

## Institutionalized Racism and Class Struggle

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*The following is a slightly modified version of one of the discussion papers prepared for the August Midwest Labor Conference which focussed on racism, labor-community links, and rank and file strategy. We hope that other discussion papers, written versions of some excellent presentations, and papers stimulated by the discussion will also appear in future DBs.*

This is intended as a contribution to the discussion on a number of points. It does not cover many others ranging from the complex issues of nationalism and the right of self-determination, to ways of dealing with racism on a personal or small group level. The focus in this discussion is racist oppression of African-Americans and resistance to it, especially dealing with it at the workplace. While many elements are common to the oppression and resistance of other national minorities in the U.S. there are also important unique issues which must be addressed. Some of this is done in separate background papers and discussions scheduled for the conference.)

There are many reasons why socialists must continually focus on the issues of racism in labor work.

1. Racism is a significant part of and symbolic of the degradation of humanity. It is wrong on the most elemental moral level.

2. People of color make up the overwhelming majority of the international working class. In the US the proportion of people of color in the working class continues to rise and may approach 50 % of the domestic working force in the next generation.

3. Racism is institutionalized in the culture and political economy of the society. As such its values become internalized in all segments of society, lessened to an extent only by conscious resistance

4. Racism is rising in recent years. The well-publicized murderous attacks by self-proclaimed white racist groups are just the tip of the iceberg. The downsizing of US industry and attack on the working class creates a fertile ground of insecurity. This combined with institutionalized racism, continued immigration, the failure of liberal welfare, civil rights, and other programs, the march to the right in national politics, the political collapse of prominent Black leadership, the collaborationist politics of the labor leadership, the lack of a credible left alternative all contribute to the rise of racism in the working class. Attacks on affirmative action programs, Spanish language education, and undocumented workers demonstrate the broadness

and deep roots of this racism. This is not to deny the tremendous victories won by civil rights struggles and differences in today's racism and that of a Jim Crow society where lynching was an accepted part of life. It is to recognize both how deeply embedded racism is in our culture and institutions and that without struggle there is no automatic eradication or even stability.

5. Racism is one of the principal destroyers of working class unity and solidarity. When white workers see themselves as having more in common with their white bosses, for example, than their co-workers of other cultures, the unity required to exercise workers' social power is prevented.

6. More than simply blocking unified struggles, racism distorts working class goals themselves. When white people define quality of life issues in terms of separation from people of color (for instance when personal security or good schools become identified with living apart from people of color) the goals and the struggle for them become reactionary and unsupportable and unified struggle becomes impossible. Indeed, the very concept of white identity is part of the racist construct. (See Roediger etc.)

7. A significant source of progressive leadership for the working class (i.e that leadership willing to break out of institutional conservatism and traditional bounds of capital) will come from people who draw their inspiration and skills from social movements and cultural heritage.

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The revolutionary left in the US has a long and complicated relationship to anti-racist struggles and uneven successes in building multi-racial organizations. There seem to be five distinct, if related, elements to organizational success in various combinations: 1: A political theory or line that accurately speaks to the situation and needs of the leadership and activists of oppressed communities. 2: On-the-ground activity and commitment of the organization in day-to-day struggles of the communities (e.g. the presence in physical defense against racist attack). 3. The identification on a world scale of powerful forces lead by people of color. 4: The ability of the organization to make itself habitable for different cultures and respect and help develop leadership from different oppressed communities. 5: Real success in organizing among whites in a manner which allows effective coalitions. Here are some examples.

In developing the Black Belt Thesis in the 1920s the Communist Party made an explicit and historically very significant contribution to a defense of Black self-determination and the definition of the Black nation. The party's work with Black sharecroppers is one example of how a theoretical understanding shaped its relationship to an indigenous Black movement. The Party's adoption of the Popular Front strategy ended the possibilities for the kind of work members had been doing among Black Southern sharecroppers.

In the 1960s, the Maoist identified group, Progressive Labor with some Black cadres from the CP, strengthened its multi-racial character by recruiting leading Black activists in Harlem and elsewhere, in part by its leading role in the first struggles for Black Studies, at San Francisco State. When the party renounced all forms of nationalism, including Black studies, affirmative action and Black caucuses in the trade unions it then lost many of its Black cadre but retained others through its anti-racist activism.. The Maoist left in general has had much greater organizational success in building multi-racial organizations, in part because of its elevation of China as a "third world" or "colored" leadership in the worldwide struggle for socialism, in part because of its emphasis on nationalism. Because our politics were not aligned with anti-capitalist regimes in the Third World we did not tap into revolutionary nationalism with the same degree

of success as organizations which developed relationships with China, North Vietnam, Cuba etc. Understanding this political legacy is an important aspect of coming to terms with our own relationship to building a multi-racial organization.

Solidarity has had several important experiences working with groups of revolutionaries of color. In particular, our relationship with the New African Voices Alliance (NAVA), established through the on the ground work of our members in Philadelphia after the founding of Solidarity, was one that appeared to be a kind of model for building unity through activism. NAVA, a revolutionary nationalist organization whose program was "first divide, then unite" argued that while racial and national identity was of primary importance to them in rebuilding a layer of Black revolutionaries, principled political collaboration with other revolutionaries was of equal importance. Thus NAVA activists were frequent speakers at Solidarity conventions and summer schools; our members taught at their youth leadership summer schools and, of course, worked collaboratively on activist projects in Philadelphia. The NAVA members were also very involved with building independent political action and shared Solidarity's assessment of the Jesse Jackson campaign and Rainbow Coalition. Political agreement about key struggles laid the basis for that relationship, as did the committed work that the Philadelphia branch did in supporting struggles that NAVA was involved in. Both organizations benefited from that relationship.

The building of a multi-racial/national organization based on internationalist politics is not inconsistent with independent self-organization of the oppressed but there is a tension here, particularly in the area of primary organizational identification. NAVA took the view that its members should not join Solidarity but collaborate with it through NAVA. Understanding both the relationships and the distinctions between identity and politics is key to this discussion.

Our tradition has also had some success in building multi-racial organization through workplace struggles, and in supporting genuinely independent organization of oppressed sections of the working class, though these have been temporary and have not transformed our organization. Solidarity had, for a time, a Spanish-speaking branch, made largely of Dominican members, in New York City. In general we have been and still are an organization which aspires to a multi-national character based on

internationalist politics but with a predominately white membership. To this point we have not been able to develop nor attract a critical mass of people of color leadership to change the character of the organization.

Nor have we been truly successful in most of our trade union work of finding ways to develop multi-racial organizations within the union reform movement. In auto for example, with a very large Black union membership we find that we are frequently at odds with Black activists who are loyal to the International Union as well as Black opportunists who use identity for personal promotion inside the bureaucratic union leaderships. In some movements, like TDU, the increasing leadership and work with Latinos is a promising development. New Directions in the Transport Workers Union continues to be an organization made largely of activists of color in a local union which is overwhelmingly non-white.

So we come to this discussion of our anti-racist practice and our interest in building a multi-racial organization not from the vantage of success, but with the modesty of experience that stems from failures.

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Our analysis starts with the notion that racism is not natural (in some genetic human nature sense). Nor is it accidental. It has been around too long and is too deeply ingrained in institutions to be thought of as a temporary, superficial or super-structural notion. The ideology of racism and race-hate are rooted in the material conditions of everyday life institutions. While racism was not the creation of capitalism, capitalist institutions and corresponding worker institutions have been created in its context. Hence we have a culture and ideology of "White Supremacy," a term which goes far beyond the organized hate groups to reflect the elaborate system of oppression which operates on ideological, psychological and institutional levels. Part of capitalism's ability to maintain racial divisions in the working class is that it encourages white workers to embrace what W.E.B. DuBois called the "psychological wage" of racial entitlement.

As socialists we see anti-racism as foundational to our politics and vision. Fighting racism is not just a means to achieve unity. Fighting racism and building multi-racial struggles are necessary on their own terms and as part of the process of gaining class

power and rule based on human values. The much harder question is how to do it.

We know that certain ideas do not work:

**1. Color blindness.** This is the idea that since our goal is not only to eliminate racism but ultimately eliminate race as a decisive social category we should act now in that way. The problem is that the playing field does not start off on level ground. People of color face specific oppression and therefore have specific struggles that must be supported and needs that must be addressed. Since racism is built into institutions, neutrality objectively reinforces racism. Affirmative action is a necessity.

**2. Class trumps race.** This view recognizes that there is a special oppression of people of color and that capitalism plays the key role in maintaining racist institutions. It sees racism as part of the superstructure of capitalism and therefore argues that attacking the economic base of the system will eliminate it. It concludes that the key to defeating racism is to fight on so-called class wide issues and sees struggles against racism as divisive within the working class, arguing that racism is an issue that effects only one segment of the class and therefore should be put on the back burner. The argument underestimates the degree to which racism, because it is so embedded in institutions and consciousness, has become itself a powerful objective material force. But far worse is the idea that the fight against racism is not a class wide issue. As socialists we reject the idea that "the class" is white (or male) by default or that a principled defense of affirmative action, for example, is divisive.

Though the concept of "Black and White Unite and Fight" has a militant legacy which we solidarize with, we see the process of rebuilding solidarity among groups of workers within the U.S. as much more complex. Not only is the Black-White binary too narrow a framework for understanding the complexity of race and racism in the U.S., this seemingly common sense approach of making-the-goal-the-method has a long history in the socialist movement which has failed at every key historical point. Why has it failed?

A. People tend to fight first against what is most immediate and painful. The special oppression of racism, sexism, anti-gay discrimination and violence etc. are all in this category. Asking people to set

aside these questions in the name of common struggle-- particularly with people who are not currently struggling at all-- is a losing strategy which "succeeds" by reducing what struggle there is. It also reinforces the idea again that the fight against sexual harassment, or against racist violence, for example, is not of import to the entire working class.

B. Part of why many whites don't fight their own exploiters is they are cushioned from the worst conditions by the special oppression of others. Job security, as one example, is less of a problem as long you do not identify with those who are among the first fired and last hired.

C. Finally it ignores the crucial role of leadership by example and by individuals that comes from the struggle of social movements.

**3. The white guilt approach.** Urging individual whites to take action because they are responsible for centuries of oppression of people of color. While as socialists we want white workers to understand the legacy of the history of racist oppression, we do not think that individual renunciation of a personal relationship to racism is the most effective way to begin this process. The character of racism, its function as both an institutional and a psychological force, makes this difficult.

**4. Romanticism of the Oppressed:** Here is the flip side of the "blindness" approach. It assumes that all actions by people of color are correct and represent a struggle against oppression. It can reinforce bureaucratic control of organizations, by diminishing the importance of politics in the name of identity. It makes it more difficult for white activists to struggle with people of color on political issues and generally limits the ability to organize anyone effectively.

Some keys to building multi-cultural and multi-racial organizations:

1. Recognition that multi-cultural means just that. People of color are not a homogenous mass any more than white people are. Indeed the specific experience of oppression is often the key organizing points for resistance.

2. Recognition of and support for struggles against special oppression. The movement must truly be built on the idea that "an injury to one is an injury to all." The notion: let's put aside "special interests"

while we fight for the general interest usually ends up in defining the general interest as that most important to white (male) workers.

3. Unified struggle opens possibilities of taking on racism. It brings out the best in people and reveals the material bases for anti-racist program and non-racist relations. But unified struggle is no guarantee. As Roediger and others have shown, there are many impressive examples of multi-cultural, united working class struggles. Often the anti-racist character is lost or overcome by other social pressures. The critical involvement of African-American workers and community groups in the organization of Ford in the 40's represented an important step forward but progress stopped and moved back at all levels of the union as indicated by the resistance of the Reuther leadership to African American leadership and the failure to develop a truly integrated shopfloor or union.

4. We must be vigilant in our understanding of the role institutional racism has played in structuring social access and opportunity in every realm - housing, education, employment, social welfare. Because these realms are overlapping the struggle against one almost necessarily leads to a struggle against another. Again we point to a system of oppression which must be challenged as a system. For example, the crisis of Black education is connected to housing segregation and the legacy of white flight from urban centers. The criminalization of Black youth is directly related to structural unemployment.

For years in the auto industry the skilled trades have been overwhelmingly white. And many whites opposed affirmative action into the trades even though they knew that a kind of affirmative action for whites existed via favoritism, nepotism and the old boys network. Still, when it came to affirmative action for women and minorities they defended "pure" Seniority. Now, at the very moment that people of color have developed long seniority in the plants, and are now in place to move into the skilled trades in larger numbers, the system shifts. The new emphasis is on "qualifications". And qualifications are now being redefined to place heavy emphasis on written tests and skills learned in school rather than on job experience skills.

Here is one Chrysler example, (but the other auto companies are very similar.) One way to get hired as a journeyman in the Auto Industry skilled

trades is to demonstrate eight years of experience in the trade as part of a complicated application process designed to weed people out. You can tell by the results. In one sitting for the test (described next) in the predominantly Black city of Detroit there were approximately 50 people. By appearances, five were black, two Latino. There was one white woman.

Then the applicant takes a general skilled trades 5-hour written exam. The results of the test weed out unacceptable applicants and apparently are also used in ranking applicants. While some parts of the test do reflect skilled work experience, other parts are measures of reading speed and comprehension, math speed, and test-taking skills.

These tests bias the job selection towards those who have learned skills through formal education rather than through work experience. Not only is this new requirement coming into existence just at the moment when people of color are able to enter the trades based on job-experience qualifications it also leads us to the question of equal access to the kind of education that is needed to pass these tests. The point simply is that the so-called neutral test simply reinforces the initial conditions created by racism. The better jobs will go to people who come from the better educational conditions, which will be largely suburban and less poor, which in this country means more white.

### White Skin Privilege

One conception advanced by a range of people is that of fighting racism by acknowledging "white skin privilege" or the privileges of being white. We want to take this up in some detail because the concept has important implications for doing union work. For well-reasoned examples of this approach from people with whom we closely work see the article by Bob Jensen and the one by Mary Fox in a Canadian NSG publication.

Senator Bill Bradley has also embraced the term. \*See his major campaign statement on "Race Relations in America" April 20, 1999 ([www.BillBradley.com](http://www.BillBradley.com))

The idea has been around since the 1960s with a number of variations. One source is the trend that calls themselves "New Abolitionists" around a magazine called Race Traitor: Treason to Whiteness is Loyalty to Humanity.

Some selections from "What We Believe" in Race Traitor:

The white race is a historically constructed social formation. It consists of all those who partake in the privileges of the white skin in this society. Its most wretched members share a status higher, in certain respects, than that of the most exalted persons excluded from it, in return for which they give their support to a system that degrades them.

The key to solving the social problems of our age is to abolish the white race, To abolish the white race means to abolish the privileges of the white skin." There is lot in this journal of interest and importance: the idea that "whiteness" in our society is not a description of history or a culture or even genetic make-up except in reference to groups that are defined historically on the basis of oppression. The values, culture, and characteristics assigned to being "white" were largely ideological constructs that were part of a defense of slavery or imperialist domination. As editor's Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey reply to one critic. "What are English, Scottish or Appalachian? They are English, Scottish or Appalachian. They only become white in certain relations, when the "white" skin confers a social status superior to that of people otherwise identified." (No. 4 p 102)

To be proud of one's "white" heritage is not the counterpart to being proud of one's Black heritage with its history of struggle against bondage and oppression. Nor is it the same as being proud of one's Yiddish, or Italian, or Russian heritage. Being proud of "white" heritage can only mean taking pride in the conquest and oppression of others.

But what are these privileges that whites have that they must give up in order to defeat racism?

First, let's be clear. *There are real privileges* that white skin does have in our racist society.

A white person has the privilege of assuming social superiority or boosting ones own sense of self worth at the expense of others and having it reinforced by institutions-- DuBois's "psychological wage." Whites

also have the privilege of ignoring racism. There are a few other similar privileges including the privilege of making the work place or any other public place offensive to others (e.g. through the use of racist or sexist posters or actions.). There are certainly specific occupations (the construction trades historically) which carved the job market based in no small part on racism.

These are privileges associated with overt racism or at least the denial of the existence of racism. And as racist privilege we try to take them away and dismantle the system that provides them.

