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USA

# Choices Facing African Americans

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**“Black humanity and dignity requires Black political will and power. Despite constant exploitation and perpetual oppression, Black people have bravely and brilliantly been the driving force pushing the U.S. towards the ideals it articulates but has never achieved. In recent years, we have taken to the streets, launched massive campaigns, and impacted elections, but our elected leaders have failed to address the legitimate demands of our Movement. We can no longer wait.”** – Opening paragraph, Platform of the Movement for Black Lives

“We can no longer wait.” What does that imply? Does it mean breaking with the Democratic Party and building a new political party of African Americans – a new Freedom Now Party? Does it mean going all in to try and take over the left of the pro-free market capitalist party? Does it mean mass actions to make the country ungovernable until full equality is the reality?

No answers are given, yet.

To start with, African Americans need to reject the current platform of the Democratic Party establishment to target the “evil” Russia and President Vladimir Putin. If you believe the mainstream media and the Democratic Party elites, the number one issue facing African Americans and all Americans is alleged Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential elections.

While stating that Trump’s election was legitimate, the only purpose of this Democratic campaign is to undermine Trump and win elections in 2018.

For African Americans, this campaign against Russia (and North Korea, Iran) is a diversion from more central issues including the right to vote. For years the far right and Republican Party has pushed voter suppression laws. Since Trump’s election, his new team of the super-rich has stepped up its efforts to take away votes from Blacks and other citizens.

While liberals focus on Russia, Trump has made big policy changes in federal agencies to undermine health care, public education, environmental regulations, civil liberties and basic civil rights. The Justice Department is seeking to reverse modest changes on drug policies and has given a green light to police departments to make sure Black Lives never mutter.

The liberal establishment targets Russia as basic rights for African Americans are suppressed. The Black-focused media also discuss Russia, because many of their owners are part of the Democratic party establishment.

But their readers are more interested in other issues. Most want to know how to stop the racism, police violence and loss of health care, especially Medicaid, and ask “Where are the new better paying job?”

The words from the Movement for Black Lives Platform quoted above are more on target than when written under the first Black president. The optimism about future change will require mass struggle.

## Three Broad Trends

U.S. history since the second American Revolution, the Civil War, when former slaves were recognized as human beings, has been a history of two steps forward, four steps back. We are entering a retrograde period once again where President Trump snubs civil rights organizations like the NAACP. (He refused to speak at the group's 2017 national convention.)

In this context, a discussion on what tactics and strategies to follow in the age of Trump by Black activists is crucial.

There have been and are three strategic visions facing Black activists (and leaders of other social movements and its left-wing supporters) in the age of Trump and whites-first ideology.

First is the liberal electoral approach of seeking to transform the Democratic Party and its entrenched establishment. The aim is running candidates and using anti-Trump protests to advance that strategy.

The goal is to run more Blue Dog conservative whites. Black women who are the biggest social group backing the Democrats (90% plus voted for Hillary Clinton) complain that the party elites refuse to give them a bigger voice in the party.

Black elected officials (BEOs) are now a bigger part of the leadership base than traditional organizations. They criticize those who focus on protesting the government and corporate policies rather than building the Democratic Party. It is a common theme of Black media pundits on MSNBC and talk radio.

Thousands of BEOs, however, have brought little relief to working class Blacks since the end of legal segregation 50 years ago that allowed a new, better-off middle class to leave urban areas.

The bottom line is that this BEO strategy has been ineffective. There is no firewall against a rising white supremacist Republican Party. Cities like Detroit have more poverty today than 50 years ago.

A second, more radical strategy relies on street marches and protests demanding change. It brings new activists into politics and radicalizes them to consider socialist and anti-capitalist thinking. The goal of this approach (borrowing from the tactics of civil disobedience of the Martin Luther King Jr era) is to win reforms by organizing popular resistance to the Republican Party, Trump and the far right.

It also means generally accepting the Democratic Party as the framework for change. What tends to happen are left wing progressives, running as Democrats, becoming moderates once in office.

While running for office, they subordinate or even oppose the tactics of civil disobedience and mass action. Take the case of Ben Jealous, a former head of the national NAACP and a prominent supporter of Vermont Senator and self-proclaimed socialist Bernie Sanders.

Jealous is running for the Democratic Party's nomination for governor of Maryland. Will he be able to organize public actions as he's done as an activist? Not likely.

In contrast, Rev. William Barber, the former head of the state's NAACP, decided not to run for office. He is continuing his mass protest movement ("Moral Mondays") against the racist and anti-poor policies of the state Republican Party.

The third strategic approach — one with fewer supporters and sharply attacked by liberals — rejects electoralism and the rigged, two-party system. Many of the activists are openly socialist and anti-capitalist. They participate in the social movements but also articulate a long-term anti-capitalist perspective.

Canadian political writer and activist Naomi Klein explains in her new book *No Is Not Enough* that to stand up to Trump, the left must push an anti-capitalist vision within the social movements and build an alternative political movement.

She is correct that mass resistance as a strategy is not enough. Yet Klein like most social movement leaders does not call for a new mass revolutionary party — even if it begins as a core of like-minded militants who are leading social and labor struggles.

## “We Can No Longer Wait”

Unlike earlier periods, particularly after the civil rights victory in the 1960s, there is no serious effort to call for or build independent Black or Labor political parties.

In the 1960s Malcom X represented the strongest voice for Black Nationalism and later internationalism with a denunciation of the two-party system and the capitalist system. Groups like the Black Panther Party and others on the left rejected working within the system. This is not yet the case today.

Blacks and others, including organized labor, need an independent class-based party, a new political party that openly challenges the free market system and pushes for stronger government and state action that puts human rights before profits.

Many African Americans and leading activists of the Movement for Black Lives are challenging the Democratic Party establishment for a bigger role in the party. As white-supremacist forces get stronger in the Trump government, it is likely that some of these activists will break with the Democratic Party as occurred in the post-civil rights revolution era in the 1960s and '70s.

The significance of the Movement for Blacks Lives is a thought-out recognition that the traditional civil rights groups, and their legalistic and electoral strategy alone, aren't working for working class and poor Blacks.

The power of the Movement's Platform and declaration “we can no longer wait” is a road map to move forward with no preconditions. It argues for the need to resist massively, to make multi-ethnic alliances and to seek a new reality that is not the status quo.

The militant wing of the popular movements should include the socialist perspective in its education for those beginning to radicalize for the first time. Building a new leadership incorporating a socialist perspective is key to building a revolutionary movement.

African Americans as a highly discriminated-against community tend to be the most open to the anti-capitalist and socialist vision. (In the 2016 primaries Blacks did like Sanders' economic plans but saw Clinton as the likely president. Black liberals smeared Sanders despite his long support for civil rights.)

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In an address about Palestine and its central place in Mideast and world politics, Australian journalist John Pilger made an observation that is equally appropriate for this discussion:

“For most of the 21st century, the fraud of corporate power posing as democracy has depended on the propaganda of distraction: largely on a cult of “me-ism” designed to disorientate our sense of looking out for others, of acting together, of social justice and internationalism.” (An excerpt from John Pilger’s address to the Palestinian Expo in London on July 8, 2017)

In the age of Trump and with the failures of liberals to lead a fight back, socialists’ support and leadership in the broad social movements and unions, and support for political realignments, is more urgent and possible.

*PS:*

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