

Of The Congress of African Peoples

# Position Statement of Imamu Baraka

Imamu Amiri Baraka began his presentation by quoting Lenin's definition of imperialism. "Imperialism is capitalism in that stage of development in which the dominance of monopoly and finance capital has established itself, in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance, in which the division of the world among the international trust has begun, in which the division of the globe among the major capitalist powers has been completed. Imperialism, as interpreted above, undoubtedly represents a special stage in the development of capitalism."

He then quoted another passage from Lenin. "Monopoly arose out of a very high stage of the development of the concentration of production. The monopolies have stimulated the seizure of the most important sources of raw materials; monopoly has sprung from the banks and grown out of colonial policy. To the numerous old motives of colonial policy, finance capital has added the struggle for the source of raw materials, for the export of capital, for spheres of influence, deals, concessions, profits, and for economic territory in general."

**CAPITALISM AND IMPERIALISM**

Baraka then talked about the dialectically linked history of the development of capitalism and imperialism in Europe and North America on the one hand and the slave trade and colonialism on the other. He demonstrated the crucial role played by the exploitation of Africa and African labor in the development of capitalism.

Baraka described in detail the triangular route of trade that was based on the enslavement and sale as commodities, of African people, and resulted in the massive accumulation of capital in Europe, especially in England.

He quoted Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. "The most spectacular feature in Europe connected with African trade was the rise of seaport towns, notably Bristol, Liverpool, Nome, Bordeaux, and Seville. Directly or indirectly connected to those ports there arose the manufacturing centers that gave rise to the industrial revolution. In England it was the county of Lancaster that was the first center of the industrial revolution and the economic advance of Lancaster depended first of all on the port of Liverpool through slave trading."

Baraka then described the economic and political development of capitalism and monopoly capitalism in the United States with the corresponding development of the United States into a new and aggressive imperialist power. Baraka stated, "There is little doubt that the slave trade convened and nurtured modern racism."

**RACISM**

Baraka then defined racism, separating it from other forms of ethnocentrism, in that, "Ethnocentrism merely defines the world almost exclusively through the eyes of one people. Chauvinism, on the other hand, tends to solidify

that onesided method of defining a broader view. Chauvinism represents that one people are superior to another; racism must be backed up by an actual show of that superiority. In other words, the racist must have the power to enforce that superiority in the objective world usually by military force. Therefore, ethnocentrism and chauvinism can exist even in African people towards others, even towards Europeans, but racism cannot exist until Black people actually subdue the European in their homes and there, in Europe, direct the economy in the interest of great capitalists living in Africa."

He then went on to say, "There can be no doubt that racism as it pervades the world is an integral part of the capitalist mode of production. And just as imperialism intensified the contradiction in capitalism, it also spread the ideology of racism around the world. But not only as ideas but as institutions, systems, ways of life and values—ironically, all of which were also imposed on the subject people themselves."

**CULTURAL AGGRESSION**

Baraka then talked about cultural aggression and the fact that it was and still is a natural and necessary part of the system of imperialism. "Since imperialism has issued most essentially out of Europe and Euro-America, it is almost always accompanied by the attempted Europeanization or cultural destruction of the subject peoples. This attempt at Europeanization and/or cultural destruction represents the negation of the culture of the oppressed and usually the appearance of racial oppression, where not only would the people be oppressed in their own country because of their race, but also attempted to destroy their values, their way of life, their institutions which is their culture."

Baraka then drew from the teachings of Cabral to point out that, "History teaches us that under certain circumstances it is very easy for the foreigner to impose his domination upon a people, but that whatever the material aspect of that domination, it can be maintained only by the permanent, organized repression of the cultural life of the people concerned. Implementation of foreign domination can be assured only by neutralizing and paralyzing the peoples' cultural life. For with a strong, indigenous cultural life, foreign domination cannot be sure of its perpetuation. There lies the necessity of cultural aggression to the process of imperialist oppression and exploitation."

Baraka then explained the material basis for the development of a peoples' culture in the level of the productive forces. He again quoted Cabral. "For every society, for every group of people considered as an evolving entity, the level of the productive forces indicates the stage of development of the society and of each of its components in relation to nature, its capacity to act or to react concisely in relation to nature. It indicates and conditions the type of material relations expressed objectively



or subjectively, which exist among the various groups constituting the society in question; relationships and types of relationships and types of relationships between people and nature, between people and their environment; relationships and types of relationships among the individual or collective components of a society. To speak of these is to speak of history, but it is also to speak of culture."

