

City of African resistance

St. Petersburg goes Uhuru

This presentation was given in Philadelphia on November 16, 1997. It is an excellent summation of the mass work of the Party in St. Petersburg following the October 24, 1996 police murder of eighteen-year-old TyRon Lewis, which sparked rebellions in the African community.

On November 13, three weeks after Lewis was murdered, a grand jury in St. Petersburg exonerated the killer cops. On that day more than three hundred militarized police attacked the regularly scheduled meeting of the National People's Democratic Uhuru Movement held at the Uhuru House. The police shot the city's entire supply of tear gas into the hall where more than a hundred people of all ages were gathered. In response, African workers again took to the streets, shooting down a helicopter and forcing the police to retreat.

Following the police murder and the rebellions, the African People's Socialist Party worked tirelessly to unite the entire African community around the interests of the African working class. Years of intense mass struggle ensued, during which the Party, and Chairman Omali himself, emerged as the undisputed representatives of the African community of St. Petersburg. Yeshitela successfully forced the city government and ruling class to acknowledge, for the first time in history, the demands by the community to end the brutal police containment policy and to implement genuine economic development that would uplift the entire African working class.

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Uhuru!

In order to talk about the struggle that has been waged by African workers in St. Petersburg, Florida, I need to establish the overall political context. For a long time it was understood by people around the world that African people inside this country and wherever we are located are oppressed and exploited. With the relative success of our worldwide liberation movements of the 1950s and 1960s, it was recognized that oppressed peoples, at least in theory, had a right to be free. This was accepted because of the serious struggles waged by oppressed peoples all over the planet.

The viciousness of imperialist white power was being exposed on a daily basis for the whole world to see, and a lot of people worldwide were sympathetic to the struggle of black people in this country. No matter what else they thought about it, white people in the U.S. had to recognize that black people were oppressed and exploited. To some degree white people were able to understand that the United States government had something to do with that oppression.

In the 1960s we saw a revolutionary movement develop among African people in this country. As this movement rose up, the United States government fought against it with a fury. They assassinated our leaders all around this country and jailed movement activists in a very brutal way.

Some of this was televised quite publicly so the whole world could know about it. The assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. was public. The assassination of Malcolm X was in front of an audience. There was the brutal murder of Fred Hampton. All around the country, cops were shooting Panthers in staged shootouts, and the leadership of the black revolutionary movement in this country was crushed. When I say leadership, I'm talking specifically about the leadership of African working

and poor people, who led an activist, independent movement in this country.

The U.S. government crushed down our Black Revolution of the Sixties, wiped it out. It killed people all over this country—just murdered and slaughtered people, and threw people in dungeons and prisons.

The Black Revolution was central to all revolutionary and progressive activity in this country. When they crushed our movement, they effectively crushed the leadership for everything else that attempted to be progressive or revolutionary.

The U.S. government waged a counterinsurgency against our movement. As part of that counterinsurgency, politicians were raised up as the new leaders of the black community. Some political forces became significant only because progressive and revolutionary forces were killed.

When our movement was crushed, the U.S. government waged a campaign against black working and poor people, and by extension against the whole African community. A campaign of slander and demonization was initiated. As a consequence, today no one remembers that Africans are oppressed and exploited. Now, African workers are targeted as the problem. We are the “criminals.” White people are scared of us.

It’s so illogical when you think about this. African people have only had the vote for the last thirty years. Thirty years ago white people would actually lynch you for trying to vote in this country. Today, it is assumed that black people are a terrible threat that everybody’s supposed to fear. It is the most ridiculous, obscene kind of thing.

African working class without a voice

In the absence of the independent revolutionary organizations that we had in the 1960s, nobody speaks about and articulates the interests of the masses of African working and poor

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people. We only get statements from the politicians and from liberal and petty bourgeois, middle class organizations that lead the charge *against* the black community.

Now you've got Africans occupying positions of authority to maintain the system of oppression of the African community. They killed off our revolutionary movement. They killed off our revolutionary leaders. Then they raised up black leaders to function for white power.

So the masses of African people are now demonized. You've got drugs and other things imposed on the community. They have demonized the community, called everybody who's in the community a "criminal," saying that we bring the conditions on ourselves. We are now the "permanent underclass."