But the users of the term want to point to something a lot deeper. They use the term to apply to the very real differentials that are the results of institutional racism. Here are some examples where the term "white skin privilege" has been applied

- Having job security. As a group Blacks were the only racial group to suffer a net loss of jobs. At some companies Black lost jobs at more than twice the rate of whites
- Being free from criminalization. Blacks are almost 8 times a likely to go to prison as whites.
- Being able to walk into a mall store without being pegged as a likely shoplifter.
- Being able to walk down the street without being thought of as a mugger.
- Being able to go about daily work without fear of being attacked because of race.
- Being able to get a skilled/high wage/ professional job.
- Being able to get into a good school
- Being able to drive down the freeway without being stopped for DWB-- "Driving While Black"-- the result of outright racism or the policy of "profiling" techniques.

There is no question that these differences accurately describe conditions generally more available to whites than blacks because of institutionalized racism. No united movement is possible without a recognition that this racist differential is real and must be attacked as part of the struggle rather than subordinated to the general struggle.

But it undermines the struggle against racism to call these privileges, white skin or otherwise.

In and of themselves they do not reflect privileges in any way we want to use the term. Unlike the sense

of superior status we agreed was a privilege, the list does not include anything that we want anybody to give up. People deserve these by right and in any decent society every worker would have more respect, more security, better, more available jobs, better schools, freedom from prisons.

Historically many whites have attempted to defend these rights by organizing to deny them to others (as men have done in terms of women.). This is why the concept of white skin privilege seems to makes sense. It is also true that capitalism is relentless in its campaigns to divide workers and in specific occupations and situations white workers continue to gain increased material benefits from racism.

But often the racist differential is used to mask a different reality: the divisions and weakness caused by racism means that white workers are getting less than they could if they were to engage in a united fight. Rather than winning material privileges through racism white workers frequently take a substantial loss even while Black workers take a greater one. Being forced to bear a 100 pound burden while others bear 200 pounds can only be seen as a privilege so long as one does not understand that united the burden could be removed entirely. This reality is disguised by white workers accepting the notion that this racist differential is a privilege for them. Our job is to help them break from valuing this "psychological wage" not reinforcing it and see that fighting to reduce the racist differential is not a destruction of material privileges but in their interests to win even greater benefits.

Without the beginnings of an anti-racist consciousness white (or male) workers may not be able to imagine another way to fight other than in defense of past, exclusionary practices. That is why it is essential that we struggle to expand access, opportunity, democracy and mobility for people under capitalism even as we expose the impossibility of capitalism ensuring any of those things. Thus a revolutionary defense of civil, democratic and human rights is at the center of our activity. We recognize that racism is embedded in capitalism and that we cannot rid ourselves of racism without at the same time tearing down the defenses of capitalism. Simultaneously, solidarity across race, gender and national borders is essential to our fight against capitalism.

In general we do not ask white workers to give up

opportunities for decent jobs, security, income, education. We demand ending the denial of it to people of color and more for everyone together. They are not privileges—they are rights. We recognize, however, that the ability of the white working class to gain relatively greater access under capital is linked to the denial of that access to Black and Latino workers and argue that white workers are hurt by this strategy. Even when white workers enjoy greater material comforts as a result of racism, racism makes their lives stupid and stunted and prevents the development of the kind of human solidarity we believe in. Further, we point out that oppressed people are not waiting for their rights—they are struggling for them. While it may be tempting for whites to try to defend their own conditions through racist defense, we point out that it ultimately a losing strategy and they are far more likely to win by allying with the struggle for rights for all. We do not accept the capitalist definitions that mean scarcity of good jobs and decent living conditions. We do not accept the capitalist notion of the fixed pie and that we have to fight over the crumbs. We say that white workers can not advance these rights and get more without ending the denial of these rights to others and the divisive racism that serves as the vehicle for denial.

While self-interest is not the sole basis of struggle, it is on a mass scale the most important. Capitalism is designed to confuse fundamental self-interest of the exploited and oppressed with individual and small group self-interest. It is vital for us to sort these out. We want people to struggle around those self-interests that ultimately lead to class empowerment and unity. And we discourage struggles around perceived self-interest, which do the opposite. Hence the distinction between the benefits of racism (real white skin privileges) and those areas which represent rights which have been historically granted to some groups while being denied others is critical.

We believe with Frederick Douglas that without struggle there is no change and that the strongest struggle begins with perceived self-interest and out

of it often emerges the most selfless acts. Such struggle also opens people (although it is not automatic) to reexamine deeply held beliefs. In explaining the deep-rooted powerful racist elements that surround us, we want to pose issues in a way which draws people into greater struggle rather than encourage them to defend the status quo in the name of self-interest. That is why it is so important to be clear about what are rights—due all and denied to many—versus privileges available only because of racism and which will be lost as the struggle against racism succeeds.

We see struggle as opening the possibility of alliances and the breaking down of barriers to solidarity. Defining job security, decent living conditions etc as rights owed to all provides the grounds for a common struggle. Defining the issues in a way that makes it seem that the gains of people of color must necessarily come from losses of other workers is playing the bosses game. It is wrong and an unnecessary barrier to unity.

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Taking on racism and the culture of white supremacy is a central task to building a militant class conscious labor movement. It must be done at the level of ideas and by exposing the deeply embedded disadvantages and burdens placed on people of color. It requires winning whites to accept the necessity of affirmative action. But precisely because racism is so deeply embedded in the institutions of capitalism and working class culture, most people will not reorder their own framework simply by exposure to ideas and individual reasoning in a seemingly fixed society. Changing social ideas requires a context of social struggle and power.

Ending racism is a moral question. It is also a self-interest question. The bosses help to maintain their system of exploitation and oppression by disguising the self-interest that white workers have for ending racism. It is our job to demonstrate the reality of our message in struggle and not reinforce the bosses.

# Some comments and proposals concerning racism, the labor movement and building a Marxist current By Malik Miah

1. The midwest labor conference provides us an opportunity to deepen our discussion on the issues of racism, the labor movement , Solidarity and how to build a Marxist current in society.

2. The following document will indicate both observations about the relationship between the Black struggle for equality and the trade union movement, and some proposals on what we, as Solidarity, can do to upgrade our activity to fight racism and expand our influence in the Black community. (I think a similar approach can be taken toward other communities of oppressed groups. But this document will only discuss the oppression of Blacks and our perspectives.)

I believe our work among students, the communities of the oppressed and other social groups is one of the most important activities that we engage in as a socialist organization. It is as central as our rank and file reform activity in the trade unions. In other words, what we do to build social struggles independent of (but not in conflict with) the trade unions is key to building Solidarity and a socialist current in the labor movement.

The objective of a rank and file strategy is to both democratize the unions and to transform them into instruments of struggles against the employers, and the bureaucracy which can't be reformed. Truly democratic unions are controlled by the membership. Revolutionary unions, however -- our objective -- are unions that are antiracist, against sexism, against imperialist war and exploitation of working people. It's the program that revolutionary Black auto workers advocated in Detroit in the late 1960s. The rank and file strategy is a transitional perspective towards this long-term objective. We educate our members and contacts to this vision, which, of course, is not on the agenda today because of the modest level of labor-boss conflicts.

The movement in auto in the 1960s, it should be recalled, was a by-product of the civil rights and Black power upsurge. In the case of Detroit, it came

after the 1967 rebellion. The leaders of that movement (League of Revolutionary Black Workers) openly called for revolution and consider the struggle of auto workers linked to the international fight against capitalism.

Our strategic objective (not specific tactics) is the framework for our discussion on racism, white supremacy and trade union policy for Solidarity. I believe an objective look at the current state of class relations (particularly the low level of political consciousness) and the level of activity in the existing unions indicates why our trade union work, as important as it is, should not be the main priority to build a Marxist current in the working class and in the communities of the oppressed.

The best opportunities to build a socialist and broader left current continues to be in the student milieu. Students (women especially) who are activate around the sweatshop issues and campus organizing, and other issues, are our most likely recruits in this period. The time and effort to reach these radicalizing students should be our number one focus. There are, as the Labor Commission proposes, some recruitment opportunities among reform-minded union activists, which we should target.

Opportunities to win Blacks and other minorities are less due to two factors, one subjective, one objective: our limited contact with organizations focused on issues of concern to these communities, and the modest level of radical political activity.

How do we change the subjective factor? We need to consciously reach out around issues that directly impact those communities: police brutality, political prisoners, affirmative action, and to join the growing movement for environmental justice. The issues concerning women's rights too are a vehicle to win minority women. We should also join the theoretical and political discussions of the Black intelligentsia and Black left.

None of these activities are counterposed to building a rank and file current in the unions, which remain the place with the greatest concentration of Black workers. But the strength of the bureaucracy, including Black officials, limits what is possible. As for all workers, the unions are viewed by Black workers as service organizations at best, not instruments of struggle. It is more likely that when a racist act occurs at the workplace, a Black worker will look to a community group or the EEOC before going to the union. This has a lot to do with the with of the officialdom that issue of civil rights and racism are not really union issues (except in words only; and that because of the civil rights laws!).

There are no independent Black rank and file formations challenging the bureaucracy as their were in the late 1960s and early 70s (auto and steel). To win more Blacks to Solidarity means we must be involved in the struggles that do exist today and show *in practice* our commitment to the fight against racism and for full equality. We must be active around these antiracist issues in broader coalitions and groups that focus their time around them. The environmental racism groups are a good example. This is the best way to bring these issues into the unions and convince white and Black workers to consider our socialist vision.

If we make this shift in priorities, by definition it that will impact our trade union work. The convention decision was to elevate our antiracist work as well as expand our trade union activity. Branches will have to balance the two. The focus of trade union activity for the foreseeable future due to the economy will tend to center around fights concerning the contract. Issues of democracy will be posed in that context. Antiracist work will be on broader issues that in general will be more political -- that is, they directly bring up the role of the government and courts the bodies responsible for enforcement of civil rights and labor laws against discrimination.

In this period of relative economic expansion and thus narrow unionism, we must balance our time between rank and file work (those of us in unions) and work in the broader social movements.

How do we evaluate the issue of racism and white workers? it is important to recognize that white

racism is at its lowest levels in the history of the United States. While racist gangs and militias exist, overall racist consciousness among the general population is less today than it was under slavery and Jim Crow. That's a direct result of the impact of the civil rights and Black power movements. A majority of white parents even according to most polls still support an integrated education for their children while opposing school busing. Blacks, Latinos and Asians able to live in the same communities are no longer seen as a reason for "white flight" as it was in the 1970s. Blacks with the economic means are now more acceptable. This was not true 30 years ago.

Finally these proposals to prioritize antiracist work flow from what I believe should be a three prong approach to building Solidarity. First, we must prioritize building a rank and file current in the unions based on politics beyond narrow economic issues. Without such a strategy an independent mass workers movement is impossible. Second, we must prioritize our work in the social movements. This is crucial in the winning of new recruits and training of new Marxist cadre. Third, we must upgrade the organizational structures of Solidarity to do the first two tasks and to become a more centralized organization.

3. The framework for this discussion is the new world reality. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the victory of U.S. imperialism in the Cold War and its establishment militarily, economically and politically as the world number one power affects both international and domestic politics. The role of Washington and its NATO allies in the Balkans is simply the highlight of the arrogant use of power. Economically the US rulers are asserting their power in SE Asia, Africa and other regions to the disadvantage of their European and Japanese rivals. (A longer document is needed on the changes facing workers and peasants around the globe.)

4. Domestically, the shift to the right in bourgeois politics is unabated. President Clinton is effectively carrying out the employing class' agenda. His administration continues to take steps that undermine social gains won in previous decades (e.g. Welfare), undermine civil liberties, and strengthens the military. The "debates" between Democrats and

Republicans is over how to implement the neoliberal agenda. Both the Sweeny AFL-CIO and NAACP-Jackson leadership of the Black community agree with the neoliberal agenda. The Black liberals and Black conservatives may disagree over issues like affirmative action, but each agree the future for Blacks is through Silicon Valley, Wall Street and the profit system. What makes Clinton special, as with others of the post-Jim Crow era, is that unlike the openly racist Nixon, there is an identification with the Black middle class as a part of the team.

5. The response of the labor officialdom to this growing power of capital is to become more slavish to big business. The AFL-CIO under Sweeny, following Clinton's example, actively pushes partnerships (e.g. ESOPs and buying stock) beyond anything that was ever done under Kirkland's reign. The new AFL-CIO is the flip side of the Clinton New Democrats -- high or liberal rhetoric, but in practice more conservative. While union militants should take advantage of the rhetoric about organizing especially in the public sector-- as we do when liberal Democrats speak out against colonialism or for self determination for East Timor -- there should be no illusions about this "leadership."

6. The Black elite is now mainstream in its ideology, and a greater obstacle to creating a new leadership ready to stand up to the racist policies of the employers and government. The new middle class forged after the victory of the civil rights movement is stronger in its influence in the Black community than ever before. During legal segregation, this layer provided the intellectual leadership to the Black movement. Although Black workers were the backbone of the movement, especially in the South, it was this social layer of professionals and ministers that was put out front and became the accepted leadership. As this layer was coopted in the 1970s into the Democratic party apparatus, the union apparatus and sections of private industry and the public sector, it began to urge poor working class Blacks to work through the system; and to denounce more militant nationalist segments of the community. Of course the policy of the carrot by the ruling class came after the stick was used to

assassinate and marginalize more militant layers of the civil rights struggle.

In the post civil rights era, social and class relations mean that it will be working-class militants who must be both the foot soldiers and leadership of a fight against institutional racism -- that is, against the power of the government and corporate institutions. The anger in the Black community against racism is still very high. But the lack of a new leadership is allowing the middle class forces to stay on top and derail any move towards an independent movement for fundamental change.

In this context it is worth while looking at the strength of nationalist sentiments in the Black community. The size of the Black Radicals Congress conference shows there is a layer of Black militants who reject the politics of the more conservative traditional civil rights leadership. At the same time, the lack of a strong working-class component within the BRC, shows its limitations. The later is not surprising because of the state of the organized labor movement. The ferment in Black intellectual circles reflects the lack of confidence in the community about the future. The overwhelming majority of Blacks remain in the working poor. Only the professionals, including union bureaucrats, have been able to "escape" and "live" the dream. (At another time it would be useful to discuss more the contradictions facing the Black middle class.)

The strength of nationalist sentiment reflects the reality of racism and inequality. But it is important to note the difference between cultural nationalism and political nationalism. The former is not unique to Blacks. It is a reflection of ethnic pride and heritage of all nationalities. Political nationalism, however, concerns how to win self determination for an oppressed community.

Black nationalism historically has been militant and progressive because it challenged the institutional racism of the government, employers and state. Because institutional racism remains strong, it is not an accident that Black self organization continues to develop, and sentiments grow. The Black Radial Congress is simply a left expression of that political nationalism.

In Marxist terms, self determination includes the right of an oppressed nationality to separation from the oppressor nationality or ethnic group(s). In the US context, since the civil rights victory, it's meant independent self organization to fight racism. Not since the days of Garvey in the teens and 20s, and discussions of the "Black Belt" in the 30s has the nationalist movement pointed toward the idea of a separate state for Blacks.

Marxists have always understood that the political nationalism of the oppressed is qualitatively different from the political nationalism (read: chauvinism) of the privileged white ethnic group. White or Euro-American nationalism is reactionary. The only purpose of "white nationalism" is to maintain the racist domination of peoples of color. Ethnic pride is different. Whites have it but don't call it that. They either say "American," or refer to specific European heritage such as Italian, Irish, German, Russian. The identity as "whites" is only raised to oppose affirmative rights for Blacks and other peoples of color.

While more can be said about this discussion concerning nationalism, chauvinism, white supremacy, and so forth, for our purposes, *Solidarity should identify with the political nationalism of the oppressed without necessarily agreeing with the political views of the various leaders.* Our political program -- rank and file strategy for the union, class independence, against racism and sexism, for gay rights, etc. -- are just as valid for these communities as for society as a whole.

Why have I have intentionally focused on the Black community in this document? It is due to the African-American nationality's unique social weight in American society. American capitalism uses racism against all peoples of color. But the Black question has had a special place in the development of American capitalism. After the first American revolution, the white colonialists targeted two ethnic groups: American Indians (native peoples) and African slaves. After the Civil War and the Westward expansion, Chinese immigrants and Mexicans were incorporated into the United States as second class citizens along the lines used against

the former slaves. But the Indians and Africans were the cornerstones for "American racism."

