

INTRODUCTION

In your hands is a treasure: a compilation of 14 years of writings on a rich array of subjects by activists of color in the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP) and Radical Women (RW).

With our written words, we have traversed racial, ethnic, and sexual boundaries in giving voice to our true selves, drawing on our life experiences with many forms of oppression. Our writings give volume to voices which have long been silenced, distorted or ignored.

We are members of the National Comrades of Color Caucus (NCCC) of the Freedom Socialist Party and Radical Women. We are African American, Chicana/o, Latina/o, indigenous people, and Asian Pacific Americans of Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Filipino ancestry. Our ranks include lesbians, gays, straights, youth, elders, workers, and students. We are integrationist, internationalist, feminist and multi-issue.

We believe that people of color will spearhead the coming American revolution. We know the forefront role of people of color is fundamental to reaching a new day without the human degradation and other horrors of capitalism. We have joined forces with our allies to create that new day of freedom.

This anthology is a labor of love and our gift to you, our readers, and to ourselves—a gift which expresses our belief in the beauty of the struggle for social change and the possibility of creating a better world.

Our voices

Articles in this collection were originally published between 1982-97 in the “Voices of Color” column of the *Freedom Socialist* newspaper, a regular and still continuing feature coordinated by the National Comrades of Color Caucus. Topics include an analysis of tensions between African Americans and Jews, the heroism of Black feminists, the fortitude of Chinese immigrants, the labor struggles of Chicanas/Chicanos, the dehumanization of Asians and Pacific Islanders, the ongoing sovereignty battles of indigenous people, the courageous fight of lesbians and gays of color, the necessity for bilingualism and Ethnic Studies programs, and much more.

The book also contains guest articles on Jewish issues. Periodically we have asked our Jewish colleagues to contribute pieces for the “Voices of Color” column on subjects such as the role of Jewish radicals in the antiwar movement and the need for a socialist, anti-Zionist solution in Palestine. While anti-Semitism differs from racism in its historic roots and modern expression, we feel a bond with workingclass Jews due to our shared experiences of discrimination and the laudable part played by Jews in the '60s Black civil rights movement and other progressive struggles. Given today's heightened climate of anti-Semitism, we feel it is especially important for people of color to speak out against the oppression of Jews.

As a whole, these writings are intended to promote ongoing discussions in people of color communities and on the Left. We also hope to encourage our brothers and sisters of color to get acquainted with Radical Women and the Freedom Socialist Party and join us in becoming agents for revolutionary progress.

Who we are

The National Comrades of Color Caucus is unique in the history of the Left. And so are the parent groups to which we belong.

The Freedom Socialist Party and its sister group, Radical Women, are multiracial, revolutionary feminist organizations. We believe that the most exploited—in particular women of color—have the potential to unite and guide a worldwide movement that can win total human liberation through the overthrow of capitalist rule. The FSP is a 30-year-old political party of women and men in the living tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. Radical Women is an autonomous women’s organization dedicated to developing female leaders and providing a leftwing direction to the feminist movement.

The NCCC is composed of the people of color within both organizations. National Coordinator Yolanda Alaniz has headed the NCCC for many years, overseeing the growth of national leadership and caucuses in Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco and Seattle. We are a thriving body of thinkers and doers, vindicating the FSP and RW program of the key role of the most oppressed and putting forth our ideas as radicals of color.

The main purposes of the NCCC are to use tough love—supportive criticism and, just as important, praise—to shape a cohesive team of strong individuals; to assess the state of race liberation efforts; to direct the intervention of RW and FSP in the people of color movements; and to monitor our organizations to insure that problems regarding race are expeditiously and fairly resolved.

The caucus analyzes current issues and arrives at courses of action. We practice what we think, taking our ideas and energies into our communities, where we educate about the need to join forces against all oppression.