In the past, people recognized that the Black Panther Party had a constituency. It was a legitimate constituency of people with legitimate needs and aspirations that were summed up in their Ten Point Program. They might not have liked the Panthers, but they could not deny that the Panthers had a constituency in the African working class communities.

But now they've destroyed the people's organizations and characterized the people as the problem. They don't have to listen to black folks. They can let whole communities be wiped out. The devastation in the African community is not explained today as being a consequence of oppression by white people or the government. "They brought it on themselves." Nobody speaks for African workers anymore. "If an organization is talking this old radical talk, it's because they're extremists and they don't have any social base." So they just dismiss it.

This affects whole federal and local budgets. You don't have to spend that money on the needs of the African community now. You can put it in places to shore up white power. You don't have to worry about infant mortality or anything else that's happening to black people. You can create economic institutions to feed

white people by putting African people in prisons. You don't have to pay attention to poverty or homelessness, because there's no spokesperson for our community. Nobody speaks for the African community.

That makes it easy for the U.S. government to kill people in the streets and not have to explain it. There is a long list of people who've been killed by the police. If these were white people, they would be armed to the teeth and shooting police.

Nobody has to pay any attention to the African community. Just lock them up and put them in jail if they don't act right. Put police on the school grounds to lock up the children. This is the situation.

Any revolutionary organization on the scene has been characterized as some dinosaur left over from the 1960s, completely out of tune with things as they are—an extremist, marginal manifestation without any social base. That's how things are in this country today, generally speaking. That's part of what makes the struggle in St. Petersburg significant.

Police killing used to justify greater repression

On October 24, 1996 the police in St. Petersburg, Florida shot eighteen-year-old TyRon Lewis three blocks from the Uhuru House. It was not supposed to be a problem because he was a black male, and the black male has been defined as menacing. Young African men now are supposed to be menacing. They can't walk down the street without being menacing.

So they can kill TyRon Lewis in broad daylight. If there's a brief uprising as a result, they can handle that. That's alright, they can crush it.

In fact, the rebellion justifies a greater kind of repression. They kill TyRon Lewis, and then that justifies bringing in Weed and Seed.¹ They say, "O.K. We're going to bring in some

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economic development.” What’s the form of the economic development? It’s a \$300,000 Weed and Seed program.

First of all, \$300,000 is less money than the mayor paid for his house, and they’re going to bring it for the whole black community. That’s an insult.

Secondly, Weed and Seed is a police program. It is a designer program that allows the cops to use the most anti-democratic attacks on the people, and to do it within defined borders where it’s just black people who are getting the brunt of it. They can use preventive detention, wire tapping and federalized penalties against black people in an area defined as the Weed and Seed areas. So, you’ve got one law for white people, while black people are under a special federal law whose sentences are three times greater than those given to white people.

So this is what they do: they put the rebellion down and then create a police cordon around the community to make sure that after having put it down, there’s more repression than there was before they killed the boy.

Now it’s not just the St. Petersburg police department in the community. They have sent in the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the state attorney’s office. All of these forces have been brought into this target area where African people live.

Problem solved, from their perspective. TyRon Lewis is dead. Everyone in the white world knows he’s supposed to die. If you don’t believe it, all you have to do is look at the letters to the editor in the newspaper, and listen to the most popular talk radio programs in the city.

All they talked about was why TyRon Lewis should have died. “He should have gotten out of the car. Bob, what do you do when the cops tell you to get out of the car? You just get out of the car. Isn’t that what you do, Bob? You just get out of the car. If he had

nothing to hide, he should have gotten out of the car, Bob.”

This is the kind of thing that poses as an explanation for why Africans get executed. Now there’s the death penalty for not getting out of your car. It’s not in any law books that I have ever heard of that if you don’t get out of your car, you die. But it’s alright if it’s an African person.

A couple of months ago a white guy in St. Petersburg had a gun and was shooting up in the air. The police came, he pointed the gun at the police and they killed him.

You should have heard the outrage from the white community about killing this guy. He was armed, pointing and shooting guns at the cops. Nobody’s disputing that. The white community was outraged. You should have seen the letters to the editor. “They could have shot him in the leg.”

So TyRon Lewis was supposed to die. The rebellion was alright because they came in and crushed it down. This is the kind of thing that happens all over the country when the police kill an African.

