

Building Power to Win Is the Revolutionary Approach to “Bourgeois Electoralism”

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We must make clear that it is imperialism that degrades and destroys the earth, makes water a commodity, food a luxury, education an impossibility, and health care a distant dream.

The following is excerpted from a presentation by Ajamu Baraka to a national webinar Electoral School of the Black Is Back Coalition for Social Justice, Peace and Reparations, June 13 and 14.

The Context of Struggle:

The great African revolutionary, **Amilcar Cabral**, reminded us that without revolutionary theory there can be no revolution.

His reminder was not a call for abstract theorizing, quite the contrary. What he meant was that one cannot advance in practice unless that practice is guided by the most advanced understanding of the material and ideological conditions that revolutionary forces face.

Over the next two days we will ground ourselves in our particular realities as they relate to our strategic and tactical engagement with bourgeois electoral system in the United States.

Let's begin:

The ongoing and current capitalist crisis has created the most serious crisis of legitimacy since the collapse of the capitalist economy during the years referred to as the Great Depression.

The economic collapse comes on the heels of the deep crisis of the economy that occurred in 2007-8. With the economic instability and the increasing economic competition among capitalist states, divisions have emerged among the nations that those of us in BAP refer to as the U.S./EU/NATO Axis of Domination.

The U.S. has responded by moving toward a more confrontational posture, not only with its allies in Europe. It has also elevated China and Russia as national security threats.

Domestically, the African working class never recovered from the collapse of 2007-8. The continued restructuring of the U.S. economy to a low-wage economy has resulted in the African working class being relegated to the lower rungs of the labor force joining

undocumented migrants, immigrants, and other colonized workers.

We are now seeing with the economy the genocidal implications of economic conditions, in which young Black workers have more value as human generators of profit locked up in prisons than as participants in the economy as low-wage workers. This reality is one of the factors driving the obscene phenomenon of Black and Brown mass incarceration in the largest prison system on the planet.

Astronomical youth unemployment, millions of Africans without health care, poisoned environments, and crumbling schools reflect the objective conditions that, with COVID-19, are ravaging the Black communities.

This is the colonial/capitalist system in its neoliberal stage. And that was before the coronavirus pandemic!

The Pandemic pulled the ideological curtain from the system and exposed the brutal realities of a rapacious system of greed, human exploitation and degradation, social insecurity, corruption, and the normalization of coercive state violence.

Bipartisan support for neoliberal capitalist policies over last four decades revealed the devastating impacts of neoliberal policies – the closing of public healthcare facilities, including hospitals as giant for-profit hospital chains consolidated; millions, disproportionately Africans, living precarious lives at the bottom of the labor markets and as gig workers with no benefits, no sick leave, no vacation, no security when ordered to shutter in place by capitalist state because the privatization of healthcare resulted in a healthcare system unable to respond to a national healthcare crisis.

Hundreds of Africans are dying unnecessarily from the virus because of conditions of colonial oppression, which amounts to state-sanctioned murder!

So, the murders of Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Aubrey and the phenomenon of vicious killer cops are just the tip of the iceberg

But because there was no video of grandma, alone and shoved into a corner of the hospital taking her last breath on a ventilator, along with all of the other thousands of Africans who are unnecessarily dying from COVID-19, it took the video of George Floyd to bring the people out of their houses and into the streets.

This is context for the current Black is Back election school as we approach the next round of bourgeois elections. This context informs the ideological, political, and economic issues of the bourgeois electoral arena, and how we see and approach the electoral system.

The Context Determines the Strategy:

Let me share a few points that I believe must inform how we see and engage the electoral arena in a way that develops and advances our forces.

1. There can be no ideological confusion – we must be clear in language that cannot be co-opted or commodified by the state or its associated institutions like liberal funders. So, we must state in unequivocal language that it is the Western colonial/capitalist imperialist system, now led by the U.S., that is responsible for the billions of human beings living in

poverty. It is imperialism that degrades and destroys the earth, that makes water a commodity, food a luxury, education an impossibility, and health care a distant dream. It is the rapacious greed and absolute disregard for human life by imperialism that drives the arms trade, turns human incarceration into a profitable enterprise, and transforms millions into migrants and refugees because of war and economic plunder. This parasitic imperialist domination would be impossible without imperialism's core instrument of enforcement and control – state violence. Beginning with the European invasion of the Americas' in 1492 to this very moment, previously unimaginable brutality and systematic violence was used to enslave, commit genocide, steal lands, despoil cultures and assault the earth, all in the service of what became the Pan-European colonial/capitalist white supremacist patriarchal project. When you start from that foundation, not only are you clear but everyone that you engage with will be clear where you stand.

2. The struggle is for power not reform. We make demands against the state and the system, but it is clear that those demands are in context of a program for winning power. Demands are strategic – participation in electoral system must be seen as an aspect of the process of building dual and contending power. The BIB [19-point program](#) represents a useful roadmap for building and shifting power to the people.

3. The entry point for participating in electoral process must be through organization. Reject candidate centered politics. Engagement with electoral system by progressive forces must be informed by a collective power-building strategy that is part of a broader strategy for building independent popular power. Individualistic, candidate-centered politics lacks accountability and is inherently corruptible.

Issue selection – focus on issues that if won will reflect a significant shift in power to the people. Defund the police – questionable, but if linked to community control of the police, stopping Israeli training of police, cutting the military budget and transferring money to the people; and electoral proportional representation represent demands that can't be easily co-opted by the state.

4. Focus on local races – county commissions, city councils, school board, mayors. The emphasis on the local is connected to what I see as the inevitable disintegration of the U.S. state. As a settler colonial state, the U.S. is, and has always been, a fragile and inauthentic state. That is precisely why a civil war was fought just 70 years after its inception as a constitutional republic in 1791.

We remember the importance of having some degree of local control with the Katrina crisis, where the surrounding white municipalities used their local power to prevent Black people, escaping from the hurricane, to enter their communities. And we watched how regional coalitions were formed during COVID-19 crisis as the Federal Government failed to provide national leadership.

As national and state power become increasingly unable to hold on to a centralized power and there is generalized descent into chaos, having some degree of local control of the state apparatus will be especially important.

In closing.

We are facing some difficult times, but we have faced difficult times before. As we ground ourselves over these next two days during our electoral school, we acknowledge that we are

an African people and we are at war! We did not ask for this war – and it has been a one-sided war so far – but we do not intent for that situation to last that long because we do not intend to lose. We understand that we must win this war – for ourselves and for global humanity!

All Power to the People

No Compromise, No Retreat!

Uhuru!

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