"Whatever made the ideological or idealistic characteristics of cultural expression, culture is an essential element of the history of a people. Culture is, perhaps, the product of this history just as a flower is a product of a plant. Like history, or because it is history, culture has as its material base the level of productive forces or the mode of production."

**CULTURAL ANALYSIS**

Baraka then stressed the necessity of making a cultural analysis of ourselves as a part of the process of developing the correct strategy for liberation. He stated that such an analysis would, "answer the question of who we are, how we have lived, how we are living, how must we live in order to liberate ourselves."

He went on to say, "Too often imperialist domination, particularly as it is manifested among the petty Bourgeois intellectuals that Cabral describes, will set us to accepting ideas from outside our own culture simply because they are that." Baraka pointed out that this tendency can lead us to mechanically apply theoretical position from other situations without analyzing our own concrete material conditions.

Baraka stated, however, that "This must not be interpreted, as some primitive nationalists do, as a retreat from the advantages of utilizing inter-

presentation, Baraka began outlining what he saw as the general tasks of our struggle. He stated, "If the principal problem is the struggle against imperialist domination with the realization that this must include the conscious and deliberate struggle against racism, whether it takes the form of economic exploitation, political repression, police brutality, or cultural aggression, then the question arises, how can we struggle in the most effective way? First, it seems evident that imperialism has oppressed us nationally, racially, and culturally in order to make profits, but also as a result of the reproduction of racist systems and institutions, philosophy, and way of life that perpetuates itself with no specific profit motive, although that is its base."

Baraka then gave his definition of race and nation. "A race, in so far as social interaction is concerned, may be thought of as any people who are distinguished in social relations with other people by their physical characteristics. A nation, on the other hand by one definition, can be thought of as a tribal group conscious of cultural unity. So actually to say nation is to say culture."

**A SUBORDINATE NATION**

He then went on to say that, "Therefore, as a people, we are Africans in North America, a subordinate nation which is what national minority means, a dependent or subject nation as Lenin provided. Oliver Cox says that the term 'minority group' has been used, but incorrectly. Are the white people in South Africa or Rhodesia a national minority? Are the Israelis in Palestine a national minority? They would be a national minority only if they had no power. The position of the opposing group is not conveyed by the antonym majority, but by such words as dominant or subordinant. The struggle between national groups is a struggle for power."

He then went on to reiterate that, "National oppression is an inherent part of capitalism regardless of the race of the nation. That is the political and economic and social subjugation of other less developed, smaller nations within the same state by a dominant nationality."

"Capitalism is inconceivable without racial exploitation. But it must be recognized that one concept that informs our national liberation movement is that every nation has the right to self determination, to paraphrase Lenin, and that any federation entered into between national groups have to be entered into voluntarily by those nations, and that this right must be supported by all socialists even though they might think that the idea of national self-determination of a particular national group might be 'unfeasible.'"

Citing specifically the Irish and Black people in North America whom he called "subject or dependent nations," he said these kinds of national revolutions would certainly turn into socialist revolutions and "that the right to self-de-

**TASKS OF THE STRUGGLE**  
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termination by such national groups, and the attendant call for secession and separation, are, in the case of clear rebellions against oppressor nations and imperialism in general, clearly revolutionary."

## THE CONTENT OF BLACK NATIONALISM

Based on his interpretation of the analysis stated above, Baraka then talked about the conditions of national oppression among Black people in this country and what he felt was the correct content of Black nationalism.

"It is the power motive," he

said, "that should inform our racial and cultural nationalism. Our oppression, which is at base economics, is perpetuated at one level as racial oppression. We are economically oppressed to the extent that we are because of our race. This, in turn, creates and reconsolidates our culture, that is, the way we live and our formal and informal record of that process.

"Because of this constant, continuous reconsolidation of culture through racial oppression, based on the intent of economic exploitation, we persist in America as a national group. Its basic stability is

racial and cultural."

Therefore, in Baraka's view, we have the moral right to national self determination and must wage a national liberation struggle based on revolutionary nationalist ideology in order to secure this right in fact. Such a struggle, he analyzed, is "profoundly progressive and revolutionary" in that it strikes at the very heart of the imperialist system, and must, in order to be really successful, pass over into socialist revolution.

Baraka again quoted Cabral, 'National liberation is based

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# Baraka: 'Build a Revolutionary Black Vanguard Party'

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on the inalienable right of each people to have its own history."

Baraka went on to say "Racism, as the cutting edge of capitalist exploitation, has denied us the right."

## OUR NATIONAL PRODUCTIVE FORCES

Again he quoted Cabral, "Imperialist domination signifies the negation of the historical process of a dominated people by means of violent usurpation of the freedom of development of the national productive forces."

