

# RECTIFICATION AND THE STRUGGLE FOR REVOLUTIONARY INTERNATIONALISM

In Zimbabwe, a war is raging to win independence and freedom from colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialist domination. In Puerto Rico, the armed struggle for independence from US imperialist control is intensifying daily. Within the current, imperialist-defined borders of the US, the revolutionary forces of Black liberation are mobilizing, building their just struggle for independence after 400 years of imperial/colonial oppression. Native American struggles for land and sovereignty are growing. The movements of oppressed and colonized nations to win their independence and freedom from imperialist subjugation are leading revolutionary anti-imperialist movement in the world today. White people, members of the US oppressor nation, who support liberation and independence for the world's nations, who hate imperialism and want to contribute to its revolutionary overthrow, must unite in solidarity with the strategies of national liberation which are leading the destruction of imperialism's stranglehold over the oppressed people of the world.

Over the past year, the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee has been pushed towards this understanding through the leadership of national liberation forces. We have been struggling to unite with the strategies of national liberation, as defined by these movements, as the only basis for building international solidarity and revolutionary anti-imperialist movement among white people. We have been struggling to overturn a white supremacist political line which placed white oppressor nation interests at the center of our politics and worked against building genuine solidarity with national liberation. We have been trying to understand our revolutionary responsibility to fight for national liberation on all levels.

This process was started in November 1977 when a leader of PFOC, Clayton Van Lydegraf, was arrested along with four other white anti-imperialists—Judy Bissell, Leslie Mullin, Marc Perry and Michael Justesen—on charges of conspiracy to possess and use explosives. The arrests were the result of two years of infiltration of PFOC by an FBI special agent. The arrests and the circumstances surrounding it forced us to open up a complete examination of our political line and history. The leadership of revolutionary nationalist forces and white anti-imperialist organizations has been indispensable in pushing us beyond superficial definitions of our errors and helping us to uncover

the white supremacist political roots of our wrong line.

At this time, we believe that we are a changed organization, united around a different political line and more firmly committed to anti-imperialist revolution. Our struggle to make a break with white supremacist, opportunist politics is ongoing. We want to lay out what we understand of our self-criticism and political changes in order to be accountable to the revolutionary nationalist and oppressor nation forces who have struggled with us over the past years. Our errors seriously held back our efforts to act in solidarity with national liberation. We want to share the lessons which our political history contains as a part of overturning those errors and in hopes our experiences will contribute to the development of anti-imperialist movement.

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Since the Hard Times Conference which PFOC helped organize in January 1976, PFOC has supported national liberation movements as the leading revolutionary anti-imperialist force in this era. Having overturned the Hard Times Conference line which held that a white-majority, multi-national working class was the agent of revolutionary change in the US, we recognized that the principle characteristic of imperialism is the division of the world into oppressor and oppressed nations. We saw our responsibility as members of the US white oppressor nation to support self-determination for oppressed nations and fight white supremacy in the white working class. However, many of the fundamental concepts of our political line continued to place the interests and needs of the oppressor nation working class in a central place. We saw ourselves as building separate, autonomous anti-imperialist movement within the oppressor nation—a different but politically equal movement with that of national liberation. This view was summed up by the formulation that we "compose separate national contingents against the common enemy. Internationalism can be crucial for victory but each working class and people are necessarily the main force of their own revolution." (PFOC political statement March 1977).

We now think this is a wrong line because it equates the struggles of the oppressor nation working class with that of oppressed nation peoples. The whole structure of imperialism rests on the division between oppressor and oppressed na-

tion, placing the working classes of oppressor nations in a different relationship to imperialism than the peoples of oppressed nations. Material privileges, based on imperialism's plunder of the labour, land and resources of colonized peoples, gives the oppressor nation working class a stake in the empire that colonized nations are fighting to overthrow. In order to participate in the fight to overturn imperialist oppression and exploitation, the white working class must fight for the liberation of colonized peoples within and without US borders. The basis of this solidarity must be support for the definitions and strategies that colonized peoples have for their own struggles. Developing separate strategies for anti-imperialist movement in the white working class stems from placing white interests at the center and works against national liberation and revolution.

PFOC refused to see that revolutionary national liberation struggles define not only the terms of their own struggles but the terms for anti-imperialist movement in the oppressor nation because of our stake in seeing the oppressor nation as our "territory." We were willing to uphold a concept of self-determination which gave oppressed nations the right to determine the goals and strategies of *their* struggles, but we drew the line at taking their leadership in order to determine our political responsibilities.

We followed a traditional view of self-determination which supports *the right* of oppressed nations to secession or independence but does not define independence as the necessary goal of national liberation struggle. As revolutionary nationalist forces have struggled with us to understand, when imperialist intervention has occurred against a nation, independence is the only resolution to the colonial contradiction, the only basis on which nations can freely determine their futures. Opportunist lines which do not define self-determination in this context but only "offer" oppressed nations within the US the option of independence end up subordinating the struggle for independence to the unitary, "multi-national" class struggle.