We participate in every aspect of FSP and RW life. Together, we build united fronts to stop the Nazis. We defend abortion rights and fight forced sterilization of women of color. We work for affirmative action and organize against discriminatory legislation. We strive for democracy and social activism in our unions and for a labor party that will break with the treacherous, big-busi-

ness-controlled Democrats and Republicans. We advocate lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender rights. We uphold the Cuban revolution and denounce the U.S. blockade against it. We support indigenous struggles in the Americas and around the world.

We share a collective belief: that workingclass people of all races, sexes, ages, and sexualities can and must work together to defeat our common and most powerful enemy—the capitalist system. We recognize that we are not each others' enemies. This unifying credo creates a foundation upon which we can construct a society without class distinctions, where all may live their lives on the highest plane of human culture.

Origin of the caucus

The National Comrades of Color Caucus was born in February 1981 out of the kind of intense political conflict that often sparks new developments in the radical movement. That these debates did not destroy FSP and RW, but instead strengthened them, is a tribute to these groups and to the Comrades of Color Caucus.

The role of people of color in our organizations came under scrutiny when a few white members of Radical Women formed a hostile clique in the Seattle branch. A clique is an unprincipled political alliance which promotes secondary, organizational gripes to a paramount level or raises misleading charges that disguise ideological differences. Such dishonest machinations are always accompanied by an attack on leadership.

The 1981 grouping blasted Radical Women's standards of accountability and collective decision-making and falsely accused FSP of "dominating" Radical Women. They tried to gain the support of new, inexperienced members of color by claiming RW's program was racist in advocating the vanguard role of women of color.

It was clear that the intriguers' charges of racism were in themselves a racist attempt to use the women of color.

Much to their credit, all the members of color remained loyal to Radical Women. They refused to join the antagonistic faction and stood with white members in calling the manipulators on their outrageous behavior.

Once the truth was exposed, the clique slithered away, never to be heard from again.

This short-lived crisis afforded an opportunity. The militants of color who had defended Radical Women against the clique decided to continue their out-front role by forming the Comrades of Color Caucus.

We are grateful to the late Clara Fraser—the stellar Jewish feminist cofounder of FSP and RW—for suggesting the caucus and advancing the participation of people of color in many other ways over numerous decades. Clara was often the first to recognize when attention was needed to internal race relations and to recommend intervention on race issues outside our groups. In many instances, she was at the helm in showing comrades how to confront racism and anti-Semitism and initiating action on these questions. It is a credit to FSP and RW, the organizations to which she dedicated her life, that the comrades of color are not alone in dealing with matters of race.

Another crisis strengthens the caucus

In 1991, ten years after the Seattle fight, the Comrades of Color Caucus grew to maturity after another sharp but necessary conflict within the Bay Area branch. (See “We are the leaders we’ve been waiting for,” page 101.) This time, an attack on national FSP leadership was launched by two white females and a Black man.

Once again, accusations of racism were raised as a smokescreen: the defectors’ real motivation was their refusal to be held accountable and their rejection of revolutionary politics. They seized on two unrelated incidents of insensitivity by two white members and rejected all attempts at resolution. They intended to set up the comrades of color to do their fighting for them by fomenting an inter-

nal war over race. But the comrades of color proved once again they would not be used in the name of racism as a weapon against FSP and RW.

The Bay Area's principal members of color—Nellie Wong, Moisés Montoya, Nancy Reiko Kato and Merle Woo—rallied to defend themselves, their branch, and the national party. In this, they received the full backing of comrades of color in other cities, the FSP National Office, and the entire international membership.

With courage, dedication, and *ganas* (desire), Bay Area comrades of color combatted the factionalizers. They took the offensive and victoriously reclaimed their branch. The traitors left, having failed to recruit even one adherent outside the Bay Area. Another clique went down the tube of opportunism and reformism, disgracing themselves along the way.

Lessons learned

Comrades of color received quite a political education from these battles. We vowed: Never will we be used! Never will we be tokens! And never will we allow anyone to betray our class and our program by fabricating racist incidents or by refusing to clear up real occurrences of racism. To carry out these resolves, we set ourselves the task of becoming the strongest and most confident, highly skilled and theoretically grounded leaders possible.