Uhuru Movement intervened in the name of African workers

But the difference in St. Petersburg was that there was a revolutionary organization on the ground. We intervened in the process and helped the people understand what it meant that TyRon Lewis had been killed.

As a consequence, there was a profound struggle that jumped off. This was crucial. First, the African working class, which had been pushed out of political life by the terror of the government with the defeat of the Black Revolution of the Sixties, thrust itself with a fury back into political life.

Secondly, the rebellion in response to TyRon Lewis’ murder was not aimless. It was focused. In Los Angeles, there was a rebellion after the beating of Rodney King, but there were no aims, no goals. It just exploded. Afterwards different people had

opinions, but there was no leadership on the ground. There was no revolutionary leadership that had a direct connection to the people who made the rebellion. Miami had rebellions in 1980, '87 and '89, but nothing benefiting the African working class community was achieved as a consequence of them.

In St. Petersburg, the masses thrust themselves into history and political life. There was a political center there. The state attorney and the media immediately started saying, "Get the Uhuru Movement. They are the ones who started the rebellion. Get 'em, get 'em." They slandered TyRon Lewis and they decided they had to move on us.

The people thrust themselves into political life, but also there was political leadership for them on the spot. That was a crucial development not only for St. Petersburg, but also for the movement in this country. That's why they came at us.

They set it up with the media to define us in a fashion that would allow them to come and put people in prison. Every time they tried to prove that Uhuru was responsible for the rebellion, they showed pictures of Sobukwe, an APSP organizer, standing up on the car making speeches. So Sobukwe was definitely going to jail. He was heading straight into the chain gang. According to them, that's how it was supposed to be.

Then, the African People's Socialist Party built a coalition, the African American Leadership Coalition. We didn't start out to build the coalition, actually. We just started out working for self-protection, self-defense.

The local chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) held a meeting, planning to run down to city hall and ask for some of the money that was coming into the city as a result of the rebellion. We heard about the meeting and went to it. The media was sitting in the hallway waiting for the SCLC to come out and tell them what the plan was.

I went into the meeting and told them that they were just asking for money. They were not saying anything about the conditions of the people, so we struggled that they had to include the people's demands.

We said that you've got to call for the prosecution of the cops who killed this brother. Call for reparations and the release from jail of everybody who was arrested during the rebellion. We called for them to demand, "Hands off the Uhuru Movement."

Most of the middle class Africans in the meeting united with those demands, except the SCLC guy. He didn't want to do it. He wanted to do everything but that. But we forced him to say that he was united.

The people saw us on television. They saw all these diverse forces sitting down together, and black people were really moved by that. They said, "Finally the community is united." The people put pressure from below which helped this guy from the SCLC get on the right track. It also helped him because he figured this was the only way he could get the money. Plus he almost admitted to the white folks in my presence that with him being in this coalition, "We got Omali under control."

That was fine. I have no ego in that way—I'll be "under control." Now all the preachers were involved in the coalition. So for the State to come get us, they had to come through the preachers. That complicated things for white power, because if I'm just this marginal force and the Uhuru Movement has no base in the community, then why were all these people standing there with us?

Community defends Uhuru Movement on November 13

On November 13, 1996, the day the grand jury exonerated the two cops who had killed TyRon Lewis, we in the Uhuru Movement were seeing signs that the police were getting ready to move on us in a serious way. We were in a meeting trying to

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strengthen the coalition. We called on them to come to our regularly scheduled National People's Democratic Uhuru Movement (NPDUM) meeting that night. One of the preachers said, "Our position should be that an attack on one is an attack on all." The coalition called a press conference right away, and though the unity was somewhat shaky, they said, "An attack on one is an attack on all!"

Later that same day the State attacked the Uhuru House in a very serious way. The *St. Petersburg Times* was printing editorials really castigating the preachers, chastising them for being in a coalition with Omali Yeshitela. They needed me isolated, they needed Uhuru isolated, but they couldn't do it! They were saying to the preachers, "You shouldn't be part of this coalition because Omali Yeshitela refuses to renounce violence." That was the stuff coming from the media. But we were able to hold onto the relationship with the forces in the coalition.

When they attacked us on November 13, it was a crucial moment. This was more important than the rebellion of October 24, the night of the police murder of TyRon Lewis. October 24s have happened all around this country. It's not that they kill us that's so significant; *it's what we do in response to the killing that's significant.* They needed the Uhuru Movement out of the way. That's why they moved on us and slandered us.

