

***Revolutionary Integration: A Marxist Analysis of
African American Liberation,***

by Richard Fraser & Tom Boot


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Introduction to the 2004 Edition

In 1965, when I was 20 years old, I worked in rural Mississippi for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), registering Black voters and attempting to desegregate public facilities. That experience changed my life. What I saw there made me rethink what I thought I knew about my country. Southern poverty—Black, white and Native American—left a deep impression. It seemed so deliberate, so fundamental to the South and so useful to the North. White violence and racial hatred stood in stark contrast to the bravery of workingclass African American women and men like Mr. and Mrs. Hill of Carthage, Mississippi, with whose family I lived during my short stint in the Deep South.

In later years, when people asked me why I became a radical and a socialist, I would say they could blame it on the Magnolia State. But that wasn't the whole story.

From Mississippi, I returned to school at the University of California at Berkeley with more questions than answers. I was disturbed by the competition among civil rights organizations and the NAACP's sabotage of SNCC initiatives. I was dismayed by disputes between civil rights and Black liberation leaders over separatism vs. integration; the proper role of whites in the movement (if there was one); sexism

and the secondary status accorded most women; and the usefulness of pacifism in the face of unbridled official violence. Most important, to my mind, was the question of how to unseat the white oligarchy that still ruled the South and had moved into the White House with Lyndon Johnson's ascension to the presidency.

Despite the courage, the deaths and the immense sacrifices of civil rights fighters, continuing long after I left Mississippi, the American apartheid system was still intact. Legal reforms, while important, had not eliminated the South's institutionalized racism, anti-unionism and race/caste/class divisions. For a couple of years, I tried not to think about all this because it was so depressing.

Then I read the first half of the book you hold in your hands. It was then a mimeographed paper entitled "Revolutionary Integration: The Dialectics of Black Liberation." It had been researched and formulated by a minority Socialist Workers Party tendency led by Richard Fraser (Kirk) and Clara Fraser (Kaye) and submitted as a resolution to the party's 1963 convention. ("Kirk" and "Kaye" were political pseudonyms adopted by the Frasers because of the intense harassment of radicals during the McCarthy period.)

I will never forget the excitement with which I read the section outlining a strategy for the southern struggle. In response to the lawless brutality of white Mississippi, it fashioned an eminently sensible, completely revolutionary program that was based on U.S. history, Marxist economics, union experience, and Black radical scholarship.

These words hit me like a ton of bricks: *"Central to the southern struggle is the demand upon Congress that southern congressmen be denied their seats on the grounds that they do not represent legal state governments but a regime imposed after violent overthrow of legal authority and maintained for nearly a century by force and violence... All armed forces under the jurisdiction of present state*

governments, including local police and sheriffs' bodies, shall be disbanded and disarmed. A volunteer militia shall be recruited from amongst those who support the U.S. Constitution. Governments shall be formed under authority of Congress and supervision of the militias on the basis of universal suffrage of all persons over 18 years of age."

These were ideas with the power to transform the consciousness of whites, Blacks and all oppressed peoples, North and South, and to mobilize a national movement for fundamental political change in the U.S.

The primary education Mississippi had given me was completed by the ideas of Revolutionary Integration: that racism was the *prerequisite* for capitalism's establishment in our hemisphere and, just like sexism, is necessary for its continued rule; that the demand for racial justice and integration (not assimilation or separatism) produces a political upheaval that is transitional to socialism and creates a revolutionary Black vanguard; that the fight against racism must become anti-capitalist if it is to make economic and social gains for the *masses* and not just a handful of entrepreneurs and opportunists.

Some 30 years later, these ideas still strike me as a brilliant analysis of that turbulent period. Many fine books have been written that tell the story of the civil rights effort from the viewpoint of local movements and organizers. Readers now can find critical evaluations of issues initially only addressed in "Dialectics of Black Liberation": the role of the established civil rights organizations, southern white business, the Black Muslims, reformist preachers, southern Democrats, sexist males, and Presidents Johnson and Kennedy. But none of these books attempt to lay out a strategy for a movement capable of inspiring African American trade unionists, breaking northern labor out of its passivity, defending the key leadership of grassroots female civil rights organizers, and winning Black freedom

as part of a broad revolt against capitalism and for socialism. *Revolutionary Integration* tells the history, but it is more than a history book. It is a handbook for revolutionaries.

It is a tragedy that the SWP had already begun its slide into conservatism and bureaucracy by the time this resolution was written. SWP leaders would not permit a democratic discussion of *Revolutionary Integration* and its criticisms of both the civil rights reformists and the virulently anti-female and abstentionist Black Muslims. The dissident tendency was told, in essence, to shut up or get out.

Refusing to stifle their views on this and other issues, Richard Fraser, Clara Fraser and the entire Seattle branch left the SWP and founded the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP) in 1965. *Revolutionary Integration* became one of the party's main theoretical pillars.

Seventeen years later, the second half of this book, "*Revolutionary Integration: Yesterday and Today*," was written by Tom Boot on behalf of the FSP National Committee and adopted by the 1982 party convention.

This section takes off where "*The Dialectics of Black Liberation*" ended: with the Black movement of 1963 poised to move in a revolutionary direction against the southern police state, but lacking a leadership with a viable theory and bold perspective. Boot examines the contenders for radical Black leadership between 1963 and 1982, taking a special look at Malcolm X, Robert Williams, the Black Panther Party, SNCC, and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. He retraces the contribution made by leaders of the Russian Revolution in insisting that U.S. socialists shake off their own prejudices, pay attention to the problems of Blacks and champion their cause. He dissects the destructive role played by the Communist Party in directing African Americans into the Democratic Party and by the SWP, which tail-ended first reformism and then Black separatism. He examines the faulty premise that Black

capitalism is an antidote to the powerlessness of Black workers and takes a hard look at the destructive influence of sexism and heterosexism, especially within the African American community and the Left.

Finally, *Boot* brings it all together in a synthesis of Black history and culture, Marxism, women's rights, and gay liberation known as socialist feminism. This optimistic perspective is the unique contribution to U.S. radicalism made by the Freedom Socialist Party and its sister organization, Radical Women.

Some may question how optimism is possible when 30% of all African American children still live in poverty (a rate *double* the national average); when the suicide rate for Black 10-to-14-year-olds increased 223% between 1980-1995; when two-thirds of the 100,000 youth in detention are children of color; when the non-union South is the fastest-growing economic region and still rules the legislative agenda in Congress and the outcome in presidential elections. But what is the alternative? Cynicism is a comfortable resting place for the discouraged and the privileged. The rest of us must keep faith with those that went before, learn from their mistakes, and press on.

Reading this book will make you mad about missed opportunities. It will make you think about the future. And it will make you want to join the perpetual, international struggle for "Freedom Now!" which is still very much on the agenda in the U.S. and around the world. As my Southern mother used to say, "Those who were not born to live in the world as it is were born to change it." And we will.

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