The Indian problem was resolved through genocide. They could not be forced to work since they knew the land. While the rights of Indians remains a political/moral issue, their social weight is minimal because of their small numbers -- less than one percent of the population.

Blacks, on the other hand, were written into the Constitution as the property of slave owners. Slavery (not state rights) was the central issue of the Civil War. While American Indians were being exterminated (genocide), Africans, ripped from their continent, became the backbone of the US economy in the 1800s. A new ethnic group was forged, which remains the largest in numbers. (Latinos and Asians while a growing segment of US society are not coherent ethnic groups. Latinos who are of African origin, for example, are viewed as Blacks first, Latinos second, by most Americans. Asians for sure see themselves first and foremost as Chinese, Filipino, Indian, etc. first This is even true of second- and third generation Asians.)

The issue of Black equality (whether to assimilate Blacks into the state as full citizens or not) has been at the center of America's race and class relations. Other ethnic groups' progress or lack of progress regarding their full incorporation into the American state as citizens has always been related to the status of African-Americans. That's why it is incumbent for a Marxist group to have a correct understanding of the Black question.

7. What does this mean for Solidarity today?

We are seeking to build a Marxist group. A revolutionary socialist organization by definition must be multinational. Even if we had zero members who are Black, Latin, Asian, Native American, we would not be a "white" socialist group. If we identify ourselves that way, we would be adapting to white chauvinism. It would imply that we believe each ethnic group, not only whites, should have their own socialist group. (How a successful revolution would take place without the unity of all ethnic groups along class lines in one

mass party is of course impossible. I remember having this discussion with Black socialists in the League of Revolutionary Black Workers back in Detroit in 1969-70. They argued that racism meant Black socialists had no choice but to build our own group and that unity would occur in the form of alliances. I said then, and I say today: it violates the basic principle of Marxism on class unity, and revolutionary leadership which knows no ethnic boundary. If all Marxists who agree on program can't be in the same party/group, how can we organize against the state?)

The only requirement to join Solidarity is agreement with our program and goal: an anticapitalist revolution and the creation of a workers government that is based on human needs before profits. The formation of a workers government would provide the legal and state power basis to enforce true equality and penalize any person who practices racism.

The fact that Solidarity is mainly white is a reflection of the depth of racism and the default of the left and labor movements to stand up to capital and aggressively fight racism. In this reality Black radicals, socialists, Marxists tend to focus on their own communities and immediate problems of racism. It is the main reason that Black socialists tend to join mainly Black groups even though they know it is a contradiction to socialist philosophy and theory. Victory over capitalism requires that membership be colorblind even though the leadership must take special steps to ensure that all members are comfortable in the group.

8. Practically speaking we need to elevate our propoganda and work on the issue of racism to make it central to building our socialist organization.

What needs to be done?

A. We need to join organizations and groups fighting for reforms in the Black community and seeking to defend past gains. While these groups may be focused on issues like police brutality or political prisoners (Mumia), they provide us contact with Blacks and opportunities to discuss broader issues besides racism. This type of work is the most

concrete way to fight "white supremacist" thinking and to show in practice our credentials as an antiracist socialist group.

B. We need a newspaper -- preferably monthly -- that is aimed at activists we meet in the Black community, other communities of the color, students and the most advance labor activists. A key objective of a socialist group is to be the best militants in our unions, among co-workers, students, Black, Latino and Asian activists. It is also to bring them other ideas (broader thinking) in order to raise political consciousness. Trade union, student, nationalist consciousness by definition is very limited. Our goal as Marxists is to insert internationalism and class thinking. Not by jargon or a phony way. But in the natural course of discussions. That's the way to win activists in the Black Radicals Congress, New Directions and student labor groups to join Solidarity. It will be made easier if our goal -- socialism, anti-capitalism, a planned economy, against imperialist war -- is popularly presented. A newspaper can help us do that.

While a broader Solidarity paper is my first choice, we should also consider launching a journal aimed at Black activists that discuss the issues of class struggle and socialism as well as racism. This journal would be a complement to ATC and LN, coming out twice a year. We could seek the help of BRC radicals and others. This is one way to insert ourselves into the discussions of the Black left and broader liberal milieu. Our aim would be to influence that radicalizing layer and white activists about the relationship between the struggles they are involved in (including on campus and the unions) and the central need to incorporate the fight against racism into their political campaign.

C. We need to encourage the editors of LN to upgrade antiracist coverage and discuss more critically the issue of labor reform and the default in leadership of the AFL-CIO officialdom. This can be done through viewpoint pieces or even editorials where appropriate. I think it is essential that a publication pushing for reform of the labor movement make the fight against racism a central plank of its agenda.

The biggest historical and current problem in the labor movement is viewing the issue of racism and human or civil rights as side issues. Building a militant trade union movement is impossible in my view unless labor makes the fight against racism a central issue all the time. Historically the labor tops have been racist going back to the AFL's pushing of the Chinese exclusion acts up to labor's support to Jim Crow in the South and opposition to Black caucuses in the 1960s and 70s. It is not surprising that most Black radicals see labor as a conservative institution and part of the "problem," and not the solution to eradicating racism. Our job in the labor movement is to never allow this issue to be put on the back burner even in relationship to reform organizations. It is very easy to say, "For broader unity let's focus on the narrow economic and working condition issues." No. We may have to do so in a pedagogical manner or with flyers or publications, but we can never gain the support of militant workers of color if we accept this position.

D. Finally, to deepen general education in Solidarity, we should prepare an education syllabus for the branches that begins with a study of US history and the place of the national struggle in it. The starting point would be the genocide against the American Indians, up to the current immigration fights. Generally the failures of the socialist left on this issue has been to segregate the history of national oppression from overall class history. I think we must tie the two together. By doing so, we will better understand the organic connection between the fight for equality by Blacks in particular, as well as other people of color, the drive by workers to form rank and filed controlled unions, the fight of the women's movement for equality and control of their bodies, and the changing social relations in the country.

9. The final point concerns the character of Solidarity. I think the present world reality requires that we move toward becoming a more Leninist-type organization. Since our key long-term task is to accumulate cadre and train them as Marxist -- so we can be better militants in whatever arena we are active in -- we need a party structure that is democratic, allows minority functioning, but can

also act in a more centralized manner. We reject the bureaucratic methods of the Stalinists, the various Trotskyist sects and others. Many of us have learned from our past experiences why that is wrong. But we should not throw the baby out with the bath water. We need a more viable organizational structure where more resources can go to individual projects, go to the National Office staff, to publications and branches. This means upgrading the PC, NC and other forms of organization. It means when decisions are made they are not basically suggestions to the branches and membership. They are what we think all members should prioritize.

Combining our rank and file strategy for the unions with deepening our work in the social movements and upgrading party-building is key to moving forward.

## CONTINUING THE DISCUSSION, MOVING THE WORK FORWARD

Report From The Anti-Racism Commission Facilitators

By Theresa E. and Kay S., Co-Facilitators

### RECRUITMENT PERSPECTIVE

For nearly a year, our organization has been engaged in a discussion about anti-racism work and recruitment of People of Color. The desire to focus more resources on neglected activities without shorting important ongoing work has led several branches to examine their structure and functioning.

The Los Angeles branch has drafted a plan for reorganizing itself that we are really excited about. LA intends to structure itself to reach out to its community, develop anti-racism work, and build a periphery from which it can recruit. We encourage everyone to read their perspective – “Towards a Recruitment Model” – which appears in the January 2000 DB. Most importantly, we would like everyone, whether in a branch, twig or at-large, to think concretely about how its analysis and approach might be adapted to their own circumstances.

We think this model is most directly relevant to the cities with significant Communities of Color and where we have branches: Bay Area, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York and Washington, D.C. We recommend that every exec discuss the LA perspective, but we especially encourage those

branch execs to think about and attempt to apply its methods.

We especially like the way LA has synthesized its external work and internal culture. It clearly defines the critical goal of focusing energy on the “transformation of [Solidarity’s] culture to become more hospitable and supportive of new members and contacts, particularly historically and currently underrepresented groups such as people of color, women, and many working class people.”

The plans it recommends for developing a mentoring and buddy system, building a culture of democracy, and developing branch cohesiveness are critical to the success of our recruitment goals.

Equally important is the role LA assigns to the centrality of “keeping the socialist project alive.” Socialism is absolutely critical to our anti-racism perspective. The link between our socialist vision and our response to racist oppression must be vividly, concretely and systematically present in our branch activity.

As branches discuss their own organization and functioning, we recommend they look at the elements identified by the LA branch and strive to connect them to local plans for anti-racism activities.

## ARC LEADERSHIP RETREAT

At the March 25-26 NC meeting, the ARC co-facilitators will report on plans for the Anti-Racism Leadership conference that will be held May 12-13. At the conference, members of the ARC, the NC and those active in anti-racism work will develop a two-year strategic plan for our anti-racism work. The plan will be discussed during the pre-convention period and voted on at the convention itself.

In the April DB we will report on the agenda approved by the NC and our goals for each of the discussions. Our general plans include establishing a historical and political framework; anti-racism movement experiences; an organizational assessment; creating a work plan; and an evaluation.

There are 20 people currently committed to attending the conference; 12 men, eight women. We are targeting women and People of Color for the remaining spaces available. Here's the current roster:

Caroline L., Bay Area  
Cathy C., Bloomington  
Dave F., Detroit  
Debby P., Chicago  
Kay S., NY  
Kim H., Detroit  
Malik M., Bay Area  
Margaret J., Detroit  
Matt N., NY  
Mike P., Detroit  
Pam G., NY  
Paul B., Detroit  
Paul L., Pittsburgh  
Rob B., Conn.  
Peter O., Oberlin  
Rodney W., Detroit  
Steve B., NY

Susan N., Detroit  
Theresa E., Durham, NC  
Tim S., NY

## FINANCIAL REPORT

Dear Comrades,  
We are truly encouraged by the level of discussion and activity within the organization around anti-racism work and very excited about the ARC meeting and its potential impact on our future.

We are discouraged, however, to share with you that the fund-raising among foundations that we hoped would help to underwrite this initiative has not been successful. We are relying solely on the organization's resources to make the conference a reality.

Many of those who will be attending are able to and have generously agreed to pay most or all of their own expenses. There are also members we would like to attend for whom it will be difficult or impossible without your financial support.

Our vision for this conference is integral to its location at Highlander. We don't want to change it, but the airfare commitment is significant. We need you to dig deep in order to have the conference we have worked so hard on.

Many of you have already responded to our plea for support. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts. If you have considered a contribution, but didn't – please, think again! We promise to put your resources to extremely good use.

Yours for the Revolution,  
Kay S. and Theresa E.

## ANTI-RACISM COMMISSION BRANCH REPORTS

**Austin** (Reporter: Chris K.) The branch coalesced around anti-racism discussions following the 1999 labor retreat; the issue is well-integrated into its culture but there are no specific organizing projects currently. Texas has had ongoing activity around affirmative action and the branch has good contacts and relationships with Xicano and Latino groups arising out of this and its labor newsletter work. There is a young militant group called Cop Watch that has lots of energy and does some Mumia work. We have good, long-standing relations with them.

**Bay Area** (Reporter: Tim M.) California always has electoral issues related to anti-racism because the Right organizes some racist proposition every two years. Recently our side took a big defeat on juvenile incarceration issues. We participated through a group called Californians for Justice, which organized leafleting and house parties and had significant support. There is a lot of activity among youth of color that takes the form of high school-based self-organization (some hip-hop concerts, high school blowouts) --- not huge but regionally important. In its efforts, the branch has emphasized political linkages: anti-racism, Mumia, criminalization of youth of color, criminal repression in Seattle, WTO. (Anti-racism is central focus of WTO work in California.)

The perspective of the four Oakland teachers is related -- there's an attack on public education that is racist and connected to gentrification. There is a contract struggle currently in which workplace issues inevitably raise racism issues. Rank and file meetings have had 50 percent women and people of color but the gaps between students and teachers have not been bridged. The goal

is linking networks of teachers and networks of students but this is a long way off.

Mumia work remains important. A key leader of the East Bay coalition was recruited. The group includes activists in the Black Radical Congress, the Jericho movement and is aligned with a Socialist Action-led group, but is more oriented to building in the community. (The contending perspectives sometimes reduce to getting arrested vs. movement-building.) There is a fraction of 3 to 4 people. Solidarity is most focused on a May 13 Labor for Mumia action.

The branch had a good discussion of its anti-racism perspectives, led by Malik M. There is some unevenness about how to relate to independent self-organization of people of color in terms of alliances and working relationships with leadership; exploration of how to develop areas of future collaboration. Branch recruits have been younger as well as people of color, which poses some integration problems. Approach has been to establish places where people can grow -- campus activities, study groups -- develop politics, confidence and relationships with other members.

**Bloomington** (Reporter: Jeff M.) Several branch members were involved in the Mumia work in the fall but activity has shifted to sweatshop work and local issues. In the sweatshop work, there is an expression against exploitation of communities of color, but this is not a focus. Indiana has the death penalty and there is some prison activism work. There are anti-racist activists in town but they have a low level of activity.

This is small branch of five; difficult to function as a group and do the things they would like to do. There have not been any organized discussions around the Anti-Racism DB or other documents.

**Chicago** (Reporter, Joel F.) Two members have been involved in Mumia work consistently, more when there is active preparation for an event. The Mumia committee is partially fragmented along organizational lines. We have argued that making inroads into the black community is key to broadening support and there are individuals who are interested in that approach, but the committee has not been successful in actually doing so. (An obstacle for the committee is the Democratic Party's stranglehold on all elements of city political life including the churches.)

Instances of police brutality occur and evoke a response but nothing is ongoing. There have been no formal discussions in the branch around the issues raised in the Anti-Racism DB or other documents.

**Detroit** (Reporter: Margaret J.) The branch has been working with the Xicano Development Committee, especially around WTO work. April 16<sup>th</sup> is an important focus along with an XDC demo set for May. A monthly study group to discuss race in America has begun to meet. The approach is both cultural and political with literature, oral history and film playing a role in the presentations; the current line-up is *Finally Got the News*, *Detroit I Do Mind Dying* and *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, which is a case study of housing discrimination that centers on Detroit. It is open to the branch periphery and much planning has gone into making it accessible. In January the branch held a

discussion focused on internal processes that was a follow up to earlier anti-racism discussions. The XDC folks are considered collaborators rather than potential recruits.

Opportunities to overcome community isolation are opening up. There was a recent environmental racism victory around a hospital incinerator in which a member played a key role. A recent meeting on urban health care provoked by the closing of a community hospital attracted about 250 and was very representative. Two contacts work for a minority newspaper with a strong community orientation.

**Los Angeles** (Reporter: Joel J.) The branch collaboratively developed a new model for organizing and structuring its work that is directly related to anti-racism activity and recruitment and can be read in full in the January DB. One part of this is a commitment to an anti-racism internal discussion every three months. Mumia is not a branch activity but a forum on the Ramparts scandal is being organized; there has been local response to Ramparts but it is not broader than the Left.

The teacher work is very exciting. The core is 50 to 60 rank-and-file activists who meet monthly organizing a coalition against standardized testing and retention. The group is younger, includes Latino/a and African American teachers, and embodies the real future of the union and the radical movement in education. The coalition is organizing parent workshops in Latino and African-American areas to educate on the issues. Workshops are high-school based and organized by the local teachers. Meetings have been extraordinarily successful but the

work remains slow-going as the enthusiastic cadre are very inexperienced.

**Madison** (Reporter: Joel S.) The branch has discussed having an anti-racism discussion but not yet organized it. The branch was involved in a Wisconsin for Mumia group that tried unsuccessfully to involve broader forces. Activities drew supporters, but the committee was a front group involving the ISO, Workers World and Solidarity. It was unable to tap into churches or any other broader community forces. On campus there is WTO work, which has excitement but is unorganized, and some death penalty work in which we collaborate with Amnesty International.

**Mid-Tennessee** (Reporter: Dylan) The branch works consistently on Mumia activities but remains isolated. Its focus has been leafleting and tabling but has not been able to broaden beyond its own members. They would like to organize a teach-in or show the Mumia video again and are interested in other ideas that would energize the work. The branch has discussed the anti-racism perspectives as well as challenges relating to women, but there are few activists of color. They recently participated in a rally against police brutality in Chattanooga.

