

Black Power Halifax, And The World

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The other day I had the opportunity to talk to Rocky Jones for several hours and, as you may expect, some thought-provoking, fear-provoking ideas were brought out, as well as some grounds for scepticism. Rocky had just come back from the Black Writers Conference in Montreal and was still on the intellectual, (or Radical) high that one gets after having participated in an event like that - particularly when such a conference exhibits a unity of feeling, purpose, and planned action as this one did.

He kept saying "you've got to stop thinking on regional terms; we've got Black people all over the world together on this thing." Delegates came from Black communities all over the world - Africa, Britain, South America, the West Indies, the U.S. and Canada - totalling about 200. He talked to a Black brother from Angola who suddenly came to realize that the type of situation they face in Africa is present in Halifax today, although in a different setting and on different levels. Rocky was quick to point out the symbolic nature of the marriage between Stokely Carmichael and Merrian Makeba - King of Black Radicals in the U.S. marries the Queen of Black Africa, symbolic of the fact that the greater part of the world's people can and are uniting against white domination. However, he failed to mention the fact that Carmichael moved into Merrian Makeba's luxurious home - which could also have some sort of symbolic meaning, I should think.

Rocky believes that before there can be equality and respect for a group discriminated against, the underdog must have the power to command this respect, since the "establishment" does not surrender power without being forced, the Black people must be prepared to take power by revolutionary means. This could and probably will lead to armed confrontation with the white establishment in the near future. However, since one no longer thinks

in regional terms, time and people are on the side of the Blacks. Another point continually expressed by Black Power advocates is that it is not the military free power which counts in victory - it is the will of the people - and of course one classic example is Vietnam. The comparison with Vietnam and the idea of all out war is a deliberate one. Rocky now envisages a "World War III" to be fought along racial lines - an all out war where the Negro also has another military advantage. Even if whites bomb hell out of Africa, the Negro population is geographically dispersed throughout white society. Whites will have to be prepared to destroy the centres of their own cities in order to rout out the Black enemy. Rocky thinks they will be unwilling to do this.



Rocky Jones with Stokely Carmichael at the Black Writer's Congress in Montreal.

Innocently, I asked when he thought this "World War III" would break out. The reply was, "Even if I know, I won't tell you. It would be like a general telling his enemy his battle plans." I asked another question, "Where does the white liberal, the man sympathetic to the Black position, belong in this struggle for Black Power?" Rocky's first reaction is "he doesn't belong. It's a Black fight." As he said in his opening address to the conference, he was speaking to the Black delegates, not white delegates. They could listen, but it wasn't their affair - they had no place in discussion or in discussions. Then he qualified himself - if the white liberal really believes in evolutionary change, his place is to work among his own race - to explain the Black position, the seriousness of Black organization, the real nature of sacrifices to be made, and try and bring about "peaceful" change in the establishment. Failing this, he must simply choose sides when the revolution comes - does he fight for black-white equality in real terms or for the status quo which would lead to greater repression.

I asked, "Do you see any hope for equality of race relations, and respect of one for another after the revolution?" The answer was "Possibly, but this is a secondary consideration. It must be remembered that the revolution will change social conditions all over the world as it happens. It is an anti-imperialist war on two fronts. Most of the black nations of the world feel subject to American or Soviet economic imperialism. This is one front where imperialism must be vanquished. (Rocky claims to have no 'standard' radical political allegiances. He says he sees basic truisms in socialism, Marxism, etc. but does not adhere to the total philosophy of any.) The other is within the white societies where the Negro is in the exploited position. "No matter what society you look at, if there are black people in it, they are on the bottom." And it will take a social revolution to bring about meaningful change within the white society.

For a white not intimately involved with the Black Power movement, this type of attitude is so foreign and out of touch with his way of thinking that it seems irrelevant. Liberal reforms are going on all the time. There has been the school integration in the States, the Warren court made all sorts of progress. Even around here, you see Negroes in all sorts of jobs where you never saw them before." Some pertinent facts however, should be used to jolt such well-wishing liberals back to reality - the ratio of Negro children in integrated schools has gone down - it hasn't been able to keep up with population increase. How many 'front jobs' for Negroes are really tokenism with no real change in attitude on the part of white society? Too many is the moderate and polite answer. The white society must also take cognisance of the fact that integration into white society is no longer the goal of Black Power. The idea is to establish a black identity which is wholly black, based on a pride in one's own people and a knowledge of not only their sufferings but also their achievements. This type of attitude no longer fits into the integrationist picture.

A Black Power philosophy as put forward by black radicals has a great many inconsistencies and internal contradictions as a social philosophy or even as a plan of action and breaks down in many places under rigorous logical analysis. The separate identity, separate society idea has a great many practical pitfalls. Much of the sentiment about the 'will of the people' being more important than fire power, or the idea that the movement is international with weight of numbers sound like bravado born out of an intense need to propagandize not only white society but also black liberals and keep up the faith of radicals in their own ideas. However, the most important way to look at the Black Power movement is not to split hairs on small detail, but to recognize that this philosophy is a political reality which must be dealt with as such.

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