On November 13, they came to get rid of us so they could go back to business as usual, especially since they had all these plans for a baseball team that they are dropping down in the middle of the African community. So they brought in everything, believe me. You really had to be there.

On November 13, some three hundred members of a variety of local, county and state police organizations attacked the Uhuru House with a barrage of tear gas. They attacked black babies and children, women and men. There were more than a hundred people there for the regularly scheduled meeting that

night. Hundreds more were outside.

The ferocity of the attack resulted in several fires being set by tear gas canisters and depletion of all the tear gas in the city police armory.

The obvious intent of the attack was to kill the Uhuru leadership. However, the heroic masses of the community—their faces covered with bandanas—rose up, rock, bottle and gun in hand, and repelled the invaders. They shot down a helicopter and wounded two policemen. They saved the lives of the people in the Uhuru House and defended the integrity of the community.

The Uhuru Movement was incredible during all this. All our forces stood tall! On the outside of the building, the work that we had done for so long in the community was paying off. The people came to the defense of the movement. They actually defeated this armed force that was outside and pushed them back!

In explaining what happened to our building the media said there were gunshots aimed at the police which came from the vicinity of the Uhuru House. We were to learn later that the state attorney's office had put out a statement from the grand jury absolving the cops of any responsibility for killing TyRon Lewis.

The statement said the cops were justified in killing TyRon Lewis, but blamed the Uhuru Movement for causing all these problems. It was clear that the statement was supposed to have been justification for the destruction of our movement, including the physical destruction of the people in that building.

Their plan was to attack our building, kill our leadership, then put an article in the paper explaining that the cops were innocent but we were guilty. So the grand jury that was supposed to be dealing with the cops that killed TyRon Lewis actually indicted us! The plan was: the cops walk, we're dead, and the explanation from the grand jury is we were the ones who started everything in the first place.

But none of it worked, because we survived the whole thing thanks to the heroism of that community! The attack on November 13 was supposed to solve the problem for them. When it didn't work, we began to see contradictions emerge inside the city council, which is made up of representatives of the ruling class. City council members began fighting with each other, arguing, having open debates. Heavy criticism was leveled at the chief of police because he didn't finish us off.

Three days later they staged a little unity march which talked about "black and white unite." They were going to march chanting "u-ni-ty, u-ni-ty." The march began on Ninth Street and Eighteenth Avenue heading towards downtown. The Uhuru House is on Thirteenth Street and Eighteenth Avenue. We decided that we would join that march from the back. When the march took off it was mostly white people. When the black petty bourgeois sellouts didn't see us, they joined the march as well.

After the march had taken off, we ran to catch up with it. There were about thirty of us in uniforms and combat boots. Everyone in the march was chanting "unity" and holding hands. As we ran down the street in uniform towards the march, the people in the community began cheering. African people standing on the side lines were cheering, "There they are!" An article in the *St. Petersburg Times* described how this dual march was going on with the people in the front chanting "unity, unity," while we were in uniform running and chanting, "Black people united will never be defeated!"

The Uhuru Movement and I had been so demonized by the city and the media. But when the mayor got up to speak at the rally downtown at the end of the march, people started immediately heckling him. So the mayor didn't stay up there very long. He beat it off the platform before the boing could reach a crescendo. But when I came up to speak, the people welcomed me like a hero. It was tremendous. The prestige of our movement

just went up so much because they had tried to kill us and yet we walked out of there. The prestige of the movement just skyrocketed. Now the mayor was heckled off the platform in downtown white St. Petersburg and I was welcomed as a hero!

Subsequent to that, Henry Cisneros from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) came to town to investigate the situation. Clinton² had sent him because he didn't want contagion; he didn't want St. Petersburg to be happening everywhere else. Cisneros saw right away that they couldn't do anything they wanted to do without coming to terms with the Uhuru Movement! He asked for a private meeting with me before he met with the city council. As a consequence of the meeting he created the Citizens Advisory Commission that would oversee the theoretical money, the phantom \$20 million the federal government was supposed to send in to deal with the situation in St. Petersburg.

Cisneros told the city council "I've been all over but this is the worst place I've ever been" in terms of the treatment of African people. He was saying, "I've never seen anything like this. The police are just incredible," etc., etc. The city council was so subjective; they had personalized what happened so much that they couldn't see what was in their best interest. Cisneros was able to tell them that they were going to have to deal with Omali Yeshitela and the Uhuru Movement.