**New York City** (Reporter: Kay S.) The branch has been most successful in organizing discussions related to anti-racism issues. Two were held in the fall around the DB and reported earlier. The journal article by Betsy E. and Robin Kelly on the impact of Maoism on the Black Liberation Movement was discussed with a presentation by a person of color who is a contact. As part of a branch reorganization plan, a small group (including a sympathizer who is a person of color) is

taking responsibility for organizing the branch anti-racism effort. The formerly very successful youth/film group is being resuscitated and will have related films recommended as an initial focus. One member has a loose group of activist associates who primarily orient to anti-racism community efforts and issues; the exec is exploring ways of bringing them into greater contact with Solidarity. Members participate in anti-repression, anti-police demonstrations but the branch does not yet have a handle on how it can most productively relate to the issue and activities.

**Portland** (Reporter: Johanna B.) The branch has had two more anti-racism related discussions (for a total of four). An African-American member visited Zimbabwe and gave an excellent talk regarding political activities among women there that revolved around racism, neo-colonialism, structural policies and the rising tide of violence against women. She is being encouraged to write this up for ATC.

The second was an educational in which four branch members read two books, one by an African American and one by a white South African. The idea was to explore the struggle against racism from different perspectives; the books were Makes Me Want to Holler and Gordimer's most recent book of essays, which focus on post-apartheid SA. The next discussion will focus on the Parker/Esch document written last year.

Mumia work continues in Portland and the branch supports demonstrations. A stronger local issue is police assaults on environmentalists and other political people, which have stepped up post-WTO.

**Salt Lake City** (Reporter: Patrick B.) The branch has been in a more inactive period; there have been no internal discussions related to anti-racism. Mumia work is one of the branch's most important arenas. Leafleting attracts new people, who tend to be young workers rather than folks already part of the Left. There will be an English-only referendum in the fall; we have been involved in the organizing meeting to oppose it but this is not likely to become active for a while. Salt Lake has a small Latino community; the English-only issue revolves around whether government documents should be printed in Spanish and Korean as well as English.

**Washington D.C.** (Reporter: Rick H.) The branch (of eight, one African American) held a discussion of the Anti-Racism DB at which some documents were found to be interesting and some navel-gazing. Documents on white-skin privilege and account of American history were thought to be flawed. Developing anti-racism politics thought to be more useful than branch introspection.

The April 16<sup>th</sup> work is hopeful in contrast to the Labor Party and Mumia work, which is more "like taking a dead dog for a walk." Mumia work at Howard did not go well, while April 16 is better especially with international students. One member of color was in Mumia work when recruited but less involved now; we participate in actions when they are called. The local committee does seem to be broadening its appeal to focus more on due process issues. There is sweatshop work at George Washington but we aren't involved. Two contacts who are people of color and AFGE activists are involved with us in the Labor Party.

**CFC**

**From:** Rob Baril <rbaril1@hotmail.com>  
**To:** <cfc@igc.org>  
**Sent:** Monday, August 05, 2002 7:38 AM  
**Subject:** DARE piece

**DARE to Organize Against White Supremacy, and For Workers Power-**

Co-written by Rob Baril, Theresa El-Amin, Sara Mersha, Greg Nammacher. Arthur Liou offered helpful suggestions.

In a recent db, Peter O. and Charles W. called on Solidarity to deepen our discussions and work against racism by studying the experiences of organizations such as Make the Road by Walking, the Coalition for Education Justice, POWER, and DARE. This initial submission deals with DARE, Direct Action for Rights and Equality, an organization with which all of the authors of this article have experience. This piece is offered not as a definitive evaluation of community-based worker organizing, but as a short, if incomplete history of DARE. We hope this submission offers insight on the ways DARE has addressed the intersection of race and class and developed a powerful institutional base for low-wage workers of color in Providence.

**History and Guiding Politics**

DARE is a multiracial, multilingual grassroots community organization of low-income families in communities of color in and around Providence, Rhode Island. In 1986 four women and a young Brown University graduate with a few years as a paid organizer came together "around a kitchen table" to form DARE. All five around the table were experienced members and allies of the recently folded welfare rights group Workers Association for Guaranteed Employment (WAGE).

Over the past sixteen years, DARE campaigns have included fights around issues including environmental justice, police brutality, human rights abuses in prisons, bilingual and multicultural education, and workers' rights. DARE's membership is almost entirely low income (unemployed, on welfare, or in low wage work), 75% women, 40-45% Black, 40-45% Latino, and 10-15% white, Native American, and Asian. Black members are predominantly African-American, with smaller numbers of West Africans and African-descended people from the Caribbean. Latino DARE members are mainly from the Dominican Republic, with rapid growth among Central and South Americans. DARE members pay dues (currently \$30 per year), plan and develop strategy for direct action organizing campaigns, design and participate in political education and leadership development programs, raise funds for the organization, and elect and serve on the Board of Directors.

Early DARE campaigns focused on neighborhood-based concerns: establishing summer programs for youth, keeping the enormous number of vacant lots in South Providence clean to reduce danger to children, and fights to preserve heat and electricity in the winter. During the early and mid-90's, DARE moved from neighborhood-based campaigns to large-scale city and statewide work around welfare reform, police brutality, and labor work.

Three basic political principles have guided DARE's development:

- a commitment to working class, feminist leadership development;
- the multiracial alliance of Black, Latino, and smaller numbers of Asians and anti-racist whites against racism;
- a direct action organizing style focused on expanding organizational power and influence to win institutional change. Increasingly campaigns are multi-year and involve alliances with other organizations.

We explore the ways in which these basic principles are practiced below, with focus on DARE's organizing campaigns and coalition work, especially around labor.

**Working Class, Feminist Leadership Development**

As DARE's membership base, the leadership of women has defined much of the organization's development. The initial campaigns around summer youth programs, vacant lots, and utilities sprang from the concerns of women as mothers. As DARE moved from neighborhood-based campaigns to large-scale city and statewide work around welfare reform, police brutality, and labor work, this focus on feminist political priorities has remained strong.

How does DARE's leadership development model differ from that of other worker organizations, such as unions? Members chair campaign committees, run actions and accountability sessions with power holders, and play a key role in developing

campaigns and the overall course organization.

In addition to campaign work, as both men and women in the organization have developed as leaders, they have demanded attention to structured opportunities to sharpen their organizing skills. This has made sense both for the practical reason that it helps move the campaigns forward and because of the political perspective that building working class leadership of people of color is as important as winning campaigns. DARE has three programs actively developing the organizing abilities and analysis of its core leadership. The DARE Leadership Institute (DLI) is a 6-month program that engages a class of 20 new and experienced members through monthly workshops on organizing skills (such as recruitment, running meetings, public speaking, and direct action) and political development (including Understanding Capitalism, History of Struggle in Black and Latino Communities, Sexism and Patriarchy). Seeds of Change is a similar program geared toward youth under 18. The Apprenticeship for Member Organizers (AMMO) brings three members through an intense 10-week paid part-time internship in organizing.

Through these programs, members gain skills, analysis, confidence, and relationships with other members, and are able to be much more effective in their campaign work and in guiding the overall direction of the organization. Increasingly members assert their desire for increased roles and responsibilities as paid DARE staff organizers. Out of a current staff of eight, six were hired from the membership, including most recently a teacher assistant who organizes on the living wage campaign. Seven are Black or Latina, and seven are women, again reflecting the membership of the organization.

DARE members carry their skills, activism, and leadership to other movement work. Current Solidarity member Juan Gallardo's TDU work in IBT Local 251 grew out of his activism in DARE. After leaving South America for political and economic reasons, Juan was attracted to DARE's militancy on racial justice campaigns affecting Black and Latino workers. Juan was introduced to TDU during a DARE sponsored trip to Labor Notes, and subsequently organized a strike at the bus company he works for in opposition to IBT leadership.

#### **A Multiracial Organization**

At the same time that DARE's organizing in communities of color explicitly challenges white supremacy on the outside, DARE works internally to address power and ideas around race issues within the organization. When the organization began, its membership was primarily Black, with a significant number of low-income white families. By the early 90s, DARE no longer represented the communities in which it worked. South Providence and the West End (DARE's traditional neighborhood bases) were no longer just Black and white, but had significant and increasing numbers of Latino families as well.

The organization decided to transform itself to bring in Latino members in a planned, structured way. The small group of Latino families who were already members formed Comité Latino and began recruiting other Latino families. The Comité chose bilingual education as a first campaign, explicitly identifying a racially and culturally based issue to build power. The campaign was made up entirely of Latino parents, organized itself primarily in Spanish, and focused on an issue specifically affecting Latinos, with an analysis that emphasized racism against Latino immigrants. Through the Comité and the campaign, many new Latino leaders joined. Trust and relationships formed when Latinos saw Black members supporting their struggle. A pivotal moment is often described by a veteran Latino leader- "We went to the Superintendent of Schools to do a direct action for Bilingual Education for Latinos- and most of the members there were African-American!"

With the strong base of Latino leaders, a majority of DARE's established Black leadership intentionally "bridged" the new Latino leaders into other campaigns and into elected leadership in the rest of the organization. DARE's membership now has roughly equal numbers of Black and Latino members. This shift in the makeup of the membership did not occur without conflict. Multiracial organizing is not always easy by any stretch of the imagination. Differing historical experiences, language, and cultural barriers are flashpoints for the tensions that develop between members. At least two times in the history of the organization, these conflicts have been quite intense. Intra-racial biases in both directions were significant and are a continued reality, especially among newer and less involved members. DARE's practice has been to tackle these tensions when they develop, to try to identify the root of conflict (often an examination of historical contradictions created by capitalism and white supremacy), to hold people accountable when necessary, and to find ways to be proactive about addressing systemic forms of racism.

#### **Picking Bigger Fights for Racial and Economic Justice**

The last 15 years have been a time of dynamic change in Providence. Collaboration between the City Hall political machine and corporate leaders have positioned Providence as a national model for small city "urban renewal." The impact of this economic policy on the Black, Latino, and Southeast Asian working class has been devastating. "Safe streets" policing tactics advertised to attract business investment permit police to profile, brutalize, and occasionally murder people in the Black, Latino, and Asian communities. To address these greater challenges, DARE has moved beyond neighborhood issues to take on city-wide fights through long-term, broadly based campaigns.

In 1993 DARE began planning a response to police abuse. Campaigns against police are no easy task. As opposed to most ad-hoc coalitions that form around one particularly vicious police brutality incident and then fade away, DARE's police

accountability campaign spans almost a decade. DARE's work to challenge police violence started with a successful five-year fight to open complaint records to the public. At different points during the access fight, DARE focused on police violence against youth and the sham civilian complaint process in place for victims of police brutality. Most recently, DARE has been waging a three-year fight to establish one of the strongest External Review Boards in the country, the Providence External Review Authority (PERA). The Board will be made up of civilians who will investigate and make decisions on complaints against police officers, as well as reviewing department policy. The campaign was spurred on by the 500 strong demonstration and subsequent coalition work following the tragic police shooting of off-duty police officer Cornel Young Jr., the son of the highest-ranking Black officer in the Providence Police Department. While trying to intervene in a potentially violent situation between two civilians, Young was killed by two on-duty white officers who mistook him for the assailant.

DARE successfully passed the ordinance through City Council, but was not able to hold onto enough votes to override Mayor's recent veto. However, with the strong leadership and awareness DARE has built through the nearly 10 years of working on police issues, the organization is clear that this defeat is not a stopping point. DARE is using it as an opportunity to develop political consciousness by having discussions within the membership of the limitations of the political system in which we are operating. At the same time, the organization is gearing up to reintroduce the ordinance with a stronger coalition, as well as a return to DARE's more militant tactics that build and exert real community power.

### **First Steps in Worker Organizing- The Home Daycare Justice Campaign**

DARE started organizing home daycare providers in 1990 when a number of members doing childcare for the state were not getting paid on time. These DARE members (all women of color) organized a direct action on the Department of Human Services to demand the \$12,000 in back pay that they were owed. They walked out of DHS that same day with their paychecks. It was good to see that their collective action made a concrete difference, but they decided that it was not enough to simply get paid on time - they were grossly underpaid, and received no benefits from the state. The Home Daycare Justice Committee was born and went on to target the Director of DHS and the Governor in a five-year fight for health insurance. In 1995, Rhode Island became the first state in the nation to provide health insurance to the hundreds of home daycare providers who work for the state. The Daycare Providers succeeded in creating a militant, democratic organization respectful of worker language and culture. In 1998, the committee branched out to form its own organization, the Daycare Justice Co-op, whose Director is a former Provider, and which has won vacation and sick time. The Co-op is now engaged in a campaign to win a contract from the state for higher pay.

### **Coalition Work: Jobs with Justice and the Living Wage Campaign**

From the start of the 90's, DARE has played a leadership role in engaging people and organizations outside the membership to influence the overall political and organizing climate in the city and state. During 1993-94, DARE formed the People First Budget Coalition, which organized to stop millions of dollars in social services cuts. By the end of the decade, DARE's traditional constituency reflected the national trend as cuts in the national and state social safety nets forced the unemployed into low-wage, predominantly non-union jobs. Providence's jobless found work in industries such as health care, food service, temp work (often in factories), childcare, and education. In response, DARE began exploring ways to expand worker organizing beyond the successful Daycare Justice campaign by playing a central role in forming Rhode Island Jobs with Justice.

DARE's role in building Jobs with Justice chapter has been sustained and strategic. DARE took a major role in the formation of JwJ in 1996, along with leadership from the handful of progressive unions in Rhode Island, including the CWA local (the Providence Newspaper Guild), 1199 SEIU, HERE, an independent nurse's union, and other community groups such as Progreso Latino. Before Jobs with Justice raised money for staff, DARE committed significant amounts of its own staff time to develop the coalition. JwJ work included solidarity for member organizations, organizing around a welfare rights day of action, and most ambitiously, living wage work.

For the past 3 years, a local living wage campaign initiated by RI Jobs with Justice in 1999 has been DARE's main focus in worker organizing. The Providence Central Labor Council (controlled mostly by bureaucratic building trades locals) submitted a proposal for living wage ordinance to the mayor in 1998. The CLC dropped the campaign after the mayor rejected it. Jobs with Justice turned to DARE to do the grassroots organizing necessary to push the issue forward. Several DARE members were non-union city employees, working as "temporary" teacher assistants in the schools for three, four, or five years, making only minimum wage and no benefits. DARE members crafted the demands of the living wage ordinance around improvements in their working conditions and lives. Provisions in the living wage would cover city employees, and has strong job access language, including affirmative action, local hiring, and non-discrimination for those with prison records. This ongoing campaign now has a high level of resources (staff time and active member organization involvement) from JwJ. In the meantime, DARE successfully organized teachers assistants and bus monitors to win shorter term demands of permanent hiring, raises, benefits, and union membership. This work gained the attention and (for a period of a year and a half) participation of the Laborers local representing the permanent teacher assistants and bus monitors.

This work has not come without obstacles. In the past several years, as the coalition gained strength, the leadership of the Providence Central Labor Council has often made it clear that it does not support this coalition work. CLC leadership cites

reasons from discomfort with DARE's work to fight racism in the police department, to anger at Jobs with Justice for doing a direct action on a downtown developer who would not sign a card count agreement with the HERE local, to indignation with an article in which

coalition members referred to city hiring based on patronage. After this most recent incident, the Laborers Union informed DARE and the entire City Council that they would no longer support the living wage work, and in fact urged the City Council to postpone the issue for another year. In each of these situations, the CLC leadership is loyal to the Mayor and sometimes even to the corporate establishment in the city, rather than to union and non-union workers and specifically people of color.

At a deeper level the CLC's resistance is based in recognition that Jobs with Justice member organizations collectively pose a long-term challenge for leadership within the Rhode Island labor movement. Particularly threatening to conservative forces within the CLC is the emergence of militant, worker-led organizing trend with a racial justice analysis. This trend is typified both by large-scale organizing efforts like the living wage campaign DARE is spearheading through JwJ and shop floor activity like DARE member Juan Gallardo's militant work as a TDU activist in IBT 251.