As white anti-imperialists, we have the responsibility to fight for the revolutionary strategies of national liberation to achieve independence and to support the revolutionary armed struggle which is the necessary means of achieving it. Unless we support *revolutionary* lines and strategies within the national liberation movements we end up supporting reformism and the status quo. And we avoid committing ourselves to all the responsibilities that solidarity with national liberation really requires.

PFOC's wrong definition of self-determination gave us the freedom to substitute our own

strategies and priorities in building anti-imperialist movement in the oppressor nation. Instead of defining solidarity with anti-colonial, national struggle as the central responsibility for white anti-imperialists, we defined party-building as our central task. Instead of seeing our accountability to national liberation as the priority, we saw ourselves as the best judges of what forms of solidarity were needed and how to build it.

We used a correct understanding that colonized nations have the right and need to build separate nationalist parties to justify our strategy of building a separate white party. We failed to recognize the serious contradictions for white people trying to develop and lead their own vanguard class force apart from the leadership of nationalist forces and without accountability to those forces.

We developed strategies to build international solidarity in the context of party building and line struggle within the white left. Accordingly, we often led line struggles based on our own political priorities, focusing on the nature of the white working class or women's liberation instead of struggling about issues that were of critical importance to furthering international solidarity such as the need to support revolutionary armed struggle or the importance of material aid to the national liberation movements.

Building white movement and organization according to our political line was the main goal which determined our political priorities. Our line on women's liberation clearly supported this goal. (See *Breakthrough* vol. II no. 2 for full analysis of our errors in this area.) We elevated the struggle for white women's liberation to a virtually equal position with that of national liberation, glorifying the revolutionary potential of white working class women. We replaced the traditional white left concern with white working class interests with a concern for white working class *women's* interests. We downplayed the white supremacy of the women's and gay movements and the need to struggle that they support the national liberation movements.

We still see building communist organization which is disciplined and built on the structure of democratic centralism and criticism/self-criticism as crucial to building a revolutionary movement among white people which is capable of fighting in solidarity with national liberation against imperialism. We also believe that we have a responsibility to contribute to the development of revolutionary political line and to struggle against opportunist politics. However, we are committed to overturning a politics which places line struggle within the white left and party-building above the development of international solidarity.

One of the serious errors in our politics which flowed directly from placing white interests at the center was our line on armed struggle. In our political statement, written in the winter of 1977, we had practically nothing about the armed violence of the imperialist state against colonized nations and the critical role of revolutionary armed struggle in the fight for national liberation. We dealt with the issue of armed struggle from the viewpoint of the oppressor nation and the stage of struggle in the white left and working class, ignoring the reality that colonized nations around the world are waging revolutionary wars now. We saw the development of an armed fighting force among white people as our separate responsibility, to be undertaken according to our timetable and the goals we defined.

Since the arrest, we have been pushed to understand just how wrong this line is. Oppressed nations are defining the winning strategies for waging revolutionary armed warfare against imperialism. Our responsibility as white people is to take leadership from those strategies, to fight in the context of revolutionary wars of national liberation. A view which does not support revolutionary nationalist strategies inevitably results in placing oppressor nation interests primary and will lead away from revolutionary struggle into opportunism and reformism.

In the context of trying to overturn this wrong line on international solidarity and armed struggle, we now understand better the history and political errors of the Weather Underground Organization (WUO). The WUO was one of the few groups of white people in the US that has ever committed itself on any level to armed solidarity with national liberation. But from the beginning they defined themselves as a separate white fighting force and did not hold themselves accountable to the leadership of national liberation for the development of revolutionary armed struggle. This politics led the WUO to abandon all armed struggle in solidarity with national liberation. By 1976, the WUO was using its anti-imperialist reputation to push opportunism.

In 1976 PFOC led a criticism of the WUO and some WUO members led a split in the WUO and formed the Revolutionary Committee (RC). However, neither PFOC or the RC took up key aspects of the WUO's errors because of their own wrong politics. The article *In Defense of the Book Prairie Fire*, written by Clayton Van Lydegraf for PFOC, opposed the WUO's line on armed struggle mainly on the basis that the WUO doesn't deal with the importance of communist line and organization in leading armed struggle. It holds up the book *Prairie*

*Fire* as the correct definition of revolutionary anti-imperialist politics even though *Prairie Fire* defined armed struggle primarily as a tactic for raising white consciousness and building a base among white people. PFOC defined the exposure of the WUO on terms which would advance our politics and our prestige. Moreover, we rejected correct criticisms that the materials which documented the split in the WUO, which we helped to circulate and publish, contained security breaches.

Many of these criticisms as well as others were sharply laid out in a paper *History Will Not Absolve Us* written by former WUO members. At the time the paper was circulated in the spring of '77, we arrogantly disagreed with these criticisms, continuing to maintain that white people should define the terms for their participation in armed struggle and that all forms of international solidarity, including armed struggle, remained subordinate to party-building.

Our wrong line on armed struggle was a serious consequence of the white supremacy of our political line. Rectifying this politics is an important responsibility before us now.