Cisneros created the Citizens Advisory Commission. I said I didn't want any part of it and he said, "I really wish you'd be part of it." So we thought about it and agreed that it would be a good idea.

Uhuru Movement stands consistently firm

So here's what happened. We started out clearly being an organization of the African working class and poor people. That's where our work is based. Then with the rebellions we went into

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this coalition and were working among the petty bourgeoisie. Finally with the Citizens Advisory Commission, we find ourselves actually participating with representatives of the ruling class and elements of the State organization. The State, the government and the ruling class have a problem because they don't have anybody who can lead them out of this mess they're in. So we're working on three different levels now.

Our stand was consistently firm, fighting for the interests of the African working class. In response one of the worst middle class forces—the guy from the SCLC—split off because he couldn't get what he wanted. He called a press conference to try to destroy the coalition and certainly to isolate me. That didn't work.

We moved the coalition to call a black community convention which would unite the whole black community on a single agenda for the first time ever. Thus we moved forward and left this guy behind.

It's been our work in this coalition to create a strategic thrust for everybody to move all in the same direction. This is why people haven't easily been able to sell each other out. The SCLC guy attacked us because he wanted to go for the sell out, but we kept things moving in a certain direction, making it hard to do. Soon the middle class sector started seeing that we were winning a place for them. We moved to create a strategic trajectory for the whole community based on the question of economic development and the interests of African workers. That is the issue for everybody. The ruling class talks about "crime," we demand economic development. It's the only solution.

So we're working. We have criticized Weed and Seed. We went to 10,000 houses with a flyer summing up Weed and Seed. We go to the Weed and Seed meetings. Every time they put a microphone in front of my face, I criticize the city for trying to use police containment as a substitute for economic development. It

is unacceptable and it will not work.

We defend the memory of TyRon Lewis even as they slander him and his family. We call on his mother to stand up at public meetings with the city, and we force the city to recognize her.

I pushed for an emergency summit on economic development which was held in August, 1997. We called the whole community out and wrote a paper on what we mean by economic development.

On August 23, the Uhuru Movement held a march with hundreds of people holding posters and banners calling for economic development and social justice. We created a strategic trajectory for the whole community. Now other folks have started chiming in, calling for “economic development.” First the Citizens Advisory Commission said their thrust was going to be economic development. Then the mayor started talking about economic development. Everybody wants to talk about economic development now.

On November 4, there was a town hall meeting on economic development at a community center a block from the Uhuru House. Bankers were there. The Chamber of Commerce was there. The mayor and the people who head up the city’s economic development program were there. Right now we have a commitment for something like a total of \$6 million in economic development for the African community.

The thing that makes it significant is what we’ve been able to do. Usually they make a deal with somebody and call that economic development. Usually Reverend Chickenbone or somebody can get a deal to train one hundred fifty people for jobs that don’t exist, and that’s what they call economic development. They were always able to circumvent any kind of struggle because most of the black businesses are so hungry and poor they have not been able to fight for economic development for the community. They can only fight for themselves. So the government would

give this little guy some money, and boom, the movement would be destroyed because he got what he wanted.

But we've been clear from the very beginning: we don't want some money. We're not looking for a job. The only thing we want is economic development for the African community! We have been able to make them produce something real—or act like they're going to produce something real—as opposed to the kinds of deals they're used to making.

The mayor told me they want to start a “business incubator” to help people by providing technical information about how to run and operate businesses, or to give them information that would make the banks more likely to give them loans. The mayor said this would be on Central Avenue in downtown St. Petersburg so it can be for everyone. I said that this has to be in the African community. So he said, “O.K. We can do that.”

The November 4 town hall meeting on economic development was so very crucial, and we isolated some of the more self-serving sectors of the petty bourgeoisie. First of all, we demanded that the session be public. We insisted that these guys come out and make commitments not to some individual Negroes, but to the community.

Secondly, we demanded a public process. We are demanding a process that will enable the people to go where the resources are without having to go through some individual Negroes. We want to remove the middle person, who is likely to get all the resources and make the people vassals.