Despite the resistance of the CLC, Jobs with Justice sees results in building workers power in Providence and Rhode Island. In addition to the living wage work discussed above, the coalition has made connections between important community and union fights, initiating innovative collaborations between groups like the Liberian Association of Rhode Island (which fights for permanent residency for immigrants) with unions like 1199 as they organize nursing home workers (a great number of which are Liberian). DARE has played the leading role in convening these progressive organizations in Jobs with Justice with a strategic vision to build a different kind of labor movement in Rhode Island.

### **Challenges for the Future**

Key to DARE's ability to keep moving forward as an important institution in social justice work locally and nationally has been its longevity - having been around for sixteen years, it has a solid core of leaders and a reputation that people can trust. Perhaps even more significant is DARE's ability to remain true to its mission, while also having a great capacity for continual evolution to adjust to changing realities, lessons learned internally and from other organizations.

Increasingly DARE's challenge is to play a leadership role among the militant minority of labor organizations in Rhode Island. Several unions share this vision for what the labor movement can become. At the same time, DARE continues to struggle with building a broader, more powerful movement that incorporates some of the unions who are not yet at that point, while supporting member workers of color who are trying to transform their unions from within. DARE values both goals, but in an effort to juggle both, we have sometimes killed possibilities for working with some unions, while also not giving member workers of color adequate tools to be effective in challenging their unions. While the entrenched, corrupt bureaucracy of business-model unions has been a significant obstacle in advancing workers rights, DARE's coalition work through Jobs with Justice has allied unions and community organizations, low-wage service workers with higher-waged skilled workers like nurses, and put workers of color at the forefront of Rhode Island's activist labor movement.

Other recent evaluation of DARE's strategies has led members to appreciate the range of tactics that we have used (from shutting down city hall to working within established venues and commissions), while also recognizing that the organization may have recently erred too much on the side of trying to win elected officials through persuasion, rather than flexing its people power more through pressure tactics. Other challenges include the need to expand DARE's geographic base in order to influence larger (state-wide) problems and possible solutions; the need to challenge problems even more at their root causes (questioning the existence of police and prisons rather than just pushing for oversight); and building strength in the labor movement by organizing unorganized workers with which unions in power will not compete.

We offer this short history for others to contribute to and learn from.

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## **Evaluation of ARC By the Political Committee March 2002**

At the 2000 convention we created an Anti-Racist Commission (ARC) and adopted an Anti-Racism Strategic Plan with twelve components (see attached) The Political Committee and the National Committee were charged with the "ongoing leadership and evaluation of the plan." While the organization has made some small, but significant steps toward making anti-racist activity a central part of Solidarity's political life we have not met the most ambitious goals of the Anti-Racism Strategic Plan.

This report is an attempt to begin an evaluative process of the organization's anti-racist work. The PC hopes to use this document, along with others, including a document on the Current State of the Black Liberation Movement in the US, to contribute to the discussion of our anti-racist work. We hope that this discussion will conclude at the Convention with the adoption of a realistic perspective and organizational form that will allow us to improve our collective functioning in the struggle against racism.

Solidarity's organizational weaknesses- our lack of full-time staff, a relatively thin layer of members willing to make the organizational and political leadership of national Solidarity their primary arena of work given their commitments to movement work and building Solidarity in their local area-had a number of negative consequences for the functioning of the ARC. Neither the PC nor the NC was able to help overcome the ARC's difficulties in functioning collectively. In particular, the PC was unable to play a more pro-active role in promoting political discussion and coordinated activity throughout the organization. Even when the ARC or the PC proposed realistic anti-racist activities, the state of the branches and Solidarity's general weakness in the areas of members' involvement and coordination made the implementation of these proposals uneven at best.

The fate of the ARC has not, unfortunately, been unique in the history of Solidarity. It has been difficult for Solidarity to maintain national commissions/working groups over the years. For the most part even the National Committee doesn't have working bodies that function between meetings. In fact, the Labor Commission is the only body that has been able to develop projects, reports, retreats, and discussion articles. The Education Commission is beginning to develop, but it has been careful to take on one project at a time and see that through to completion. In both of these cases one or two members of the commission are the driving force while others respond to their initiatives. We're not putting this forward as the ideal way to organize, just a recognition of what has generally been true.

So why did we think that an ARC would be able to make a breakthrough in developing a dynamic commission? We hoped that through the anti-racist retreat and the work that had gone on before, again largely on the part of a few individuals, a core group could come together and move the work along. Individuals on the anti-racist commissions have been able to advance some of the points, but the commission itself has become bogged down and doesn't exist as a commission at this point. At the July 2001 NC meeting, Michael David replaced Kay as co-convenor with Theresa. In November 2001 Theresa resigned as co-convenor, and Michael David didn't feel he could continue as sole convenor. He proposed that the ARC reconvene as a working group, and in discussions with Michael David the PC proposed that the working group focus on two points:

- A. Contacting branches to implement and evaluate the Education Commission's projected Spring 2002 anti-racist class series
- B. Working with Solidarity News to develop articles and authors on anti-racist issues.

Since then a group of comrades put forward a proposal for an anti-racist caucus, the motivation

statement for which is in the January DB.

There are also "objective" reasons-factors over which we have little or no control-which contributed to our ability to meet the objectives set. Although the last few years have seen the gradual emergence of new forms of resistance to neoliberal capitalism on a global scale (which is reflected to a lesser extent in the United States), there continues to be a low level of sustained struggle overall in the US working class, including in communities of color (certainly when compared to the period from the mid 1950s to the early 1970s). The absence of this level of sustained social activism, which would produce a significant layer of radical activists of color attracted to revolutionary organizations, places profound limits on the ability of a small, predominantly white socialist organization like Solidarity to transform its racial composition in the manner projected in the Anti-Racist Strategic plan.

The absence of sustained activism is most evident at the national level. There are few national campaigns against racism led by people of color which would allow us to work collectively and concentrate our forces. In general, the struggles of communities of color are local, not national. While both the campaign for reparations and to free Mumia are national in scale, and demand fuller discussion by Solidarity in the upcoming pre-convention period, neither has yet sunk deep roots in communities of color.

The Black Radical Congress is a national organization of Black radicals and attempts to carry out national campaigns. Theresa has been the only African-American Solidarity member who has been able to be consistently active at its national meetings, however. Had we been in a situation where a core of comrades could be active in its campaigns and meetings we would be in a better place. When the BRC met in Detroit, many comrades attended its open meetings and housed BRC members, but that cannot take the place of a process of collaboration and evaluation that a core of Solidarity members could undertake. (A number of comrades are on the BRC listserv and the BRC webmaster has placed some ATC articles on the listserv.)

According to some observers (Malik M.), the BRC is in crisis. It has been unable to cohere an independent radical politics (divisions over the 2000 elections between supporters of Gore and Nader, divisions over relations with the AFL-CIO leadership) or launch sustained and successful national campaigns in the current period. Its national campaign for "Schools, Not Jails" has failed to take off despite support among BRC youth, and despite the existence of some vibrant local campaigns against youth incarceration, such as the Books Not Bars campaign in the Bay Area.

Many struggles of people of color target a specific incinerator or industrial polluter dumping waste in their community or against a particular incident of police brutality. Often times the form of organization is through Black churches or local community organizations with which we do not have developed relationships. In some areas our comrades have participated in these struggles and won the respect of the small layer of radicals of color who have emerged, showing the need for Solidarity to think creatively about how to deepen our participation in community-based organizations that fight racism in its varied forms. However, even these crucial struggles have been highly episodic.

Clearly, the state of struggles against racism and among people of color is not unique in the current conjuncture. Comrades active in the labor and other social movements face the same problems of localized and episodic struggles creating small layers of radical activists, most of whom do not experience the need to join a socialist organization today.

The new movement against capitalist globalization has produced an important number of young people who share a mix of radical politics with strong anticapitalist, anti-authoritarian characteristics. Yet, because of the overall level of struggle and the prevalence of looser, alternative forms of organization, only a tiny minority of them are currently attracted to more traditional left organizations such as Solidarity. The same could be said of many young radicals of color, who, although not separate from the global justice movement, are developing their own

networks and loose forms of organization. For example, the readership of such publications as ColorLines or the now defunct internationalist underground hip-hop zine BLU, includes a significant number of young people of color who identify as revolutionary, anti-imperialist, anti-authoritarian, and/or anticapitalist. But the majority of these radicals are not currently attracted to traditional organizations of the left, even ones that have a relatively stronger concentration of people of color members than Solidarity. Socialist organizations have much to learn from these networks-- from their political ideas, cultural forms of resistance, and organizing styles. Any discussion of Solidarity's anti-racism work needs to take these developments into account, and grapple with the challenge of how to relate to networks of young radicals of color specifically and among networks of radicalizing youth in general.

However, in other arenas of activism--particularly our labor work--Solidarity has adopted political and organizational goals based on a more realistic assessment of what is possible.

Specifically, we believe that Solidarity has, particularly at national conventions and national leadership meetings, fallen into the habit of adopting motions that involve goals that are unrealistic in terms of the current level of struggle and Solidarity's organizational coherence. For some, the Anti-Racist Strategic Plan was an ambitious but feasible plan. For others, it was another example of embracing unrealistic goals. Given the absence of sustained, growing struggles led by people of color against racism that could produce growing numbers of radicals of color, and given our organizational weaknesses, Solidarity's ability to transform itself in the manner projected in the Anti-Racist Strategic Plan was unrealistic.

Adopting unrealistic goals can produce both cynicism and recriminations in the organization. On the one hand, comrades vote for motions they don't think are practical. They feel to question them is questioning our commitment to being an anti-racist organization. But this confuses a wish list with a set of realistic goals. On the other hand, adopting goals that cannot be achieved produce tremendous frustration among comrades, particularly those working hard to move the work forward, when these goals are not realized. Comrades may question the political motivations and commitment of other comrades, accusing them of "insufficient commitment" or "adaptations" to various forms of bourgeois politics and ideology. Both responses--cynicism and recrimination--make it difficult, if not impossible to set realistic goals. As a result, the organization that sets unrealistic goals for itself is unable to meet the goals it in fact can in a given political conjuncture.

Finally, we believe that the conception of anti-racist activism that informed the Anti-Racist Strategic Plan was too narrow and must be expanded. Often comrades defined anti-racist activism as the struggle to Free Mumia, win reparations for slavery, opposition to local instances of police brutality and the like. As a result, we did not clearly explore the fact that struggles specifically related to issues of concern to, and under the leadership of, people of color take a wide variety of forms today.

Many Solidarity members engage in anti-racist activism through their unions or community-labor organizations. In TDU, the most rapid growth in membership is among Latino/a teamsters who are struggling not simply for shop-floor power and economic justice, but against racist immigration laws and union bureaucrats. In other cases, comrades in the labor movement have helped organize against attempts to dismantle programs that promote the hiring and retention of workers of color. We have participated in attempts to build coalitions with communities of color in support of union organizing, against "school reform" schemes that victimize students of color and the like. Comrades in a number of cities helped promote the case of the Charleston 5, which linked racism and the defense of union rights. In New England, comrades have worked in the LP to promote a people of color-led campaign for health care and improved education; while others have worked through workers' centers around issues of the living wage and immigrants rights.

Such labor-based anti-racist struggles, whether in the workplace or community, are also highly localized and episodic today. As a result, we face many of the same problems presented in other

forms of anti-racist activism. However, we need to support and nurture these forms of anti-racist organizing as we do other more "explicit" anti-racist struggles.

Despite the ARC's inability to cohere as a viable commission and our collective inability to implement the Anti-Racist Strategic plan, Solidarity has made some important strides in our anti-racist activism. These accomplishments demonstrate the commitment and effort of Solidarity in this arena. Among the group's accomplishments since the last Convention are:

1. The committee organizing the 2001 summer school set a goal of having people of color speaking on every panel and giving a number of presentations. While that target was not fully met, the reason it wasn't was due to last-minute cancellations. In addition, there were several workshops that took up issues of race (including Dean's Black Radicalism workshop, and Jose Palafox's on Chicano punk.)

Of the 134 who attended the 2001 summer school, about 20 were people of color, and two of those have since joined Solidarity. (See Summer School Evaluations in NC Minutes, Part 1, July 27-29, 2001.)

2. Jose Palafox, who spoke at the summer school, agreed to make himself available for a Solidarity sponsored tour. In the fall of 2001 we organized a tour of five areas in the Northeast, with Jose showing his film "New World Border" and speaking on the militarization of the U.S./Mexico border and immigrants' rights. (See December 2001 DB for the tour report )

3. The December 2000 PC meeting mandated the production of a special DB on "White Skin Privilege." This DB appeared in April 2001, and included the draft of Malik M.'s document on the current state of the black liberation struggle, and contributions by Mike P., Betsy E., Charlie P. and Steve B. on the concept of "white skin privilege."

4. ARC members interviewed branch members in various cities about the state of their anti-racist work. Those interviews are in the December 2001 Discussion Bulletin. The interviews indicate that anti-racist work is part of many branches' thinking and activities, but that much more planning and consistent follow through is needed.

5. The Education Commission has designed a new members' packet. It contains three articles by Malik M. ("What Counts in the U.S. Census?", "Racism and the Stolen Vote," and "Digital Divide and Racial Capitalism") on anti-racist themes.

6. The Education Commission has designed a 4-part education series that is to begin in the winter/spring. The Political Committee is encouraging the participation of all branches and twigs.

7. As part of the study group the Educational Commission is encouraging branches to hold public forums. The PC has asked Malik on the West Coast and Chris on the East Coast to make themselves available to speak specifically about African Americans, racial profiling, and the war at home. Brad is contacting branches.

8. The "White Skin Privilege" Discussion Bulletin contained a draft document on the "State of the Black Movement." The PC has asked Malik to work on drafting an article based on the outline. We will be meeting with Malik to discuss how to move ahead with this document.

9. Against the Current has worked with a number of writers of color. We continue to publish updates on the Mumia case and cover the struggle in Vieques. We have columns by three people of color: Malik Miah's Race and Class column, Kim Hunter's Radical Rhythms and Arlene Keizer's Camera Lucida. In the last few issues we had an article by Edward Whitfield (96), a book review by BRC leader Bill Fletcher (95), an interview with Anan Ameri (95), Jose Palafox's talk from the summer school (94), an article by Cedrick May, an African-American activist at Penn State (94), an article by African-American scholar Christopher McAuley (94), Rafael Bernabe's article about

Puerto Rico and the death penalty (94), an article and photos by African-American students at Duke--Saraf Wigfall and Camika Haynes--(93), Ahmad Rahman on the "criminal injustice" system (92), a book review by Clarence Lang--an activist in the BRC--(92), an article by Asian-American activist and scholar Scott Kurashige on Asian Americans and the 2000 elections (91), Jack Bresee on John Ashcroft (91), Grant Farred, Melba Joyce Boyd, Tyrone Williams for the 2001 Black History issue (90), Native American activist Hunter Gray (90), Charles Simmons on why Detroit needs CPR (88), Madison Solidarity member Jose Manuel Sentmanat on an IPPN conference (88) Bay Area Solidarity member Louise Cooper on youth activists of color fighting Proposition 21. (86) In addition, we had coverage by Indonesian activists of color (94, 93, 89), articles by South African activists (87), an IWD issue featuring women's struggles in Senegal, India and the Philippines (91), coverage of the Timothy Thomas killing in Cincinnati (92 & 93), the Charleston 5 case (95) and Paul Le Blanc's article Martin Luther King (96).

10. Solidarity News is now being published bimonthly as well as being available to download on the Solidarity web page. Past issues included articles and photos about high school youth supporting Mumia and Arab Americans' double jeopardy. The editors are seeking more anti-racist articles.

The PC has discussed the need for Solidarity as an organization to pinpoint the war as a issue that targets people of color. We all know that the war at home will impact to a much greater extent on people of color, both in terms of layoffs and the problems the nearly 20 million non-citizens face under the Patriot Act. The overall decline of anti-war activism in the wake of the rapid imperialist victory in Afghanistan has narrowed our ability to organize in this area. However, there are some hopeful developments. Comrades in the Bay Area have been able to attract young people and people of color to the Labor Committee for Peace and Justice and have hopes that it will continue to function during the downturn in anti-war organizing.

