

ON CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN THE PEOPLE

Criticisms of the
August 21st Coalition
by the African People's
Socialist Party and the
Burning Spear Support
Committee

Response and Self-Criticism
by the Minority of the
Coalition

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CRITICISM OF THE AUGUST 21st COALITION BY THE AFRICAN PEOPLE'S
SOCIALIST PARTY AND THE BURNING SPEAR SUPPORT COMMITTEE

On September 11, 1978, the African People's Socialist Party (APSP) and the Burning Spear Support Committee (BSSC) severed all relationships with the North American prison support group, August 21st Coalition.

The severing of the relationship between the APSP and August 21st was the culmination of a chain of events marked by serious political errors and mistakes made by the August 21st Coalition in its so-called effort to take leadership from the African liberation struggle in current U.S. borders around the question of black prisoners.

The August 21st Coalition was formed as a result of a demonstration in support of black prisoners in San Quentin around the continual assaults and murders of African prisoners by white hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, the Nazis, and the Aryan Brotherhood. These attacks had been supported by the prison administration at San Quentin. August 21st is significant as the commemoration of the death of our fallen comrade George Jackson who led on-going struggle against the same type of colonial terror in 1971 that is taking place today.

The APSP and the BSSC had a working relationship with the August 21st Coalition as a part of our long range strategy for winning the progressive sector of the North American people and the general anti-imperialist movement to the politics of pro-Independence. It had been put forth repeatedly by the August 21st Coalition that it was seeking African leadership around the relationship of prisons to African people in the U.S. There was enthusiasm expressed by the Coalition at the presence of the Party in this area and for our on-going work around the prison question.

The Party and the BSSC expressed what was needed to be done in order to support the building of the California Bay Area Committee to Build ANPO. Always engaging in relationships in a principled manner, the need for political and material support was put forth as the most viable way to do support work. Specifically the BSSC requested that August 21st Coalition organize North American people to give political and material support to organizing efforts to build ANPO and to do fund-raising to help advance the demonstration on August 19, 1978 around the commemoration of the death of George Jackson and the demands of San Quentin inmates.

The August 21st Coalition said it would do these things and agreed that they saw these requests as important to building a strong African prison movement and advancing the demands of black people in this country for national liberation. They needed to do all in their power to give material and political support at this much-needed time.

One of the first things they did was to attempt to organize a demonstration around African prisoners without consulting or notifying the APSP or the BSSC of such an action even though African people were involved in the demonstration. A criticism of their action was put forth by the BSSC and the APSP.

Then when we were asked what could be done around support for the August 19th demonstration, we put forth the need for a poster that would inform the black community of the upcoming rally. August 21st Coalition initially accepted responsibility for it but at the last minute they said they couldn't do the poster because of other obligations.

In an attempt to involve the August 21st Coalition in doing concrete support work it was suggested by the APSP that leafletting and petitioning take place on August 19th in support of actions taking place at the San Quentin rally. One of the specific tasks that we saw of vital importance to the work taking place was a leaflet in support of the demands of black prisoners and the leadership that African prisoners have provided for the anti-prison movement specifically and the black liberation struggle. What resulted was a leaflet with terrible political content that liquidated:

1. the leadership of black prisoners in the anti-prison movement at a time when they are under attack from the state, the Ku Klux Klan, the Nazis, and the Aryan Brotherhood;
2. the necessity to support the African led demonstration and rally at San Quentin.

The Party requested that August 21st Coalition correct the leaflet and circulate it in the North American community.

Prior to the demonstration they had agreed to and saw the need for it to be an African demonstration. They said they supported the right of black people to organize for self-reliance and revolutionary organization. August 21st Coalition professed to having no problems with the demonstration being an African one on August 19th, yet no less than a week later rumors started to fly about concerning allegations that "white people had nothing to do on August 19th because they couldn't come to the demonstration at San Quentin." When another criticism was put forth concerning their actions they said they would try to correct their mistakes.

We pointed out how it served to undermine our leadership and support from the North American left at this time. It was also taken back to the prisons and caused problems in communications between the Party and African prisoners.

At first August 21st Coalition denied being at the root of the confusion, but later admitted that they might have "inferred" some disagreements with what the California Bay Area Committee to Build ANPO had requested. Again another discussion and criticism took place to point out the serious errors in the way that they moved. They agreed to do a self-criticism to the prisoners and the North American left in the area around their actions in regards to the August 19th rally.

Consequently what took place two weeks after the demonstration was a mailing done of the incorrect leaflet to African prisoners in San Quentin, and August 21st visited and told them of the APSP criticism, of course expecting a response. What resulted was a near annihilation of relationships between the APSP and the BSSC and African prisoners.

Indeed, it was the intolerance of the shaky and unprincipled manner in which the August 21st Coalition acted that left us with no alternative but to sever relations with this North American prison support coalition

that quite often acted in a manner as though they were the leadership of the black liberation movement in this area.