As human beings living under the distorted social conditions of capitalism, none of us are exempt from making racist, sexist or homophobic mistakes. We make no excuses for oppressive conduct in society or in our organizations. But we find it most effective to confront our political colleagues within the context of our common beliefs and with a calm and rational approach. The comrades of color, and the entire membership of FSP and RW, are committed to correcting racist behavior through timely, direct, open, honest, and educational discussions. Because we share a socialist ideology which upholds the highest

standards of human relations, we are able to both clear up racism when it occurs and reach an understanding of its root cause.

Class war, not race war

A central issue addressed in these pages is whether fighting racism is a crucial front line in a united battle for class liberation or whether each oppressed race is engaged in a separate war against whites.

The NCCC believes it can be very valuable for people of color, especially women of color, to form their own groups and work together on shared concerns. We agree with independent organizing as long as it does not preclude participation in the multiracial struggles of working people. Such autonomous initiatives are very different from the separatist policy of cultural nationalism.

Cultural nationalists react to racism by uniting around color and culture alone and ignoring *class*—the fundamental division of society into haves and have-nots, bosses and workers. In the name of racial solidarity, they usually end up supporting members of their own ethnicity within the ruling class at the expense of workers of all colors. In addition, racial exclusivity erects a barrier between workers of other races who should be natural allies.

We understand the attraction of clustering with one's race "family" against whites. A similar response to oppression has at times generated separatism among feminists, lesbians and Jews. There are strong pressures to conform to isolationism, but it has deadly consequences.

Cultural nationalism's blindness to class makes it reactionary. It does not address the origin of racism in capitalism's drive to reap maximum profits by using bigotry to justify grossly underpaying people of color and to divide the entire working class. By wrongly identifying whites as the enemy rather than capitalism, race separatism arrives at disastrous tactics. It directs workers of color away from their allies among white workers, prevents linkages among

women of different races, and leads to treacherous blocs with the bosses for the sake of a few crumbs. It denies the importance of other liberation struggles and is deeply sexist, homophobic, anti-Semitic, anti-radical, and hostile to other people of color.

Our answer as socialist feminists of color is very clear. We counter the misleaders. We educate that we are in a *class* war, not a *race* war. We refuse to play the suicidal divide-and-conquer game of people of color against each other and against whites. We unite with those who have common interests with us, no matter the color of their skin. We propose a program to bring the class together, not split it. At the same time, we fight bigotry whenever it appears and recognize that in order to stop racism or other kinds of oppression, we must defeat capitalism and replace it with socialism.

This may not be the easy way out, but it is the only way that can succeed.

¡Viva la revolución!

The National Comrades of Color Caucus is committed to achieving a better life for all people. We find fulfillment in collective action on all issues of equality, liberation, and self-expression. By ridding the world of prejudice and oppression, the human species will not simply survive, but will flourish.

It is with this purpose that we continue to speak our minds in the “Voices of Color” column and in every other arena. Enjoy the fruits of our labor.



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Third World Conference of Lesbians and Gays: The personal vs. political

1982

by Yolanda Alaniz

The first time that Third World lesbians and gays met for a national conference was a political high for everyone. That was in October 1979, and 500 people engaged in an intensive debate of political ideas, points of unity, and differences. Afterwards, the conference became an impressive contingent in a massive march on Washington, D.C. held that same weekend.

By comparison, the second national conference in Chicago on Thanksgiving weekend 1981 was a downer, a disappointment.

Poor advance publicity, travel difficulties posed by the air traffic controllers' strike, and a hefty registration fee combined to keep attendance below a hundred.

The conference agenda primarily addressed personal feelings and relationships, and individual solutions. Despite a banner proclaiming "A Unified Rainbow of Strength," the focus was not on program or organizing, but on forming networks for individual contacts.

Daniel Tsang, conference speaker and editor of *Gay Insurgent*, had something important to say: "Our challenge is to form a united front against our oppressor." These fighting words could have sparked productive discussion had the conference organizers, the National Coalition of