All of us in Solidarity very much want the organization to become more involved in the struggles of people of color in the US, to develop political relations with radicals of color and change the racial composition of Solidarity. We have made small steps in this direction. We have a long way to go however. We believe the roots of our inability to achieve the goals we set at the last convention flow from the ongoing organizational and political weaknesses of Solidarity and from the generally low level of struggle today. Within this context, our political task is to figure out how to improve Solidarity's political and organizational functioning, continue our involvement in struggles of people of color, and deepen our understanding of racism and anti-racist struggles in the US.

**Anti-Racism Strategic Plan**  
**Adopted at the August 2000 Solidarity Convention**

1. While recognizing that its timeline may need revision, Solidarity supports the goals of the Anti-Racism Strategic Plan and will provide the political and physical resources necessary to advance the organization's anti-racism work. The Political Committee and the National Committee are responsible for ongoing leadership and evaluation of the plan.

2. The facilitators of the Anti-Racism Commission will report the progress made toward achieving the Strategic Plan goals to every meeting of the National Committee. A national conference, held in summer 2001, will assess the goals and our progress in achieving them and will recommend revisions as necessary.

3. The ARC, other commissions, branches and National Office will work together to maximize the participation of People of Color in the organization's political life. The ARC will encourage participation by People of Color in regional and national meetings, conferences and retreats.

4. Campus organizing projects, including speaking tours, forums, brochures and other outreach materials, will address the special needs of urban campuses. Urban branches are encouraged to identify a campus to which they could orient. Our goal is to achieve an ongoing Solidarity presence on three urban-centered campus branches by August 2001, and on six by August 2002.

5. All branches are encouraged to develop a local campaign that relates to anti-racism or is led by People of Color. Our goal is that half the branches are engaged in ongoing anti-racism work by August 2001, and that all branches are by August 2002.

6. Solidarity will support the national campaigns of the Black Radical Congress and will affiliate with the BRC as early as possible.

7. Solidarity branches are encouraged to develop a consistent form of study around anti-racism issues. Our goal is to have half the branches engaged in ongoing study by August 2001 and all branches so engaged by August 2002.

8. The ARC will solicit materials for special Discussion Bulletins that examine related themes, for example, reparations or state repression, to encourage organization-wide discussion. Our goal is to encourage four such discussions by August 2002.

9. A discussion document related to a political position on African Americans in the United States will be commissioned. The Black Caucus will guide the collaborative process.

10. The ARC will collaborate with the Education Commission on a systematic anti-racism education process for new members.

11. The ARC will collaborate with the Education Commission on useful literature for non-members that motivates Solidarity and its anti-racism politics.

12. The ARC will encourage a newsletter that reflects our anti-racism politics and is aimed at young activists.

# Notes on the Development of a Latino Identity

by Joaquin B.

Following up on David F.'s comment about the need for a discussion on the Latino community, some notes, focused primarily on the question of identity and self-identification.

\* \* \*

When I was growing up in the 1960's, there was a lot of talk about "WASPs" being the dominant group in the country. White Anglo Saxon Protestants. You don't hear the term used much anymore because reality has changed -- it was changing even then.

At some point in the 1930's or 1940's there was, I believe, a ruling class decision or consensus that emerged that a whole bunch of folks who until then had been "not quite white," if I can so express it, would become "white." They decided to largely tear down the distinction between the "WASPs" and the "white ethnics."

World War II and the postwar GI Bill and then the 25-year economic boom gave a tremendous impetus to this.

Fred Feldman (who is Jewish and I think was born in the early 40's) wrote recently on the Marxism List that when he was growing up, his family was very conscious that they were becoming "white," acceptable, of equal social standing with other "ethnics" and these European "ethnics" were achieving roughly equal status with the WASPs.

Latinos were most decidedly included in this "whitening" policy. Darker-skinned ones would, of course, continue to be considered Blacks and treated as such, but "white" Latinos were just the most exotic variant of a spectrum that included Poles, Jews, Italians, Russians and so on. (I'm not sure if "Irish" had achieved equal status by then, but to the degree they hadn't, they, too, were included).

You can see that from the popular culture at the time. Zorro as a Robin Hood of the American West. West Side Story. But most of all, "I Love Lucy."

That was the most popular show in television's first decade as a mass medium. And it was a light domestic comedy centered on a Cuban band leader who was married to a white American redhead. And they even had a baby together. And it wasn't a specifically Cuban thing, because after the Revolution Ricky Ricardo suddenly became "Mexican." (Whether white privilege was also meant to be extended to the recognizably indigenous descendants who make up the big majority of the Mexican and Chicano people is, of course, another question.)

Think about that. Back then, in the 1950's America of McCarthyism and white supremacist resistance to segregation and terrorism against Black folks, what some people today would reject as "miscegenation," was considered a perfectly good theme for light entertainment to sell laundry detergents and washing machines with.

The Democrats in 1960 even had Hispanic "Viva Kennedy" committees. And, fittingly enough with this broadening of "whiteness," Kennedy was an Irish Catholic.

It should be remembered that in those days Latinos were a very small percentage of the population concentrated in a few states of the Southwest and a few cities on the Eastern seaboard, with small populations in a couple of other industrial centers like Chicago and Detroit.

That this motion towards "whitening" Latinos stopped at some point is evident, and that it had to do with the 1960's, the anti colonial revolution, etc., is pretty obvious. But a more basic reality undergirds this. I think "non-white" status nowadays generally flows from imperialism and follows the patterns of imperialist domination. The people who traced their roots to "third world" countries --colonial and semicolonial countries-- by and large get second-class (or worse) treatment here.

There are complications in all of this because it is viewed in terms of "race" and "color."

The U.S. started out as a European (mostly English, but not just) colonial-settler state. It developed and prospered to a large degree thanks to the expropriation and genocide of native peoples and the genocidal enslavement of Africans. The social construct of "race" grew out of, and helped to justify this system.

People from Latin American don't necessarily fit very well into the "color/race" American social constructs and stereotypes. Latinos identify on the basis of factors like language, culture, history without any necessary "color" or "race." One of the leaders of the Latino immigrant rights organization in Atlanta, for example, is as "white European" as one could want, but nobody in Latino movement circles thinks of him as anything but Mexican and Latino although all his genes and even his last name come from Germany just a generation or two back.

In the 1960's, there was, AFAIK, no self-identified generically "Latino" movements anywhere in the United States. The movements were (for moderates) Mexican-American or Puerto Rican-American; for radicals Chicano or Puerto Rican. New Mexico was an exception, but only terminologically: the long-standing Mexican-descended community there often self-identified as "Hispanos" but that was recognized in the movement as just the local name for Chicanos.

Despite that, anybody from any Latin American country who lived in an area where these movements were active was always welcome and the radicals from other Latino backgrounds would usually join whatever the majority group was. I remember well some Puerto Ricans who were leading activists in the Raza Unida Party in Oakland, California – especially one couple of a "white" man with blue eyes and a Black woman.

Visiting Puerto Rico on assignment for the Militant, I met with leaders of pro-independence socialist student groups who I found out years later were Cuban; one of the most prominent figures in the independence and student movements of those years was singer-songwriter Roy Brown, who had been born in Miami in 1950, his father an Anglo, his mother Puerto Rican, grew up in both countries, and radicalized --as a Puerto Rican-- in New York when he was 17.

This fluidity of identity flows from another reality, which is that in addition to many specific "national

questions," there is also a national question of Latin America as a whole.

Or, if you don't want to think in terms of "national questions," think just that there are different peoples, like the people of Cuba, Mexico and so on; but all of them form part of the people of Latin America as a whole.

This is not an arbitrary creation like "the people of all the countries whose names start with the letter 'U.'" This is a self-identity based on geographic, historical, cultural and other factors, BUT NOT on "race" or "color," that goes back centuries. And in the past century it has been re-enforced by an increasingly common adversary/oppressor, U.S. imperialism. Thus Latin Americans speak of "La Patria Grande" [the big homeland, Latin America] and "la patria chica" [the individual country].

As martyred Chilean President Salvador Allende said, «Soy un hombre de América Latina, que me confundo con los demás habitantes del Continente, en los problemas, en los anhelos y en las inquietudes comunes.» ("I am a Latin American man who blends into the other inhabitants of the Continent with common problems, desires and concerns.")

José Martí's Cuban Revolutionary Party had a Puerto Rican section that was the main organization of Puerto Rican patriots at the end of the 1800's, the two islands being Spain's sole remaining colonies in the New World. That's why the flag of the two countries is the same, with only the colors switched. Puerto Rican poet, patriot and feminist Lola Rodríguez de Tió, who also penned the original words to La Borinqueña, Puerto Rico's national anthem, wrote in those years, "Cuba y Puerto Rico son de un pájaro las dos alas. Reciben flores y balas en el mismo corazón." (Cuba and Puerto Rico are, of one bird the two wings. They receive flowers and bullets in the same heart).

Dominicans played major roles in leading the Cuban insurgents in Cuba. (A half century later, in the 1940's Fidel and some friends were active in a movement to overthrow U.S.-backed dictator Trujillo: this has always been a two-way street.)

The dream of all the great Latin American revolutionaries was to create a giant republic South of the Rio Bravo and the Florida Straits, at least of the Spanish-speaking nations.

The Cuban revolutionaries around Fidel when they took power viewed that as the beginning of a Latin American revolution, and exactly 40 years ago were holding a congress of youth and students in Havana under the banner, "Make the Andes the Sierra Maestra of Latin America." (And none worked more for this than one of Cuba's greatest national heroes, the Argentine Ernesto Che Guevara).

And Latin American unity is very much a central tenet of the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela today.

Within this broad Latin American national question you have the specific questions of individual countries, Bolivia's sovereignty, for example. And within that question you have the question of the systematic political disempowerment for 500 years of the big majority of what is now Bolivia, the indigenous peoples. And in the Caribbean basin you also have the legacy of the enslavement of Africans.

It is not at all predictable from some formula how these national questions within national questions will

all shake out, nor when. And the struggles that emerge around this, the defeats and victories, will have a tremendous impact on the consciousness of Latinos in the U.S. for the foreseeable future.

Right now the trend in Latin America is "Bolivarian" – towards integration, Latin American unity, especially on the Left. The thinking is fairly straightforward. It is much easier to imagine a federation of several socialist countries being able to defy the U.S. than a single smallish country like Venezuela or a couple of countries like Venezuela or Cuba.

This is re-enforced by globalization, and it is notable that the most important media initiative of the Venezuelan Revolution is an international news and information channel to counter the imperialist CNN called TeleSur which just began to broadcast. And that is a partnership between people in Venezuela and several other countries, very much with the idea of creating a Latin American Al Jazeera.

If you look at domestic (U.S.) Spanish language local and national TV news, you will see that it is very heavy on news from Latin America--with the emphasis on one or another specific country in local news varying from market to market, depending on the makeup of the local population. The weight of Latin American political developments on this sector of the U.S. population is growing as the development of technology over the past 20 years has tremendously reduced the cost of communications.

The political and social weight of immigrants in the overall Latino population is growing, with a massive net influx of perhaps a million people a year (both legal and undocumented). Latinos are now settling in many more states, notably those in the South with better economies (TN, GA, NC, but not SC, for example).

These immigrant flows are scrambled in terms of national origin. Just recently the board of a Latino group I'm a part of had breakfast at a Mexican restaurant in a strip mall owned by a Cuban where we discussed tactics to defend Mexican and Central American immigrants with a legislator of Puerto Rican origin while a Uruguayan waitress served us breakfast cooked by Guatemalans.

But in addition to that, we have now a new reality in the United States that developed in the last decades of the 20th Century. Because we have had for some time Hispanic communities of greatly mixed national origins, there is also a growing layer of young Hispanics who are the product of marriages between Cubans and Puerto Ricans or Mexicans or Colombians, whose primary national identity, so to speak, isn't specifically Mexican or Guatemalan but Latino. And even those whose parents may trace their roots back to the same specific country have grown up in this mixed environment.

In this sense I Love Lucy's "Ricky Ricardo" should probably be remembered as the first "Latino" because although identified as a Cuban for most of the show's run, the allegedly "Cuban" culture that was projected as his went from Carmen Miranda fruit hats (Portuguese-Brazilian) to Uruguayan/Argentinian tangos (there's a huge brawl with both countries claiming to have originated it) to Mexican Mariachi music. And, of course, the genuinely \*Cuban\* stuff was very heavily African.

You also have a phenomenon, especially in the long-established Puerto Rican and Dominican ghettos, of Latino Afro-Americans. I don't mean Black Latinos who identify with their African heritage, I mean people who identify both as U.S. Blacks and as Puerto Rican or Dominican.

In this field of increasing cultural cross-fertilization and multiple identities, you have political and social factors operating.

The change in the atmosphere of the Latino communities over the past five or six years has been palpable. At the end of the 90's no states had implemented the federal diktat to deny drivers licenses to undocumented immigrants. The full force of the federal cutoff of social services to immigrants of the 1996 Clinton-Gingrich immigration reform act had yet to be felt. You had the usual nativist rants from the yahoo right, but the Republicans had gotten their fingers burnt with Prop. 187 in California and were a little more circumspect. The economy was booming. And the undocumented population was thought to be only a few million.

Now the community feels besieged. "Dred Scott" laws and state constitutional amendments are pending in quite a few states, I think 13 by the latest count. These are sweeping pronouncements whose effect is to say the undocumented are not persons under the law, they have no rights that anyone is bound to respect.

And the idea is already being applied without being approved. In a couple of towns in one northern state, several Latinos have been arrested for "trespassing" for just being there; being out in the streets. In Georgia there are a couple of counties and townships that have made fines (to be more precise: forfeited bail money) for driving without a license significant sources of revenues.

In Michigan right now, the Cherry and other fruit crops are in crisis because immigrants have been too scared to come to that state where ICE--the new name for la migra-- has been very active especially against the Arab community but also impacting the Latino community because a lot of us look "Arab."

The big change of course, was 9/11. But this happened to coincide with the application of the Clinton-era decision that social security numbers would be required to get drivers licenses (supposedly to track down "deadbeat dads" who weren't paying child support). It went into effect in October of 2000, but many states were late in complying, and when they did, the post-9/11 ID requirements for airplane and rail compounded the issue. From the point of view of Latino and other immigrants, the United States is a country with a strict internal passport regime, one in which it is difficult, even dangerous to travel.

But there are other changes as well. Everything I see and read suggests that the huge immigrant wave unleashed by NAFTA (which ruined the corn-growing peasantry in Mexico and with them much local commerce, artisans and so on; as well as coincided with the closing of maquiladora plants as the capitalists shifted production to Asia) hasn't subsided and may well be accelerating. And there's not just Mexicans and Central

Americans crossing the border, tons of people have come here as tourists and stayed. In Atlanta the increase in the southern cone population is palpable since the Argentine economy cracked up. And there's a ton of people coming daily from countries all over the Pacific rim.

In Georgia, nearly 15% of births are now to Hispanic women, nearly 20% to immigrant mothers. Nationwide around 22% of all births are to Hispanic mothers and 23% of immigrant mothers. Officially

there are 44 million Latinos now, unofficially, 50 million is probably a better estimate. This demographic tsunami is quite palpable and visible in the "hyper growth" states of TN, NC and GA, and the turbulence and dislocations such a massive population shift causes are being manipulated by right-wingers with the aid of the media in the post-9/11 political climate.

The impact in the Latino community is to tend to drive it together because, frankly, the racists don't care \*what\* kind of "spic" you are. As far as they're concerned, everyone who is recognizably Latino or even "foreign" (Third World foreign, white brits are o.k.) by their features, name, manner of speech, dress or self-identification is part of an "alien invasion," part of a "reconquista."

The intermingling of populations of different national origins is leading clearly to a cultural cross-fertilization and an emerging "Latino" or "Latin American" culture and identity which mixes with the similar phenomena that arise from globalization in Latin America as a whole.

Thus, in places like Georgia, the self-identification of the leading activists, and their branding of the movement, is very much "Latino" and not exclusively or narrowly Mexican (the now dominant national origin group). And U.S.-Spanish language and Hispanic-aimed media overwhelmingly speak in terms of Latinos and Hispanics when referring to the community and population and in self-identifying, if for no other reason than that this broadens their potential reach and audience.

How all this will play out in the end is anyone's guess. But this is some of the background and current tendencies as I see them.