The APSP saw their actions in all these instances as being: 1. anti-black; 2. anti-black leadership; 3. interventionist; 4. of an ideological imperialist nature. These actions come at a time when the black liberation struggle is beginning to stand on its own feet again, a time where we see we are very vulnerable. It is a period prior to which we were militarily smashed as well as nearly crushed ideologically. August 21st Coalition's actions served to expose our party and movement to attacks and served to impede the forward motion of black people working for revolutionary advancement.

We hope to deepen these criticisms of the August 21st Coalition and to smash the opportunist tendency in the North American left and challenge the legitimacy of any white group who would build its organization at the expense of smashing the black liberation movement. We must combat opportunism wherever it raises its head so that we may move forward the anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist movement.

Not one step backward
Pamberi Ne Chimurenga

"In the Party we have no illusions about the difficulties and contradictions involved in our strategical involvement with North American forces. In fact, we anticipate more and more problems with some North American forces which are now friendly to us as our Party and the general African Pro-Independence movement gets stronger and begin to assume more responsibility for the direction of our movement. We anticipate that many of the various North American forces which do not have unity with each other now, will find greater unity in opposition to the Party and our movement as we grow stronger.

"It is unfortunate, but we know it is true that there is a colonialist mentality at work within the North American Left which will allow charitable solidarity and material support for us as long as we appear relatively weak... In fact, some of our friends are motivated more by their need to be needed than they are by a genuine commitment to a revolutionary process necessary to smash imperialism and bring about political independence for our people..."

Joseph Waller APSP Chairman

RESPONSE AND SELF-CRITICISM BY SEVEN MEMBERS OF THE COALITION

We unite with the criticisms given to the August 21st Coalition by the African People's Socialist Party and the Burning Spear Support Committee on September 11, 1978, that the Coalition was anti-black, anti-black leadership, interventionist, and ideological imperialist. We attempted to understand the criticisms within the framework of the strategy that the APSP was developing and of the increasing attacks by the state on the Party. Our awareness of COINTELPRO actions against black revolutionary forces and the general move to the right in this country helps us understand the seriousness and urgency with which the Party must operate.

We see the errors made by the August 21st Coalition in the period since the existence of the Bay Area Committee to Build the African National Prison Organization as being deeply rooted in the whole history of the Coalition. The relationship of August 21st to the APSP and the BSSC in their efforts to build ANPO exposed and intensified these errors and contradictions. From the beginning we claimed that our leadership was coming from black forces inside San Quentin. But there were always serious limitations on this leadership given the objective conditions of our limited access and the stage and development of inside organization. This problem, however, was not taken seriously by the Coalition, but instead we opportunistically maintained that the Coalition was fully under black leadership when this was not the case. Furthermore when black forces who were early members of the Coalition left, this was treated only as a minor problem rather than a very serious blow to the Coalition. This happened despite the fact that people on the inside were struggling with Coalition representatives to follow black leadership on the outside. In fact, this direction was never communicated to the main body of the Coalition by our representatives. Instead, the Coalition was ultimately defined as an all-white organization. Thus, we claimed to be under black leadership but in fact, weren't responsible to it. By doing this, we undermined the politics put out by the revolutionary prisoner movement led by black national liberation forces and opportunistically increased our own power and prestige.

It is important to note that the August 21st Coalition did provide important material aid and propaganda through demonstrations at the request of brothers inside, educational efforts in solidarity with the revolutionary prisoner's movement and publishing of the newsletter Arm the Spirit written and edited inside San Quentin.

However, the educational presentations that we did in January and March were examples of how our errors got manifested. We developed the politics of the scripts for the presentations through our own internal struggles rather than through dialogue and struggle with inside and outside black leadership. We also undermined this leadership by bringing in the scripts to San Quentin at the last minute and thus making feedback and struggle from inside impossible. The result was that we were putting our politics and de-

sire to build our organization above the political leadership of the black forces inside and outside that we were supposedly taking leadership from. In this way we as North Americans were trying to determine the politics of the black national liberation struggle and specifically the politics of the prison movement. This we see as ideological imperialism. We were in effect trying to support the prison movement while trying to maintain our power in the movement, which is a contradiction.

This ideological imperialism extended to our relationship and work with the African People's Socialist Party (APSP) and the Burning Spear Support Committee (BSSC). One important way this was manifested was in our consistent failure to struggle and to put out our questions to the APSP and the BSSC, despite their persistent attempts to get us to do so, and even though we knew that we did indeed have questions about what it meant to follow their leadership. Our liberalness in the face of their attempts to struggle with us was anti-black leadership. Through not struggling we didn't allow our politics to be challenged and this undermined the politics of the APSP and the BSSC in their work to build ANPO, and thereby we were able to maintain our influence of the politics of the prison movement.

We feel the roots of this lie in not wanting to give up our power and prestige as white people within the revolutionary prison support movement. We continued to refuse to face up to these problems even after we were repeatedly criticized for a whole series of errors rooted in the same white supremacist attempt to maintain our position of colonial power.

