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## I. Introduction

Although discussion around building an African National Prison Organization have been going on formally and informally between various organizations and persons for some time now, the present discussion takes place within the context of decisions made by several nationalist organizations on September 4th, 1977, in Atlanta, Georgia following a National Mobilization to Free Dessie Woods.

The participants at the September 4th meeting were moved by a collective understanding of the need to develop a higher level of unity between pro-Independence forces. Flowing from this understanding a brief discussion was initiated around the possibility of building a National Liberation Front. It was eventually decided that several obstacles presently prevent the creation of the front, but that the creation of an African National Prisoner's Organization might provide us with the basis for such a front in the future in addition to speaking to its own self-serving organizational and political needs.

The September 4th meeting participants then decided upon the following principles as the basis for building the African National Prison Organization:

1. Self-determination
2. Political Independence
3. Anti-Imperialism
4. Anti-Colonialism
5. Self-defense

Participants then decided that organizational representatives at the September 4th meeting would send position papers to a selected New York clearing house, which would deal with the makeup of the proposed African National Prison Organizations, with the papers being followed by a January meeting in New York.

This paper represents the efforts of the African People's Socialist Party to comply with decisions made at the September 4th Atlanta meeting.

II. The conditions of existence for African people colonized within current U.S. borders has seldom been so perilous as they are today. At one single historical point we find ourselves unemployed at a ratio of more than two to one times that of North Americans; (For our youth the figure is even higher, reaching 64 per cent for those between the ages of 16 to 20); we are battered worse than anyone by the escalation of prices for the basic necessities of life, all this in a situation where our colonial condition already allows for super profits from higher prices and lower wages. Our people are under constant attack by neo-Nazi, and Klan-type organizations throughout the country; rights, previously thought to be unassailable by some, such as rights to employment, and education, are being cut out from under our feet. Police terror is escalating throughout the entire African colony, as more and more of our people are receiving vigilante-type justice in the streets at the hands of this occupying army.

Although certain aspects of our present situation are the result of policy decisions of the U.S. capitalist-colonialist class, there is a real crisis of imperialism occurring, to which the imperialists can only desperately respond. It is beyond their immediate ability to deal with this crisis rationally or differently.

The capitalist-colonialist class itself is being battered daily -- by an increasingly shrinking rate of profit and a narrowing base for territorial expansion outside U.S. North American borders. The perennial contention between imperialism and socialism, augmented by the growing clamor for liberation by subject peoples, especially on the Great Continent, all play a role in promoting and defining imperialism's general crisis.

The extraordinary aspects of the present conditions of our existence is imperialism's desperate response to its crisis, with its traditional attempt to resolve its contradiction at the expense of our people as well as other subject peoples within current U.S. borders.

There is no better evidence of this attempt than the increasing numbers of African people being shuttled off into the prisons. While prisons have always been a harsh, and cruel reality for African people, imperialism's crisis has promoted an unprecedented push to build new prisons, along with an ideological assault upon the people, which absolves the present social system of any responsibility for the burgeoning prison population.

The estimates of the ratio of African to North American prisoners vary from 47 to 80 per cent. But, whatever the accurate figure, it is a fact that virtually every African within current U.S. borders has had either a direct or indirect experience with prison. Moreover, with an end to the moratorium on state executions, the 58 per cent African population on death rows in the prisons throughout the U.S. take on a sharper significance.

Clearly, prisons represent a major tool of African colonialism within current U.S. borders.

The need to build an African National Prison Organization is not an abstract need. It is real, and is conditioned by the conditions of our existence, the general crisis of imperialism, and the state of our movement, factors, the sum of which, when taken together help to define the period we live in.

It is a period in which imperialism is in crisis and which is presently not characterized by obvious motion of the masses; there are no serious mass movements. Related to this, our most revolutionary organizations are small organizations, and in the absence of mass movements, the basis for relatively rapid growth of our organizations does not exist.