Joaquín

terms of political experience and political as well as gender/race balance, was the primary leadership body, empowered to take decisions on political as well as organizational issues. In the new model, emphasis was on an activist NC, involved in organizing the work of the organization and guiding it politically. Some comrades feel that the PC was excessively bogged down by the requirement to consult on every issue with the NC. They propose that perhaps a larger PC would be seen, and see itself, as being able to take decisions without consultation on every single issue. On the other hand, some comrades think that the structure itself is not at fault, but rather that the PC and the NC need to learn how to work more effectively within the structure. One suggestion is for the NC to hold regular, pre-scheduled monthly phone meetings to facilitate consultation between the PC and the NC. On the other hand, some people feel that they have spent too much time on conference calls and while we meet a lot, not enough gets done.

The small NC conception assumed a very high level of activism on the part of the NC members. Although most NC members have fulfilled their minimal commitments as outlined in the candidates' pledge, levels of participation by NC members have varied quite a bit. An NC in which everyone is as active as our most active NC members would have been preferable. However, many NC members had larger organizational responsibilities that limited their work; for others, personal reasons were responsible for lowering what they could do. To acknowledge these differences in activity levels is not to point fingers or blame. Rather, it suggests that we need to seriously assess the real limitations we face in engaging people in the organization's political work. Our organization's size constrains who is available to serve on national bodies. We may not have 12 individuals in the organization who are ready to work at the highest level of activity, without shifting leaders out of other important bodies. This is particularly the case when we add gender/race balance as a criterion for service on the NC, along with other considerations for leadership (such as political development, experience, etc.)

One alternative is to downscale our expectations of what individual NC members can do. We can then either expect less from the 12-person NC OR we can enlarge the NC. A larger NC would have to meet face-to-face less frequently—unless we want to put fewer resources into other sorts of national/regional gatherings. This is not ideal because all evidence is that our national/regional gatherings have been extremely productive—both in terms of the positive experiences of members who attend them and the

leadership development and cohesiveness that we achieve through members working together in planning the events.

### **Planning and Follow Up**

If we start with recognizing the very real constraints we face in terms of people power on the NC and in the organization, we then must conclude that the NC will need to focus its resources and do fewer things more effectively. We need to develop a proposed workplan to take into the convention. This workplan should identify areas of strength we want to build on and areas of weakness in the organization that we want to address. We have plenty of both strengths and weakness, so the NC will have to choose which of these we are going to work on and we have to stick to it. This plan will not be rigid; but if something unanticipated comes up, if we decide to switch activities, we have to give up what has been planned and not add on to it. (e.g., given that we did the summer school in early August, we perhaps should not have planned a convention for November). Secondly, we have to establish clear goals for the things we do. And we need to think about how every project or event fits in to broader, overarching goals that we have set for ourselves. And we have to acknowledge the trade-offs; when we use resources for one thing, something else is not going to get done. If, for example, we decide that greater membership involvement is a goal for the next two years, then one criterion for deciding on the value of a project the NC takes on is how it will forward that goal. Of course, the best projects will address more than one of our goals and no project is likely to hit all of them. In other words, we need a strategic plan that we take into the convention and that guides our work in the years following.

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## **What Does it Mean to be an Anti-Racist Organization?**

by Carolina B-M (NY), Michael D (Bay), Michael M (NY), Nate F(NY), and Nnenna O (NJ) with gratitude for feedback/suggestions (not all taken) from Catherine S, Charlie P, Joanna M, Johanna B, Kate G, Kay S, Kim H, Peter S, Robert C, Simmi G, Steve B, Ron Lare and Tim S

### **Introduction**

Solidarity prides itself on having an intersectional anti-oppression analysis. While we acknowledge that race, class, sexuality and gender are intertwined and often cannot be separated from each other, we felt that it was necessary to tackle Solidarity's "race" issues at this

particular moment, especially leading into the 2008 convention<sup>4</sup>.

Since the last convention, the Anti-Racism Commission and People of Color caucus have been thinking about the racial composition of the group and our anti-racism practice. A training was developed for the leadership of Solidarity (PC, NC, and Commissions and Working Groups). The trainer(s) got in an auto accident and were not able to complete their work. The people in that room commissioned this document to address the question: "What does it mean to be an anti-racist organization?" Another way to pose that question would have been, "How would we become, as an organization, a reliable ally of anti-racist struggles?" Our goal is for the discussions surrounding this document to help shift Solidarity into a more comfortable and welcoming organization for marginalized communities, and in particular people of color. All of this, of course, is done because we are committed to making Solidarity and our members more engaged in and useful to growing struggles for social and economic justice as well as more effective in recruiting militants rooted in these struggles to revolutionary politics.

There are a variety of perspectives within Solidarity on what anti-racism is. For some, anti-racism work means that white comrades participate in predominantly people of color organizations. For other comrades anti-racism means that white comrades talk with other white people about racism (calling them out, etc). Some view it as a more individual level practice, while others view it more structurally. While anti-racism work can indeed take on an individual level practice, if we want this to be a priority in the organization we

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<sup>4</sup> See Feminist Process Document for more suggestions on how to change our internal culture: "Of course, the tiny island of our organization embedded in a hierarchical, capitalist society cannot produce a socialist utopia. But, we can do a much better job in bringing socialist values into our organizational culture. One strategy for achieving this goal is to draw on feminist process." Also, for interesting parallels, see Tema Okun's "white supremacy culture" available in section II at <http://www.cwsworkshop.org/resources/ARagenda.html> >. Stephanie Luce notes, "It might be a useful discussion piece for continuing our conversations about Solidarity, race and anti-racism, and thinking about the kind of organization that Solidarity should/could be."

This is not simply a problem for Solidarity. All of the revolutionary groups that come from the pro-democracy from-below tradition that Solidarity identifies with are overwhelmingly white. So something very deep is involved, and overcoming it is a major challenge.

must move beyond this model and begin thinking more systematically about our collective anti-racism practice. As an organization we should be thinking about and developing an anti-racism "method." While individual behaviors confronting racism in the workplace and in organizations are valuable, this will not be sufficient to change our racial composition and make Solidarity a more comfortable organization for people of color. In this document we aspire to move in the direction of changing both internal culture and strengthening anti-racism practice as an organizational priority<sup>5</sup>.

### ***Internal Process: Making Solidarity a more comfortable and welcoming space for People of Color***

#### **What does it mean to take leadership from people of color?**

Question: What does it mean to take leadership from people of color? Why is it important?

First, we must look at what it means to take leadership from POC as it relates to internal practices, and second, we must consider it as it relates to our work outside the organization. A clear understanding will serve to minimize many potential knee-jerk responses alleging tokenism/favoritism/etc, and simultaneously enable an ever-present guide in our individual decisions regarding leadership.

Focusing inward, the importance of taking leadership from POC lies partly in our general interest in creating

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<sup>5</sup> Another pre-convention document will survey the experience of Solidarity comrades working in POC-led, community-based organizations as a beginning step in summing up and collectivizing Solidarity's existing practice. We agree with the authors of that document that that work is necessary to begin to develop an overarching theory in Solidarity commensurate with the theory that underlies our workplace-based political work (i.e., the "rank and file strategy" or "rank and file orientation"). We agree that one reason our labor work is more consolidated than our anti-racism praxis (and hence easier for Solidarity to prioritize collectively than the anti-racism work) is the existence of a common theoretical framework going back to before Solidarity was founded. The work Tim S has done on the Black labor movement that began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the portions of that analysis carried forward to the current moment and applied to the current crisis in the US trade union movement are also an important beginning to bridging Solidarity's grounding in a pro-working class, anti-racist practice. We see all three of these efforts as distinct and complimentary.

a democratic and harmonious internal culture. Our political legitimacy as an organization lies in our ability to reflect the society we currently are working to build.

White comrades can start with trying to understand how people of color experience relationships in the organization. People of color involved should be approached with concerns, and asked for help in developing correct understandings of our existing culture and practice. To prioritize the leadership and direction of POC entails that we pay particular attention to how POC are negatively affected by certain aspects of our organizational culture.

Concerning our external work, both relevance as an organization and attractiveness to non-members remain central driving forces for our efforts in incorporating POC leadership. The leadership of people of color within our organization should be viewed as a necessary step in overcoming historic obstacles. First, such leadership serves to generate the linkages between our organization and the communities and struggles of POC. Furthermore, it presents us externally as an organization dedicated to the leadership of POC in their own struggles.

In our focus on leadership of POC, we must remain aware of where white comrades may/may not be the most useful. We cannot have a conversation about taking leadership from POC without acknowledging their relationships with white comrades. Clearly, white comrades have a part to play in most/all POC struggles. But the crucial questions are "where?" and "how?" The answers to these questions are contextual and contingent so we (white and POC) must be flexible in accordance with what the movements and struggles need<sup>6</sup>.

We assert that we are trying to develop comradely political relationships within the organization that do not assume white comrades will always simply do as told (i.e., a commandist framework as to how following POC leadership should function). That is, we must strive for an environment in which white comrades are able to hold comrades of color accountable, just as much as the contrary. Part of being taken seriously as a leader is having one's accountability open to critique. At the same time, white comrades should be expected to work even

harder than is the case with other white comrades to understand and prioritize the suggestions and opinions of comrades of color. This is necessary if we are to expand the ways in which Solidarity acts publicly so as to develop a practice and culture informed by, and useful to, activists of color.

As an organization, Solidarity cannot in any event be expected to re-orient our activities based on the strongly stated preference of any individual comrade. However, our leadership bodies and individual comrades should be expected to prioritize the collective positions and requests articulated by the POC caucus. Political positions and activities advocated by the POC caucus deserve the engagement and serious consideration of Solidarity as a whole.

While the overall trend should be towards increasing the current degree to which we take leadership from POC, we must always take into account individual talents, interests, timing, situation (context), etc. This can help prevent the potential burn out of those in leadership. Negotiating the necessity of a more inclusive structure of leadership with that of considering individual interests and political development will always require much work. It requires that we are continuously reflexive in our every move—that we continuously return to the question of why we are prioritizing leadership of POC. This process must be continuously rooted in conversation (which entails a whole lot of listening). When we do this, we truly continue to understand that we must look at all POC as complete human beings—with individual variations—not just as representations of a group. That is, we avoid the pitfalls of tokenism and essentialism.

### **Leadership development for POC in the organization**

Dilemma: Solidarity is an organization that is overwhelmingly white (and 60% or so male) in composition that is committed, politically, to supporting, prioritizing and helping to develop the leadership of women and people of color both in the wider world as well as in the movement/left and more specifically within our own organization.

Whether and how to do this is something we wrestle with internally. How does an organization with our composition do this without burning out and/or tokenizing comrades of color?

Guidelines:

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<sup>6</sup> As Mozambique's first post-independence President, Samora Moises Machel, was quoted as saying, "*International solidarity is not an act of charity. It is an act of unity among allies fighting on different terrains towards the same objectives.*"

1) Ask comrades of color. Solidarity's racial composition has been slowly improving (not without reversals from time to time) and the people of color caucus has been gaining more coherence and ability to function collectively over the years.

Solidarity should continue to offer comrades of color the opportunity to take on individual leadership roles and privilege leadership of comrades of color (in general) over that of white comrade (in general). Comrades who are approached with multiple opportunities to take leadership should be given explicit leeway in determining which of the multiple opportunities they want to take on based on their interests and political goals. Comrades should be clear they can say no to all offers and that they will be provided additional support (see guideline 2) as needed if the role they decide to take on is a stretch based on their current level of political development and/or experience within Solidarity. We should recognize that being asked to participate in project(s) within the organization is one way of demonstrating the importance we place on that comrade's work and ideas while setting comrades up for failure by not providing any needed support is a form of tokenism and can have the reverse of its intended effect: driving comrades away from participation/membership in the group.

Besides individual leadership responsibilities, there are also decisions (both political and organizational) that are made in the day to day workings of Solidarity. We need to acknowledge that there will be certain situations where taking leadership of people of color is more important than others. What those issues are will be a matter for the POC caucus to determine. We should ask the POC caucus to identify if there are particular categories of issues they always/never wish to be consulted on and take particular care when in a given work area or leadership body there are few or no comrades of color present. Checking in should not expect a developed response necessarily as we don't want to make this just one more responsibility for comrades of color but some timeframe to allow response should be developed and individual comrade's suggestions taken seriously with any collective response from the caucus taken particularly seriously.

2) Build accountability and anti-racism praxis among white comrades. White comrades should not be let off the hook nor left feeling there is nothing they/we have to contribute to deepening our racial justice politics and practice. In fits and starts, we already try to move in this direction. We can note the limited example of Solidarity caucus meetings (e.g.,

POC, women, LGBTQ) developing the demand that people on the up-side of the relevant power relationship are not given break time while the caucus meets but are expected to work on the politics in question (sometimes with guidance from the relevant caucus leadership) while the caucus is meeting.

Solidarity needs to find some manner of collectivizing and harnessing the labor of white comrades to a) support, promote and develop individual comrades of color's leadership as well as to b) support, promote and develop the political initiatives the POC caucus wants to prioritize and have implemented.

At an lgbtq allies meeting at the cadre school, Ted L (New York) suggested that since Solidarity had a bounty of white men who presented as heterosexual, perhaps some such comrades could be organized to spend a modest amount of time every month assisting one of the various caucuses in moving the work its members saw as politically important.

We propose trying on Ted L's suggestion as a serious experiment and giving it some legs. This proposal is meant to be a volunteer obligation based on trust and political commitment from the volunteers to the caucus. It should set up the scaffolding of a structure so that white comrades' labor is made available and the caucus is able to utilize that labor.

## **Solidarity's Organizational Culture**

Creating a more comfortable place for people of color requires that white members try to keep in mind how people of color might experience Solidarity (as the feminist process document suggests), especially given our racial composition. While cultural issues regarding preferences in music, food, ways of socializing, etc., are important and acknowledging such diversities will help make Solidarity a more comfortable place, we think most of the critiques have been in terms of our organizational and political culture.

**Discussions:** Much of Solidarity's common language (acronyms/short-hand) is that of European Marxists. Some note that participating in structured 3-minute rounds can be easier for people familiar with white left traditions<sup>7</sup>. Though

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, reality is complicated. Three minute rounds were a feminist response to male tendencies to drone on, dominating discussions. On the other hand, not interrupting and giving a person complete and uninterrupted attention has been attributed to Native culture.

other groups (including groups that are predominantly people of color) often have their own traditions of communicating that can also be exclusive, some people have found that presenting ideas outside Solidarity's dominant traditions (such as those of Black feminists/womanists or Black labor history) can be more difficult than presenting ideas more central to the group's historical identity. Such a critique was expressed during the anti-oppression weekend when the People of Color Caucus reported that "smashing the polemical style" of discussion was a central part of making Solidarity a more comfortable place for POC.

**History and analyses:** When the histories we use to justify our analyses—and the level of generality at which we claim these analyses apply—do not always consider how they fit with the histories of people of color, some people of color have felt excluded<sup>8</sup>. Claiming to have a "general" analysis while prioritizing white history and neglecting the intersections of oppression is of little use, and can be experienced as arrogant and dismissive of people who identify with histories not included in the analysis. Furthermore, this "general" analysis of history does not advance the political education of white comrades, which is critical, if the organization is to take seriously the history and contemporary nature of POC movements and struggles.

**Political priorities:** Our analyses largely determine our political priorities. In Solidarity, the labor work is a political priority. This makes sense, given our bottom-up politics. However, the labor movement is not without complications. As Tim S. notes, "the history of the U.S. labor movement is largely a history of a white worker's movement for white supremacy." This leads many activists to prioritize other areas of work, such as community organizing<sup>9</sup>. When our labor work is

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<sup>8</sup> Like other perceptions of the world, our perception of history is subjective—i.e. what we choose to focus on and develop expertise in. No one can be an expert in "all of (fill in the blank)", even all of labor organizing in the U.S., and there will always be another angle unexplored that complicates a "general" analysis (such as The Washerwomen of Jackson, Mississippi's first union, referenced by Sandra Jaribu Hill at Labor Notes recently), and it will likely reflect our other subjective biases.

<sup>9</sup> This seems to be a generational issue: Though many young activists of color and white activists seem to think of community organizing struggles as somehow more revolutionary than the labor movement, Chicano and Black Liberation movement activists were heavily involved in the labor movement (i.e., UFW and Memphis Sanitation

presented and motivated publicly or to new contacts/comrades without including such important critiques and exploring their implications for our practice, activists with other priorities can feel that their priorities are irrelevant to our work. These examples risk characterizing Solidarity as uninterested in other working-class struggles (despite rhetoric and leadership to the contrary) and an unwelcome place for activists working to build these struggles.