Baraka continued, "What are our national productive forces? The major and decisive part of the productive force are Black people whose development has been violently obstructed by the development of capitalism and racism.

"That small group of Blacks who do control some means of production, and have exploitative relationships to wage laborers, do not have control of the total means of production that we make ultimate claim to. Black people can lay claim to that percentage of the means of production of the total society that would be ours by virtue of our work and needs.

"The struggle against racial oppression is basically a struggle for national liberation. The objective of national liberation is to free the process of development of the national productive forces, the people and the means of production.

"Not only our people must be

free, and they are the ultimate makers of history, but finally we must struggle to free the means of production from monopoly capitalist domination. It seems critical that we must always keep in mind that we are struggling to liberate ourselves as a people, and also to destroy capitalism and bring about the advent of socialism."

## INDEPENDENT NATIONALIST CHARACTER

Baraka then moved on to defend what he saw as the independent national character of the liberation struggle from those lines that he perceived as trying to deny this and to submerge the liberation struggle in the general struggle for working class revolution and socialism.

In this regard he stated, "The fact of racism in America is real, not theoretical, just as the fact of our racial distinction is real. When we project our struggle as simply a class struggle, or render ourselves invisible within the phraseology of a struggle simply between the working masses and the ruling class with no further revelation of the essential reality of the existence of any potential transnational, interracial working class; to say as some multi-national formations do, that they represent the entire working class, is not to go to the depths of analysis and investigations of American society. Racism renders talk about the entire working class, at this time, as idealist conjecture."

Baraka continued, "Dialectically our struggle takes on a nationalist character if only because it is a struggle, at one point, against racial oppression. But there is a class nature to our struggle itself, since we understand the economic reasons behind that oppression, though by the time of imperialism the white ruling class and the white masses of Europe and America were convinced that people of color around the world should be exploited because we were colored and therefore inferior.

"But in our class relationship to the ruling class the complication, again, is the racial character of capitalist oppression. The greater portion of that monopoly capitalist ruling class is white though that is finally secondary to the fact that they are a ruling class."

## NATION-CLASS

Baraka moved on to deal with the question of what, precisely, is our relationship, as a people, to the monopoly capitalist ruling class. In answering that question he put forth the idea that Black people as a whole are proletarian, that the necessary relationship between an oppressed nationality and the oppressor power is a class relationship with the entire oppressed nationality functioning as a working class. "Capitalist and certainly imperialist domination proletarianized our whole people. Race relations are not caste relations, they are not reproduced simply by families. They are labor, capital, and

profits relations. Therefore race relations have a proletarian-bourgeois relationship and are hence a political class relation.

"For this reason, just as Cabral and Nkrumah can speak of nation-class in characterizing our formation in struggle against colonialism, so we must understand that proletarian is not merely a social class definition as is working class, but a formation of struggle. The struggle against national oppression calls for a national liberation struggle as a nation-class.

## BLACK VANGUARD PARTY

Based on his analysis, Baraka, in the last section of his presentation, spoke of the organizational needs of the Black liberation struggle.

He stated that our struggle "demands the mobilization and organization of the nationalist forces within the framework of, and by the action of a strong, well organized, well structured political organization.

Baraka goes on to talk about Lenin's concept of a vanguard party and applies this to what he sees to be the needs of our struggle today. "The one thing that Lenin was firm about regardless of conditions varying from country to country, was the need for a vanguard party whose members all recognize the necessary difference between themselves and the revolutionary masses, and who have a firm ideology, programmatic summation, and discipline before they go to

the masses, interact with them and give them leadership."

Baraka asserted, "If this distinction is blurred, what comes into being is not a revolutionary vanguard party, but a mass party, no matter how small in size, which incorporate into its membership those who should actually be its followers and supports. Such a party cannot lead the masses, it can only tailgate and follow after them."

Baraka continued, "Lenin is relevant for his concept of building a revolutionary vanguard party on the basis of that section of the population in a given country which is both the most oppressed, and the chief revolutionary social force.

If the chief revolutionary social force is the peasant; as in China, then base the party on the peasantry. If it is the Black masses, as in the United States, then build the revolutionary party on the basis of a Black revolutionary social force.

Baraka closed his presentation saying, "Building strong disciplined organizations based on the correct ideology, based on nationalism, Pan-Africanism and socialism, an analysis of the concrete conditions, we are able to actively pursue concrete programs to mobilize, organize and politicize the masses and move them objectively to transform the entire society. And in so doing we help alter objective and subjective conditions throughout the world...."