It is within this context that we are moving to build an African National Prison Organization. It should therefore be clear that our efforts to build the African National Prison Organization must be tied to the pressing tasks of our general anti-colonialist movement for political independence through self-liberation.

One of these tasks, and the most pressing from the perspective of the African People's Socialist Party is to integrate, or fuse, or unite, the ideology of the political independence with the spontaneous or mass movements of the people. (During this period, when there are no mass movements, we must make a conscious attempt to bring together and influence the various spontaneously developed local prisoner support organizations, in unity with the pro-Independence movement which should reach greater consolidation in the process. Moreover, what with the depth of the forced

relationship with prison experienced by our people, a mass movement, if properly articulated and led, probably lies just below the surface.)

Therefore, it flows logically that the African National Prison Organization must be a mass-based organization, one that recognizes its primary task as realizing the above-styled objectives of winning and organizing the great mass of our people. Its mass character, combined with the leading influence of the pro-Independence forces, will facilitate our efforts to integrate the ideology of Independence with the mass or spontaneous movements of the people, thereby smashing their spontaneous character and adding depth to the movements; provide the necessary popular base for economic stability through regular dues, and advance the general struggle of our people for political independence through self-liberation.

Throughout the entire process it is the responsibility of the progressive pro-Independence forces within the organization to influence the mass based organization to develop structural, ideological, and practical relations with the various questions surrounding the implications that prison holds for our people and our movement. Not the least of these is the question of political prisoners and prisoners of war.

(We realize that there are those who would presently make the political prisoner and prisoner of war question the main or primary focus of the African National Prison Organization. However, it is the opinion of the APSP that such an attempt would fly in the face of science and reason, and hurry us along the already well-trodden path of solitary ultra-leftism.

(If an African National Prison Organization is going to be meaningful, and capable of mobilizing the masses of our people, it will necessarily have to speak immediately to the very real oppressive relationship to prison that is shared by the overwhelming majority of our people. Otherwise, we will end up mainly speaking to ourselves, no political prisoners will be freed, and in many instances, our isolation from the masses will drive many of us into the arms of adventurism, incapable of seeing any other way.)

From our perspective then, the planned January meeting should be a planning meeting attended by the same forces we defined at the September 4th meeting. We should use the January meeting to build an agenda for a later meeting based on a united call coming from the January meeting. This called meeting should be an invitation to all African people and organizations able to agree with the principles already put forth, but generalized in the call. The actual building of the African National Prison Organization should occur at the called meeting, allowing for democratic participation of all parties involved. This democratic participation, which should include the election of officers, discussion of structure, amount of dues to be paid, etc., will help to facilitate the greatest amount of active participation of all forces, as the actual organization will reflect the collective decisions of everyone involved.

However, the APSP does believe that the progressive pro-Independence movement should be prepared to put forth several items as part of an agenda of struggle for the African National Prison Organization.

They should include the U.N. initiative inaugurated by the August 21 Coalition, which proposed that the question of inhumane treatment of African people in U.S.

prisons be put before the proper U.N. subcommittee in an effort to internationalize the prison question. Another item of struggle should be for minimum wages for prison labor. We should also struggle for legislation which makes it illegal to deny employment, "civil rights," etc. to a person because of a prison record.

The African National Prison Organization should also initiate struggle around basic prison rights issues such as medical care (especially for women prisoners), a decent and tasty diet, meaningful visitation privileges (including conjugal rights), an end to mail censorship and the prohibition against political materials.

We should be prepared to struggle for "coed" prisons and against all behavioral modification, forced druggings, "medical" experimentation, etc. The progressive pro-Independence forces should also attempt to add to our struggle agenda the release of all political prisoners and prisoners of war, with special emphasis given to the Black Liberation Army captives, the RNA-11, the former Panther Party members, and Dessie Woods, all of whom represent, either actually or ideologically, the nationalist, and pro-Independence character of our struggle.

