

TO: The Freedom Now Campaign
African-American Political Prisoners and POWs
African-American community & supporters

As a consequence of racist government repression of the Black liberation movement twenty years ago there has existed a serious ethical, moral and political deficiency in the African-American community. In the wake of that brutal government repression and co-optation a fertile environment for political opportunism and unprincipled behavior was created. In many respects that opportunism still haunts the African-American community today as it desperately searches for principled leadership.

In many respects the COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE PROGRAM (COINTELPRO) repression of the late sixties and early seventies left African-Americans without militant, principled and courageous activists capable of galvanizing our youth and organizing grassroots needs into militant struggle programs. Those few principled and courageous activists--who were not swallowed up by vicious COINTELPRO and police repression--were isolated by fear and the compromising politics which surged forth in the wake of that repression. Eventually these principled and courageous few were rendered irrelevant.

Briefly stated, it can be said that the repression of the mass Black movements of the sixties and their militant organizations left somewhat of a vacuum in the African-American community that less-than-principled and ethical individuals have rushed to fill and exploit. The militant and uncompromising voice of truth and Black indignation has long been stilled. The battle flag of African-American liberation has been taken up by slick rappers and charlatans in jogging suits like Al Sharpton, **an admitted FBI informant**, who nonetheless is still able to lead marches, organize rallies, and elicit a platform for his opportunism. What better example is there of the leadership void in the African-American community than this absurd image of a glib slick-haired conman masquerading as a Black leader?

The cancer of opportunism, sectarianism, and unprincipled politics is one which has had an adverse impact upon our ability to resist oppression as a people. Failure to expose such opportunism--when it rears its disgusting head--is an ethical and political mistake. COINTELPRO should have taught us the political value of ethical and principled behavior. But how easily we forget.

The issue of African-American political prisoners in America is one that has long been especially vulnerable to opportunistic exploitation and unprincipled sectarian abuse. This is because the issue of African-American political prisoners, by its very

nature, readily lends itself to sectarian opportunism and selfish aggrandizement by people who see in the helplessness of political prisoners a unique chance to advance their own agendas and gain some historical credibility at the same time. Usually such opportunists have a distinct aversion to communicating directly with political prisoners (except when it suits them) and they seek at every turn to mute the public voice of the political prisoner. This is because opportunism seeks to substitute in form what it lacks in content.

Opportunists want their voices, agendas and analysis to dominate - not principle. They want to reap the gain without enduring the pain or doing the unglamorous support work so necessary in building popular sentiment for the freedom of all political prisoners.

Because we are in prison, often isolated and separated by great distances and dependent on others for communications, information and support, various parasitic elements--within and without our community--can and do manipulate us and exploit our plight. When criticized from behind prison walls, these opportunists interject themselves between us, the truth, and our collective best interest.

Some of us, in either a genuine desire for unity, or under the influence of distorted information, have fell easy victim to the bogus accounts of opportunists on the outside and have broken ranks with the principled criticism directed at them by myself and others. Many of us have been down for almost two decades and seem to have lost sight of the fact that we have no organizational relationship with some of the groups and individuals that now claim to represent our interests. For many of us our comrades have been killed or burned out, our organizations were destroyed.

Of course, there are others who have been down for less time and these political prisoners have outside organizational affinity with particular groups. But now we are in the same boat: we are all prisoners. Our freedom will come as a result of principled struggle - not as a consequence of pursuing individual group agendas. Historically this has led to support for particular cases to the exclusion of others of strategic importance for the overall struggle of political prisoners. What does it take before we appreciate the destructive effect opportunism has had upon our plight?

As a political prisoner--held captive for almost twenty years--I have tasted the abject powerlessness of complete isolation and the numbing fatigue from standing alone against an unrelenting enemy that changes shifts on your spirit and never ceases in his attempt to break you. It is for this reason perhaps that I have a particular hatred for opportunists who would politically

exploit the plight of political prisoners without consistently working on our behalf, except to talk loud, be seen and do nothing.

As a consequence of my experience, I have always been and will remain an outspoken foe of sectarian opportunists who practice their deceit behind the political rhetoric of support for political prisoners. Opportunists have no love in their hearts for genuine political prisoners, no respect for our feelings, views or needs.

Recently, individuals such as Coltrane Chimurenga, Viola Plummer and Roger Wareham and the **December 12th Coalition** they represent have exhibited and continue to exhibit opportunistic tendencies where the issue of African-American political prisoners are concerned. These individuals, while professing to champion the cause of African-American political prisoners, have interjected themselves in the struggle around political prisoners in a very opportunistic fashion which warrants our unequivocal and vocal condemnation.

For example: Last year the **December 12th Coalition**, represented by Chimurenga, Plummer and Wareham became a constituent member of the Freedom Now campaign. It was as constituent members of the Freedom Now delegation that they were criticized in writing by myself and other African-American political prisoners for the following:

1. Taking documentation, without permission, from the Center for Constitutional Rights on COINTELPRO and political prisoners which was prepared solely for presentation by a Freedom Now delegation. Freedom Now was to make a presentation to the U.N. Human Rights Conference in Geneva on February 17, 1989. Maggie Smith (a white woman) carried out this less-than-honest mission for December 12th and then pretended as if it was just a mix-up in understanding.
2. Plummer and Chimurenga then traveled to Geneva in advance of the Freedom Now delegation, with the purloined documentation, and met with people in Geneva supposedly around the issue of political prisoners in the U.S., never issuing a written report regarding their itinerary, who they met with, or what was discussed. Their intention to fly to Geneva in advance of the official Freedom Now delegation was not disclosed to the Freedom Now steering committee.
3. Subsequent to their return from Geneva, these same individuals sponsored an event around the issue of political prisoners and used the Freedom Now campaign name on their leaflets without the knowledge, permission or participation of Freedom Now in the event.

4. After a letter of criticism was written to them, signed by myself and other African-American political prisoners, they withdrew from Freedom Now.

To this day, they have not responded in person or in writing to the criticisms we made of their behavior. In fact, they did not even appear personally before Freedom Now but instead sent white representatives who communicated on their behalf. These representatives offered the excuse that because Freedom Now did not issue a formal retraction of our criticism December 12th was withdrawing from Freedom Now. Their request seemed bizarre: how could Freedom Now issue a retraction for a statement that they did not make? We, as political prisoners, expressed our criticism. Our criticism is our own! It may or may not have been that of Freedom Now. Why didn't December 12th communicate with us directly?

In February 1990, December 12th once again sent representatives to Geneva and again arrived in advance of the Freedom Now delegation. In fact when the Freedom Now delegation arrived, December 12th had already made its presentation.

Opportunism knows no shame and as long as some political prisoners remain liberal and do not speak out against parasitic opportunists and groups and permit them to use their names, a unified and principled support movement will never evolve. Opportunists seek to project themselves at the head of struggles based upon their own sectarian agendas and perceptions. Seldom are they willing to accept criticism, direction or advice. In other words they refuse to be accountable to anyone but themselves.

None of us will ever secure freedom as a consequence of opportunism. Our freedom will ultimately come about as a result of the power of a principled movement. It is my position that until such time that December 12th members answer the criticisms leveled at them and admit their errors they should receive neither recognition or aid from anyone who claims to support our cause. I, for one, will not be compromised by opportunists. I will not involve myself with or assist those who do.

Dhoruba

Dhoruba Bin Wahad
African-American Political Prisoner (1971 to 1990)
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