**Responding to critiques:** When we respond to critiques of our organizational culture, it is important to consider how the response itself might be perceived by people of color. In the larger U.S. society, responses to critiques of racism tend to protect whites from any responsibility of changing themselves. Some people of color have noted that Solidarity's responses to critiques of organizational culture have at times paralleled such patterns. Overall, we have found it useful to be wary of responses that avoid placing any responsibility on whites for creating a welcoming space for people of color.

## **External Relationships/Political Work<sup>10</sup>**

### **How do we prioritize Anti-Racism Work?**

We argue that generally, members of the group as individuals do care deeply about dismantling racism, but Solidarity suffers from a lack of a developed "political method" for doing grounded and effective anti-racism work<sup>11</sup>. While many members are engaged

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Workers Strike). This is a history and political perspective that we as a group can offer activist POC, in addition to acknowledging critiques of labor organizing in the U.S.

<sup>10</sup> Regarding an earlier draft, some members of the NC asked why this section was there at all since the POC Community Organizing pre-con doc is to incorporate the beginnings of a theorization of our work in this regard. Alternately, some comrades thought the document needed to be much more about external work and that no internal work could be fruitful without an uptick in our external work. That critique taken to that extreme, at least, seems to fly in the face of why we would commit resources to an anti-racism training at all since the whole idea of doing so has to be based on the assumption that you can do something internally (not that this would not be connected to motivating better external work but that it could happen now before the added external work was undertaken).

<sup>11</sup> In the history of Solidarity there have been several attempts at changing the racial composition of the organization. There have also been attempts to make anti-racism work a more central political priority. However, over twenty years since its

in anti-racist activities, we as an organization do not have a strategy or “method” for prioritizing and collectivizing the work. This is further hindered by the different perspectives on how and where we should prioritize anti-racism work. The document on non-workplace based organizing that Johanna B et al are working on will be a good place to re-engage these discussions which need to be begun and carried out organization-wide including in the post-convention period:

1) What are Solidarity's priorities for developing relationships with radicals/revolutionaries of color? Do we do this primarily on the basis of their ideological stance (revolutionary nationalism, etc.) or on their practice (attempting to help organize and preserve networks of activists)? This will not be an easy discussion, but it needs to be had out in the open. Clearly, any decision the organization makes will not "be binding on all members," but instead will set our political and organizational priorities-- what discussions the group has, which groups we devote resources to developing relations/discussions with, who we encourage comrades to get involved with.

2) What is and what should be the relative weight we have given to workplace and community organizing and why? How do our answers to #1 inform our thinking regarding how we might answer this question (or vice versa)? This conversation will be richer and more useful to the extent that both the Community Organizing Study and the Labor Commission continue and share their investigations into our (and others) anti-racist practice in various struggle arenas with the rest of the group.

3) What level of explicitly political discussions (socialist, anti-oppression, etc) are appropriate to have

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founding, our organization still struggles with these issues. The first ARC launched in 2000 dissolved for lack of available leadership to coordinate its functioning. The current ARC, launched at the 2006 convention has essentially become defunct as well. Despite all the best intentions, the ARC sometimes seem to gather comrades who sincerely want to move this work forward but then provides no effective vehicle to do so. White comrades not on the ARC have at times expressed a concern that the ARC was prepared mainly to call them (or their branches) out as racist and irredeemable. Comrades on the ARC have often waited for direction from ARC leadership and not effectively moved the organization forward on these questions either. Again, we are certain that comrades who volunteer to serve on and who organize the successive ARC's are sincere in their desire to improve Solidarity's praxis in relationship to fighting white supremacy.

in various arenas of work including in rank and file trade union work? Why? How do we imagine political consciousness will develop from among those we work with and what do we think our role should be?

4) We need to update our analysis of mainstream Black and Latino politics as well as taking seriously the task of developing an analysis on the politics of Asian America and White America. We need to explain how we have gone from the Jackson campaign-- another failed social-democratic attempt to 'realign' the Democrats-- to Obama-- an African-American neo-liberal.

5) Also, we need white people to talk to white people about why racism is useless. How do we prepare people for these conversations? What kind of political education/practice would be most useful?

We believe that it is important and useful for branches and working groups and commissions to have the difficult political discussions on how to collectivize and how and where to prioritize our anti-racism work in the context of the above national discussions. We also have to take into consideration the state of people of color movements in the broader society.<sup>12</sup>

Prioritizing Anti-Racism work in the organization should be viewed as a long term project without losing a sense of urgency. Right now, anti-racism work is done mostly by individuals. While it would be ideal to get to a point where we could effectively establish collective priorities, we are not there yet as an organization.

## **Moving Forward**

This section will attempt to outline concrete steps towards implementation as well as some structures of accountability.

Solidarity should maintain its current commitments internally to affirmative action for participation in formal leadership and project committees while paying special attention to comrades' interests, politics, level of development and capacity. Solidarity should make a practice of asking all members of committees and leadership bodies what support they would need to feel and be successful in that role and, when time and other resources are limited, should prioritize providing additional support to comrades of color and women comrades.

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<sup>12</sup> Not that we should use this as an excuse not to do the work.

We should acknowledge that the experiment we signed up for – an externally facilitated anti-oppression training center on, but not exclusive to, issues of race – did not happen. The authors of this document believe we need to complete an anti-oppression training whose leadership should be selected after interviewing a number of possible candidates. External political experience, personal conversation and facilitated self/group examination will be the basis for a serious and sustainable anti-oppression movement in the group (see next section).

We should engage the discussion over the pre-convention period as to what project rooted in anti-racist struggle comrades believe the organization should attempt so that we may look towards making a decision at convention. The key will be to start small, be realistic, and have a concrete and measurable goal. Furthermore, we should ask each branch and interested twigs within two months of the convention to decide at the local level whether they are committing to participating in this national effort and communicating to the national organization that decision as well as a preliminary plan and timeline for activities if they have decided to commit.

Branches could also develop a list of groups that they might consider working with – a task first suggested in the last pre-convention period but still worth doing or updating in any event.

We should know that one goal is to strengthen our capacity for engaging in collective projects, locally and nationally, without merely announcing national projects and expecting more success than the very limited successes previous such announcements have provided. Without an ability to count on Solidarity members to, in general, commit to some amount of political activity in a manner that is accountable to the organization collectively, we will not be able to do so in regards to anti-racism practice either. Those specific conversations about how membership is to be (re)defined will continue and are outside the scope of this document, but we acknowledge that they are related discussions<sup>13</sup> and look forward to progress in both as we move towards the convention.

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<sup>13</sup> Robert C commented on an earlier draft that “the organization has very modest levels of joint work (with loose standards and expectations even in working groups), which reinforces existing privilege and limit opportunity to expand methods through joint real-world experiences.” Robert connected this to “not [sufficiently] prioritizing internal leadership development.”

For the many experiments in Solidarity to try to improve our political work and public profile connected to self-determination struggles among communities of color as well as limited efforts to conceive of what political interventions by white comrades among broader white working class communities might look like, we regularly come up against limits of organizational capacity as well as of political will<sup>14</sup>. This effort, too, will have limited chance for success if it does not include within it a new model for capacity-building to be able to effectively channel the political will that does exist to become manifest in concrete activities, both internal and external.

Towards that end, during the 2008 convention and pre-convention periods, Solidarity should gather a list of white comrade volunteers who pledge to have available two hours or more each month which they will place at the disposal of the POC caucus to do whatever work is assigned to strengthen the caucus and further its political and organizational goals (perhaps, this should be done in conjunction with developing volunteer lists for male as well as straight-identified comrades). We suggest this be done instead of repeating attempts to cohere an Anti-Racism Commission to be elected at the 2008 convention for the period following that convention. We believe this will both allow more opportunities to build on the growing coherence of the POC caucus –members of whom will no longer have to try to hold an ARC together -- as well as provide white comrades a clearer path to doing this work specifically in and through Solidarity<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> In responding to an earlier draft, Steve B comments: “Any document that hopes to contribute to overcoming the problem has to say to the membership of Solidarity, point blank: This process will involve confronting your whiteness in ways that will be uncomfortable for you.” He also proposes “a renewed effort to generate the collective experience we need in order to talk about this problem intelligently amongst ourselves.” We view our specific suggestions regarding capacity-building to follow as one attempt at generating this collective experience.

<sup>15</sup> This –disbanding the Anti-Racism Commission to provide more resources and support to the POC Caucus-- is not a principled position for all times but follows from an analysis of the current conditions within Solidarity and the opportunities and priority at this juncture to support an increasingly vibrant POC Caucus’s collective functioning as the most fruitful way of moving these politics in and through Solidarity. We note that at the anti-oppression weekend, the POC caucus members present asserted that the POC caucus would be demonstrating more leadership in the group as a whole on these questions, for example, and aim to provide all possible support from the general organization to making that more possible.

To this end, the current formally-elected national leadership (NC/PC) shall assign members to collaborate with comrades assigned by the POC caucus to:

- a) develop and cause to be implemented a plan to recruit volunteers in the 2008 pre-convention and convention period;
- b) discuss and propose to the convention specific mechanisms to maximize the usefulness and minimize the burden on the POC caucus which the project of white comrades who've made a monthly pledge of labor at the direction of the caucus;
- c) develop proposals for the POC caucus and the organization as a whole to consider regarding under what instances and in what manner the caucus will be formally consulted by the national leadership or project committees to maximize the influence of the caucus. As noted above, we suggest ahead of time that this be done in a way that facilitates the caucus functioning, rather than simply adding responsibilities.

### **Understanding and Challenging Whiteness**

As noted above, in addition to our internal work as an organization and our external organizing, challenging whiteness also requires that white allies engage in an ongoing process of personal self-critique, which we hope will be aided by an outside facilitator. In contrast to overt, explicit racism and structural racism that are often easier to identify, there can also be a more subtle racism that influences whites' behavior (individually and as a group) in ways that are difficult to identify; rather than any set of behaviors that could be easily listed, it tends to be manifested as a patterned way of interacting with POC (whether generally or specific to various racial groups). For example, both always asking POC to assume leadership positions regardless of individual interests and always passing over them for such positions are patterns that imply a racially-based motive to the behavior (such as a desire to appear anti-racist, or a presumption of inadequacy, respectively). Therefore, in such situations, though the behavior gives us clues, it is our own motivation that ultimately must be critiqued; because motivation is often unspoken, this critique is more honest and productive if whites take it upon themselves to do it. Thus, as noted in the first section above, we must continuously return to the question of *why* we—as whites—are doing what we're doing, even if it something seemingly uncontroversial for us like prioritizing leadership of POC. The more we

understand our motivations, the clearer the course of action will be.

While whites can and should continuously critique our relationships with people of color, looking for patterns of behavior or thoughts, another way for whites to spot the problematic situations is to listen closely to critiques offered by people of color and especially note themes among them. In addition to this self-critique, the following are general practices that can help diminish the dominance of a problematic political culture.

### **Initial Suggestions**

**Communication:** Implementing the feminist process' alternative norms of how we talk to each other can help prevent the silencing of people of color. The Feminist Retreat implemented many of these, including allowing time for more informal discussion, and was widely seen successful in this regard (see report on retreat<sup>16</sup>). Another suggestion is to use everyday language instead of "scientific" language whenever possible.

**Historical common-knowledge:** Creating a basis of common knowledge/vocabulary is essential for any organization. Creating a less white base of common knowledge is essential for organizational transformation. This will take time as members study more historical analyses outside of our dominant (and largely white, often male) intellectual tradition. Along with engaging anti-colonial classics like Nkrumah and modern day classics of intersectionality (e.g., *This Bridge Called My Back* and INCITE's more recent *The Color of Violence*), we should encourage the reading of C.L.R. James and George Breitman-- two anti-racist thinkers from our tradition of "socialism from below." We should also reach out to Chris P. (Mansfield, OH) who is writing a history of the Trotskyists and African-American struggles, from the 1930s through the 1970s-- a history that is much richer than we often give ourselves credit for.

**Presenting analyses:** At Next Left, Stephanie B.'s presentation was popular among people who critiqued other presentations as "academic". Using non-academic language, she started with her own experiences (using lots of "I" statements) and drew conclusions based on them, bringing in other sources

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<sup>16</sup> Chloe T., Karen M., Jamie D., Brooke C., Erin S., Catherine S., "Feminist Retreat Report", sent to "Solid3", Feb. 19, 2008

as necessary. People felt her presentation was very informative, engaging, and 'real'. Her style was very much in-line with the feminist process recommendations, as well as popular education methods. Other comrades should also put forward their best thinking in different venues<sup>17</sup>.

**Political priorities:** We need to be more flexible in our approach to political priorities. In *Solidarity at 21*, Michael D claimed, "Solidarity's promise can only be fulfilled if we take our emphasis on 'socialism from below' and expand our ability to articulate those politics...in terms of other arenas of struggle". The Organizing in Communities of Color study is designed to begin this process.

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## Comments on "The Lay of the Land for Labor"

Chris K. (Austin) and Charlie P. (NY)

The publication of Mark B. and Jane S. "The Lay of the Land for Labor" (*Solidarity 2008 Preconvention Bulletin #2—August 1, 2008*) is a welcome development. Along with the NC-prepared documents on regroupment and anti-racism, Mark and Jane's contribution marks a welcome return to meaty political discussions in *Solidarity* of the material world we

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<sup>17</sup> For examples of what we are calling for, we urge comrades to look at the documents Kay and Tim sent to the solid3 list on July 16 and 17 ("Democracy –The Grand Struggle", "A Call For Very Old School Labor Politics", "A Counter-Democracy, Liberation, and Labor." Similarly, see Michael McCarthy in July/August 08's ATC, "Racism and Structural Solutions." Michael McCarthy shared in an appendix to an earlier draft of this document: "Our theory directly informs our practice, sharpening the former will strengthen the latter and help *Solidarity* develop a coherent and critical strategic vision. [...] Giving relative autonomy to non-class forms of domination (racism, sexism, homophobia, etc) while framing our strategy and analysis through the lens of class is a way of avoiding problems of class-reductionism and identity politics and building broad-based movements that organize around particular experiences. In terms of race, radicals need to identify and explain the dialectic between the means of production and the process of racism. Histories need to be revisited, with the past class injustices bearing on our explanations for a contemporary racism that appears autonomous. Race cannot be subsumed into class, but they cannot be divorced either."

operate in. We agree with much of the argument and analysis presented in the document that they lay out. The document is "dead-on" in its analysis of the long-term impact of the post-war collective bargaining—the consolidation of a labor officialdom and the profound disorganization of the rank and file of the labor movement.

We do have some important disagreements, however, about the nature and impact of the restructuring of capitalism in the past 30 years, especially regarding the "globalization" and "financialization" of capital. While recognizing that much of the loss of jobs in US manufacturing since the 1980s has been the result of technological innovation and work reorganization, Jane and Mark insist that part of the job loss "has been due to trade, given the enormous increase in the flow of goods in and out of the country." More importantly, Jane and Mark see the growth of the financial sector fundamentally changing the "dynamic of profit-making" and removing:

some of the traditional leverage that workers have on the job (e.g., if GM makes most of its profits through its financial arm rather than making cars, this weakens the power of on-the-job activity by auto workers). It also has put workers involved in 'production' in competition not just with workers in other regions or countries, but with the choice of no production at all) that is, could choose to invest in speculative activity instead. (1-2)

We believe that this particular point is mistaken. We think that "globalization"—the movement of manufacturing out of the United States—accounts for an extremely small percentage of job loss in manufacturing. Instead, the vast majority of job loss in US manufacturing is the result of the ongoing process of mechanization of production; and US-owned manufacturing firms invest approximately five percent of their capital overseas.

Nor do we agree that finance has displaced the production of goods and services as the center of capitalist accumulation. The growth of the financial sector and its conditions of profitability remain dependent upon the "real," productive economy. Marxists are not alone in recognizing that profits are ultimately created in the production of goods and services. The \$25 billion federal bailout of the automobile industry in the earlier this year and the incoming Obama administration's promises of additional subsidies to the auto industry are indications that key capitalist state policy makers understand this connection. They want to ensure that the US auto