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These wrong politics were the real underlying cause behind the split in the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee in November 1976 at our national conference. At the time, we defined the cause of the split as the opposing lines on women's liberation between the Bay Area PFOC and New York/Chicago PFOC which we connected to overall political differences regarding our line on oppressor and oppressed nations and party-building. From the beginning, our (Bay Area) real error lay in focusing struggle on the issue of women's liberation in the way we did. This focus represented our white supremacist definition of the central importance of analyzing white women's oppression. It also served as a cover for some of the central line struggles that were going on at the Conference.

From the start, New York/Chicago PFOC struggled that the Conference needed to focus on our line on national liberation and the relation between oppressed and oppressor nations. Bay Area PFOC, on the other hand, regarded that line as a settled matter, something we already understood and united around. We minimized the critical importance for a white organization that was struggling to overturn an opportunist politics and build a revolutionary politics to address the issue of solidarity with national liberation as the priority. Instead we saw the "real" business of the Conference as defining a "full" communist line for our organization—on the Sino-Soviet split, on women,

on party-building—because we wanted to consolidate our organization to take our place in the party-building arena.

We rejected all criticisms of white supremacy at the Conference on the basis that the Bay Area chapter had been the leadership for rectification in the past and therefore we couldn't be making serious white supremacist errors in the present. We ignored criticisms from revolutionary nationalist forces who objected to the split on the grounds that we were placing our line struggle on women above the need for building an organization which could further genuine solidarity with national liberation. We made our main goal the preservation of our line and leadership.

After the Conference we pursued the struggle with New York PFOC (now the May 19th Communist Organization) in a destructive, hegemonic way, labeling them opportunists of the worst variety. In doing this, we attacked one of the few forces of white people struggling for revolutionary anti-imperialist politics. We refused, for a long time, to learn from the more correct politics which May 19th was struggling for with the leadership of revolutionary nationalist forces.

Over the past period, the political criticisms of May 19th, concerning our wrong politics, have been very significant in helping us to overturn our wrong line and uncover the roots of our errors. We are committed to struggling for a principled political relationship with May 19th on the basis of our self-criticism and ongoing rectification of our politics and practice.

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The arrest of the LA5 was the culmination of a seven year FBI strategy to locate the Weather Underground and other white anti-imperialists who were politically close to the WUO. The LA5 were set up in a COINTELPRO type action by the US state because they were white anti-imperialists who had a political commitment to armed struggle against US imperialism in support of national liberation and women's liberation. We have supported and defended the LA5 because we know that the state attacked them because of this political commitment.\*

However, we have also recognized that Clayton Van Lydegraf as a member of the leadership of PFOC, and the other members of the LA5 held the same wrong political line that we have been criticizing in this statement. We have understood that the state used our white supremacist political weaknesses to carry off its successful infiltration of

PFOC and to set up the case against the LA5. And we have seen it necessary to criticize our wrong politics and those of the LA5 as the only basis for moving forward in a revolutionary direction and defending the case of the 5 on a correct basis.

Since the arrest, we have been in sharp struggle with Van Lydegraf over our analysis of the arrest and our self-criticisms of our past political line. Van Lydegraf disagrees with our political self-criticism and the changes in our political line. He has seen the attempt to define our responsibility for the infiltration and arrest as a negation of the state's responsibility and a form of collaborating with the state. He has not taken responsibility for any political errors.

Over his forty year political history, Van Lydegraf has made important struggles for white people to take up support for national liberation and anti-imperialism. He led the struggle within PFOC to overturn the opportunist line of the Hard Times Conference and to base PFOC's politics on an understanding that the division of the world into oppressor and oppressed nations is the defining feature of imperialism. But Van Lydegraf also led, with others, a line which continued to place oppressor nation interests and leadership above solidarity with national liberation and accountability to revolutionary nationalist forces. The fact that Van Lydegraf made contributions to correct politics cannot wipe out his serious responsibility for incorrect politics. At this stage, Van Lydegraf is not in unity with the political line which PFOC now holds. For these reasons, there is no basis for him to be a member of PFOC and he is no longer part of our organization. We continue to support Van Lydegraf's defense as part of the effort to expose and combat COINTELPRO and other state attacks on anti-imperialist movement.

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Through the process of criticism and rectification, PFOC has taken important steps in the past period to strengthen its political and practical commitment to revolutionary internationalism. We recognize, more sharply, our responsibility to intensify our efforts to organize white people to political and material support for national liberation; and to help build movement within the white working class which can contribute to the worldwide struggle, led by national liberation, for the total destruction of imperialism.

A Luta Continua  
Prairie Fire Organizing  
Committee

\*Four of the LA5, excluding Van Lydegraf, have now pleaded guilty to state charges of conspiracy to possess and use illegal explosive devices. See *LA5 Defense Bulletin* and *Update* for more details.

We welcome struggle from comrades about the contents of this statement. Prairie Fire Organizing Committee, POB 40614, Sta.C, SF, Ca 94110