people there, leading to massive migration across the globe. Within the U.S.—the imperialist power most responsible for the devastation of these oppressed countries—there has been a significant increase in immigrants especially from Mexico and other parts of Latin America, contributing to the growth of the non-European percentage of the U.S. population, while at the same time the relative weight of African-Americans within that non-European population has decreased. This has had contradictory effects, including the negative effect of increased tension and conflict between Black people and immigrants.

In place of revolutionary forces, the Black middle class, and especially the very wealthy Black bourgeois, have been promoted as "role models" for Black people, even as there is no real possibility for the *masses* of Black people to rise to the same positions. As I spoke to plainly in "Hope For Humanity On A Scientific Basis": "Black people as a whole suffer horrific oppression in many forms, including one of the most egregious expressions of this, murder by police, as well as rampant discrimination and racism throughout the society; but different classes, strata and sections of the Black population experience this differently and respond to it differently." Typically, the Black bourgeoisie and Black petty bourgeoisie (middle class) "see the solution as working within the system and getting a better place within this system"—and that viewpoint, which is constantly promoted by the dominant institutions of this system, has a powerful influence among masses of impoverished and desperate Black people. (*Hope For Humanity On A Scientific Basis, Breaking with Individualism, Parasitism and American Chauvinism* is available at revcom.us/BA's Collected Works).

All these changes have been reflected in a marked change in the culture that prevails, or has initiative, among Black people, with a significant influence among larger sections of people in this country (and in the larger world).

Soon, I will be getting further into some of the significant backward, and even putrid, political as well as cultural expressions influencing Black people, and the need to radically transform this situation through fierce struggle. But with all that, the fact remains that Black people continue to be subjected to the most horrific oppression. As I have written before:

No matter what their position, Black people can never feel "safe and secure" in this country where, at every level, white supremacy is built into the structures and functioning of the system—a white supremacy which is systematically, and often violently, asserted and enforced. *(Since 1960, the number of Black people killed by police is greater than the thousands who were lynched during the whole time of open segregation and Ku Klux Klan terror after the Civil War.)*

Among Black people in their masses there continues to be "the sometimes openly expressed, sometimes expressed in partial ways, sometimes expressed in wrong ways, but deeply, deeply felt desire to be rid of these long centuries of oppression of Black people." And once more:

> There is the potential for something of unprecedented beauty to arise out of unspeakable ugliness: Black people playing a crucial role in putting an end, at long last, to this system which has, for so long, not just exploited but dehumanized, terrorized and tormented them in a thousand ways—putting an end to this in the only way it can be done—by fighting to emancipate humanity, to put an end to the long night in which human society has been divided into masters and slaves, and the masses of humanity have been lashed, beaten, raped, slaughtered, shackled and shrouded in ignorance and misery.

But this very real potential *must be fiercely fought for*—against the powerful political and cultural forces and influences working to extinguish this potential and subject Black people to continuing and worsening degradation and oppression.

Next: Black People—Powerful Revolutionary Potential, In Opposition to Putrid, Degrading Politics and Culture.

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