

ON THE IDEOLOGY OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

By Eldridge Cleaver



PART I

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(Part 1)

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We have said: the ideology of the Black Panther Party is the historical experience of Black people and the wisdom gained by Black people in their 400 year long struggle against the system of racist oppression and economic exploitation in Babylon, interpreted through the prism of the Marxist-Leninist analysis by our Minister of Defense, Huey P. Newton.

However, we must place heavy emphasis upon the last part of that definition -- 'interpreted...by our Minister of Defense..'. The world of Marxism-Leninism has become a jungle of opinion in which conflicting interpretations, from Right Revisionism to Left Dogmatism, foist off their reactionary and blind philosophies as revolutionary Marxism-Leninism. Around the world and in every nation people, all who call themselves Marxist-Leninists, are at each other's throats. Such a situation presents serious problems to a young party, such as ours, that is still in the process of refining its ideology.

When we say that we are Marxist-Leninists, we mean that we have studied and understood the classical principles of scientific socialism and that we have adapted these principles to our own situation for ourselves. However, we do not move with a closed mind to new ideas or information. At the same time, we know that we must rely upon our own brains in solving ideological problems as they relate to us.

For too long Black people have relied upon the analyses and ideological perspectives of others. Our struggle has reached a point now where it would be absolutely suicidal for us to continue this posture of dependency. No other people in the world are in the same position as we are, and no other people in the world can get us out of it except ourselves. There are those who are all too willing to do our thinking for us, even if it gets us killed. However, they are not willing to follow through and do our dying for us. If thoughts bring about our deaths, let them at least be our own thoughts, so that we will have broken, once and for all, with the flunkeyism of dying for every cause and every error -- except our own.

One of the great contributions of Huey P. Newton is that he gave the Black Panther Party a firm ideological foundation that frees us from ideological flunkeyism and opens up the path to the future -- a future to which we must provide new ideological formulations to fit our ever changing situation.

Much -- most -- of the teachings of Huey P. Newton are unknown to the people because Huey has been placed in a position where it is impossible for him to really communicate with us. And much that he taught while he was free has gotten distorted and watered down precisely because the Black Panther Party has been too hung up in relating to the courts and trying to put on a good face in order to help lawyers convince juries of the justice of our cause. This whole court hang-up has created much confusion.

For instance, many people confuse the Black Panther Party with the Free Huey Movement or the many other mass activities that we have been forced to indulge in in order to build mass support for our comrades who have gotten captured by the pigs. We are absolutely correct in indulging in such mass activity. But we are wrong when we confuse our mass line with our party line.

Essentially, what Huey did was to provide the ideology and the methodology for organizing the Black Urban Lumpenproletariat. Armed with this ideological perspective and method, Huey transformed the Black lumpenproletariat from the forgotten people at the bottom of society into the vanguard of the proletariat.

There is a lot of confusion over whether we are members of the Working Class or whether we are Lumpenproletariat. It is necessary to confront this confusion, because it has a great deal to do with the strategy and tactics that we follow and with our strained relations with the White radicals from the oppressor section of Babylon.

Some so-called Marxist-Leninists will attack us for what we have to say, but that is a good thing and not a bad thing because some people call themselves Marxist-Leninists who are the downright enemies of Black people. Water for them. We want them to step boldly forward, as they will do -- blinded by their own stupidity and racist arrogance -- so that it will be easier for us to deal with them in the future.

We make these criticisms in a fraternal spirit of how

some Marxist-Leninists apply the classical principles to the specific situation that exists in the United States because we believe in the need for a unified revolutionary movement in the United States, a movement that is informed by the revolutionary principles of scientific socialism. Huey P. Newton says that "power is the ability to define phenomena and make it act in a desired manner." And we need power, desperately, to counter the power of the pigs that now bears so heavily upon us.

Ideology is a comprehensive definition of a status quo that takes into account both the history and the future of that status quo and serves as the social glue that holds a people together and through which a people relate to the world and other groups of people in the world. The correct ideology is an invincible weapon against the oppressor in our struggle for freedom and liberation.

Marx defined the epoch of the bourgeoisie and laid bare the direction of the Proletarian future. He analyzed Capitalism and defined the method of its doom: VIOLENT REVOLUTION BY THE PROLETARIAT AGAINST THE BOURGEOIS STATE APPARATUS OF CLASS OPPRESSION AND REPRESSION. REVOLUTIONARY VIOLENCE AGAINST THE COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY CLASS VIOLENCE PERPETRATED THROUGH THE SPECIAL REPRESSIVE FORCE OF THE ARMED TENTACLES OF THE STATE.

This great definition by Marx and Engels became the mightiest weapon in the hands of oppressed people in the history of ideology. It marks a gigantic advance for all mankind. And since Marx's time, his definition has been strengthened, further elaborated, illumined, and further refined.

But Marxism has never really dealt with the United States of America. There have been some very nice attempts. People have done the best that they know how. However, in the past, Marxist-Leninists in the United States have relied too heavily upon foreign, imported analyses and have seriously distorted the realities of the American scene. We might say that the Marxism-Leninism of the past belongs to the gestation period of Marxism-Leninism in the United States, and that now is the time when a new, strictly American ideological synthesis will arise, springing up from the hearts and souls of the oppressed people inside Babylon, and uniting these people

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and hurling them mightily, from the force of their struggle, into the future. The swiftly developing revolution in America is like the gathering of a mighty storm, and nothing can stop that storm from finally bursting, inside America, washing away the pigs of the power structure and all their foul, oppressive works. And the children of the pigs and the oppressed people will dance and spit upon the common graves of these pigs.