By not having developed struggle relationships with any of the forces we said we were taking leadership from, we were not accountable or responsible to any of them, and in effect, acted autonomously. With the development of the Committee to Build ANPO, the Party struggled with us to develop a responsible relationship both with them and the inside, which we failed to do. While pushing us to be responsible to their leadership, they never asked us to do anything that conflicted with our support for the inside.

The responsibility of visiting forces inside was never collectivized. The process of political discussion both before and after visiting rarely happened. We see that this contributed to the power that the white leadership of the Coalition had in interpreting the politics of black liberation forces. It also enabled the people who were visiting to hold onto information and thus the power and prestige gained through those relationships, which was opportunist. Our not figuring out the political basis for each visit left room for the personal relationships, at times, to take precedence over politics. Although the question of white women visiting black men had been raised within the Coalition, we never dealt with the contradiction. We consider these to be very serious errors.

We see our actions around the August 19 demonstration as showing that the August 21st Coalition had in effect failed to unite with the Committee to Build ANPO's leadership. This demonstration was called for by forces inside San Quentin in commemoration of the assassination of George Jackson and put forward a series of demands concerning conditions in-

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side California prisons. It was agreed by everyone involved that we would follow the Committee to Build ANPO's leadership around the outside actions on the 19th, which included a call for an all-African demonstration outside the gates of San Quentin. The Coalition expressed support for it being an all-black demonstration on the outside, and we understand the Coalition representatives visiting San Quentin also supported and struggled for this position with forces inside. However, our other actions were ideological imperialist, interventionist, anti-black and undermined the APSP and the BSSC's efforts to build ANPO.

(1) There were rumors and confusion about whether the Coalition supported August 19th being an all-African demonstration. Because of this, we were asked for a clear statement of support by the APSP and the BSSC for the all-African demonstration. In the light of a very serious situation, their vulnerability to COINTELPRO manipulation and attack, we should have responded immediately. Instead we placed our needs for a polished statement above the needs asserted by the black leadership in an urgent situation. It took us weeks to write the statement, partially because of our trying to state both our support of the Committee to Build ANPO's action on the outside and our support for the struggles on the inside, but also because of our failure to accept the Committee to Build ANPO's leadership.

(2) After August 19, we were still operating under our own conception of leadership and responsibility and consequently took it upon ourselves to take inside the leaflet that the Coalition had written to distribute to North American communities on that day. We did this in spite of the fact that the APSP and the BSSC had made serious criticisms of the leaflet, which we had accepted and therefore had not distributed. Taking the leaflet inside was interventionist because we made the struggle between the Committee to Build ANPO and inside forces focus on "our" leaflet on our terms. Also we as white people were carrying in our interpretation of the APSP and the BSSC's understanding of colonialism and criticisms of the leaflet and in this way were intervening in the political struggles between black forces.

(3) We feel that the politics of the leaflet itself are a continuation of the opportunistic and ideological imperialist tendencies of the Coalition. By putting out an analysis of the prison movement that speaks primarily about Third World people and unity we reduced the black liberation movement, national liberation and colonialism to a question of racism and discrimination. The fact of genocide was never presented. Colonialism was reduced to a list of atrocities with no analysis of the state and its relationship to colonized nations and national liberation struggles. Our presentation of a Third World analysis did not reflect reality and did not give recognition to the consistent leadership of the prison movement by black liberation forces. The leaflet revealed that we did not understand the politics of colonialism and black leadership. Had we taken the APSP and the BSSC's

leadership more seriously, we would not have made such serious errors. We additionally would have recognized the importance of bringing them a draft of the leaflet well in advance for criticism, instead of 11:00 the night before it was to be printed.

(4) In regards to the criticism of our failure to produce the poster for the August 19 demonstration, we want to clarify that we were not diverting energy to the Folsom demonstration at that time, as we received the Committee to Build ANPO's request the evening following the Folsom demonstration. However, we accept the thrust of the criticism as we did not take seriously the request for the posters. We verbally accepted the responsibility but did not follow through on our commitment. We negated the importance of this and acted instead out of our own sense of priorities. Acting off of our own understandings and disregarding the leadership put out by the APSP and the BSSC was anti-black and anti-black leadership and made them more vulnerable to the state's attacks.

We see the sum total of our errors as feeding into the strategy of the state's attacks on the black liberation movement. Our errors have undermined the work and strategy of black nationalist leadership and undermined our ability to build political support among North American people for anti-colonialist struggles. In this context, we see the righteousness of the severance by the APSP and the BSSC of all relationships with the August 21st Coalition and support the decision by the Coalition to dissolve.

This is an understanding that seven of us in the former August 21st Coalition have come to. We hope to deepen our understanding through continuing our struggles with APSP, BSSC, the Committee to Build ANPO, other black liberation forces, and North American forces.

Printed by the minority who unites with the criticisms as a part of our support of the struggle for African liberation in the U.S.

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