(These are some of the basic questions. However, there are others (see August 21 Coalition platform.) They include the formal recognition of the U.S. settler-colonial-capitalist government of political prisoners, the forced abortions and frequent sterilization of African women prisoners, etc.)

However, a major, and priority struggle of the African National Prison Organization must be one directed at overturning the death penalty which raises the ugly spectre of genocide for African and other subject nationalities within current U.S. borders.

Initially the African National Prison Organization should be involved in massive propaganda and agitational work, designed to disclose the tremendous contradictions prison offers for African people, and its use as a colonialist tool. It should be involved in leafleting, radio and T.V. programs, letters to the editors of capitalist-colonialist-serving newspapers, college and university teach-ins, etc.

This propaganda and agitational work, augmented by examples of oppression by our enemy, and the struggle agenda of the organization itself will assist us in building a greater and more capable organization, prepared to take on even greater tasks, such as voter education and registration programs designed to make more Africans eligible for jury duty. And, flowing from this, jury education programs, designed to teach Africans how to enhance our probability to be accepted for jury duty, and, flowing from this, a massive propaganda and agitational program, designed to influence Africans to vote "not-guilty", with very few exceptions, for all Africans charged by the illegitimate U.S. colonialist ruling class, thereby exacerbating internal structural and institutional tensions and contributing to a structural and ideological attack on a specific aspect of U.S. North American bourgeoisie democracy.

In order to put any of the ideas and programs concerning the African National Prison Organization in motion, we of the African People's Socialist Party are also convinced of the absolute necessity for creating a national office and staff to act as an information/communication clearinghouse, collect dues, handle other general administrative responsibilities, and carry out the day-to-day national (U.S.-wide) responsibilities of the organization. It is our opinion that we must attempt to avoid the organization-in-name only type formation which is incapable of doing

anything including taking care of its own internal affairs.

The African People's Socialist Party would also like to make this suggestion relative to a structure of the African National Prison Organization.

1. The APSP proposes that we establish a National Coordinating Committee as the highest policy-making body responsible for guiding the work. This committee should be elected by the National Conference, called as a response to the general call resulting from the January meeting. The National Coordinating Committee should be composed of one representative from each national organization participating in the work, one representative from each local affiliate of the African National Prison Organization, one prisoner representative from each of a certain number of districts (or some other formula to determine and guarantee prison representation), and a number of members-at-large, who represent important national movements of struggle.

2. An Executive or Interim Committee should be set up by the National Coordinating Committee and composed of representatives from the National Coordinating Committee. This Executive or Interim Committee should meet monthly with the staff of the National Coordinating Committee to make all necessary decisions concerning activity during the period between National Coordinating Committee meetings.

3. Immediately after determining the geographical composition of the conference resulting from the joint call, a determination should be made concerning the creation of Regional Coordinating Committees to be selected by the same formula used to determine the composition of the National Coordinating Committee, and which would be directly, structurally subordinated to the National Coordinating Committee.

4. Local chapters of the African National Prison Organization should be composed of a minimum of three persons (many people feel three persons represent too small a minimum number, some preferring five. However, we believe that three persons will allow us the minimum NECESSARY structural division of labor and functional reliability.)

We of the APSP believe this structure will allow for democratic participation and general efficiency of the organizational.

Finally, we would make the point that the African National Prison Organization should be exactly that. We should make every effort to guarantee that the organization does not become the victim of mistaken attempts to convert (subvert?) it into a "revolutionary" party-type organization which will surely spell its doom.

The African People's Socialist Party offers our solidarity and congratulations to all our comrades who have seen the importance of this question of prison, and who are committed to consolidating our forces, and smashing the general isolation of our forces, one from the other.

Surely we are on the road to unity and victory. Let us continue!

PAMBERI NE CHIMURENGA! (FORWARD WITH THE REVOLUTION!)

O.Y./African People's Socialist Party  
November 3, 1977