There are some Black people in the United States who are absolutely happy, who do not feel themselves to be oppressed, and who think that they are free. Some even believe that the President wouldn't lie, and that he is more or less an honest man; that Supreme Court decisions were almost written by god in person; that the Police are Guardians of the Law; and that people who do not have jobs are just plain lazy and good-for nothing and should be severely punished. These are like crabs that must be left to boil a little longer in the pot of oppression before they will be ready and willing to relate. But the overwhelming majority of Black people are uptight, know that they are oppressed and not free; and they wouldn't believe Nixon if he confessed to being a pig; they don't relate to the Supreme Court or any other court; and they know that the racist pig cops are their sworn enemies. As for poverty, they know what it is all about.

These millions of Black people have no political representation, they are unorganized, and they do not own or control any of the natural resources; they neither own nor control any of the industrial machinery, and their daily life is a hustle to make it by any means necessary in the struggle to survive.

Every Black person knows that the wind may change at any given moment and that the Lynch Mob, made up of White members of the "Working Class", might come breathing down his neck if not kicking down his door. It is because of these factors that when we begin to talk about being Marxist-Leninists, we must be very careful to make it absolutely clear just what we are talking about.

On the subject of racism, Marxism-Leninism offers us very little assistance. In fact, there is much evidence that Marx and Engels were themselves racists -- just like their White brothers and sisters of their era, and just as many Marxist-Leninists of our own time are also racists.

Historically, Marxism-Leninism has been an outgrowth of European problems and it has been primarily preoccupied with finding solutions to European problems.

With the founding of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 1948 and the People's Republic of China in 1949, something new was injected into Marxism-Leninism, and it ceased to be just a narrow, exclusively European phenomenon. Comrade Kim Il Sung and Comrade Mao Tse-tung applied the classical principles of Marxism-Leninism to the conditions in their own countries and thereby made the ideology into something useful for their people. But they rejected that part of the analysis that was not beneficial to them and had only to do with the welfare of Europe.

Given the racist history of the United States, it is very difficult for Black people to comfortably call themselves Marxist-Leninists or anything else that takes its name from White people. It's like praying to Jesus, a White man. We must emphasize the fact that Marx and Lenin didn't invent Socialism. They only added their contributions, enriching the doctrine, just as many others did before them and after them. And we must remember that Marx and Lenin didn't organize the Black Panther Party. Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale did.

Not until we reach Fanon do we find a major Marxist-Leninist theoretician who was primarily concerned about the problems of Black people, wherever they may be found. And even Fanon, in his published works, was primarily focused on Africa. It is only indirectly that his works are beneficial to Afro-Americans. It is just easier to relate to Fanon because he is clearly free of that racist bias that blocks out so much about the Black man in the hands of Whites who are primarily interested in themselves and the problems of their own people. But even though we are able to relate heavily to Fanon, he has not given us the last word on applying the Marxist-Leninist analysis to our problems inside the United States. No one is going to do this for us because no one can. We have to do it ourselves, and until we do, we are going to be uptight.

We must take the teachings of Huey P. Newton as our foundation and go from there. Any other course will bring us to a sorry and regrettable end.

Fanon delivered a devastating attack upon Marxism-

Leninism for its narrow preoccupation with Europe and the affairs and salvation of White folks, while lumping all third world peoples into the category of the Lumpenproletariat and then forgetting them there; Fanon unearthed the category of the Lumpenproletariat and began to deal with it, recognizing that vast majorities of the colonized people fall into that category. It is because of the fact that Black people in the United States are also colonized that Fanon's analysis is so relevant to us.

After studying Fanon, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale began to apply his analysis of colonized people to Black people in the United States. They adopted the Fanonian perspective, but they gave it a uniquely Afro-American content.

Just as we must make the distinctions between the mother country and the colony when dealing with Black people and White people as a whole, we must also make this distinction when we deal with the categories of the Working Class and the Lumpenproletariat.

We have, in the United States, a "Mother Country Working Class" and a "Working Class from the Black Colony". We also have a Mother Country Lumpenproletariat and a Lumpenproletariat from the Black Colony. Inside the Mother Country, these categories are fairly stable, but when we look at the Black Colony, we find that the hard and fast distinctions melt away. This is because of the leveling effect of the colonial process and the fact that all Black people are colonized, even if some of them occupy favored positions in the schemes of the Mother Country colonizing exploiters.

There is a difference between the problems of the Mother Country Working Class and the Working Class from the Black Colony. There is also a difference between the Mother Country Lumpen and the Lumpen from the Black Colony. We have nothing to gain from trying to smooth over these differences as though they don't exist, because they are objective facts that must be dealt with. To make this point clear, we have only to look at the long and bitter history of the struggles of Black Colony Workers fighting for democracy inside Mother Country Labor Unions.

Historically, we have fallen into the trap of criticizing mother country labor unions and workers for the racism