Uhuru Movement leads struggle against Weed and Seed

In October 1997, around the first anniversary of the killing, I was on a live television show with the mayor and the new chief of police who's a Negro. At the end of this little anniversary discussion we were having, they asked if anybody there had any last things they wanted to say and sum up. The chief of police said,

“Well, I just want to say that we’ve been looking out for trouble spots in the community, and people have been telling me that one problem area is Weed and Seed. Therefore it’s clear that we’re going to have to rethink Weed and Seed.”

It’s been a struggle for position, and currently the Uhuru Movement commands the high ground.

Now we still have a lot of work to do. At any juncture that they decide the price is too high, we’ll see them move in other kinds of ways, including raising up whatever Negro leadership they want, or they may increment the people to death to make them feel they’ve overcome their own crisis.

We’ve done a tremendous amount of work. When somebody wants to talk about economic development or political direction in the white community, they no longer find a preacher with whom to have the discussion. Have you ever noticed that it’s just in the African community that they find a preacher to talk about economic development? They don’t find somebody who’s involved in business or political philosophy, they find a preacher.

The people are really getting a lot of political education. Almost every week we’re holding events and helping people to understand not only the political issues but also economic development. It’s a crucial kind of political education. On Wednesdays, the National People’s Democratic Uhuru Movement meeting is held and everybody from the movement comes. On Sundays, the African People’s Socialist Party mass meeting occurs. At these meetings we lay out our strategy for the people.

One important element in the work in St. Pete has been the existence of the solidarity movement.³ The existence of the solidarity movement has been a problem for them. We’ve been able to create the Northside Residents Opposed to Weed and Seed, which is an organization composed of white folks.

There was a televised meeting, called by the League of Women Voters, at which the mayor spoke. During the question

and answer period the mayor called on this safe little old white woman sitting in the audience. She jumped up and jammed up the mayor about Weed and Seed. “Why are you putting this undemocratic Weed and Seed in the African community? It’s not going to solve any problems.”

It’s been really important to work that front. It’s important also because the Uhuru Movement is THE movement now. Uhuru has a white presence that’s really important because we can reshape the political terrain in the city of St. Petersburg. All that liberal garbage that’s functioned to attack us in the past can now be neutralized.

Currently, our most crucial work is block organizing. We’ve got a map of the city and we’re dividing the city up into twenty sections now. For every section we want to have a section leader right out of that community. For this we’re trying to win people who are Uhuru supporters. We want them to commit to just doing Uhuru work in the neighborhood where they stay. The solidarity forces are currently dividing up the white community into sections as well.

On every block we want to put a block captain. We will organize the entire city in that fashion so that no matter where the government attempts to go, no matter what kind of thing they want to do down the road, we will have put down Uhuru houses throughout the city. Every house becomes an Uhuru house. That way, we’ll be able to maintain the high ground that we have now.

New style of mass work

The work of this past year has been difficult in that for the last thirty years or more our movement’s basic work has been criticism of the system. This is the first time we have ever been in place to actually make and implement policy! It is not the solution overall, but we have an opportunity here to actually

change the conditions of existence for the masses of people and put the struggle on a higher level.

During this recent process we have said things that have confused some people. We have, for example, defined the situation in St. Petersburg as a win/win situation for everybody. We've told the capitalists who want to get something like the baseball team, "You can have what you want, but the thing is we've got to get what we want. We have to have economic development."

Some people have asked, "What do you mean the capitalists can have what they want?" Well, revolution isn't happening right now. They're going to get it any damn way. The problem is not that the capitalists are going to get what they want. The problem is that we have to win everybody to understand that we've got to get what African workers want.

What happens is this: you raise the relative position of the masses of African workers in relationship to the position of the capitalists. The people cannot get strong except at the expense of the bourgeoisie. I don't care what the capitalists think. The thing is to win everybody to agree that the masses have to be raised up. That's the thing. Win maximum opinion about that.

The capitalists are dragging their feet. I'm criticizing the banks and others. I'm criticizing the owning classes because they're not doing what they're supposed to do, and its part of the deal. Win masses of people to agree that they are supposed to have economic development and they'll be looking funny at the banks and owning classes for not holding up their part. That's the kind of thing that we've been able to do.

The other thing that is so crucial is that today nobody is trying to demonize the black community in St. Petersburg any more! You might hear some whacko on talk radio, but generally speaking that does not happen. Generally speaking, they can't dismiss the African working class as ignorant, inarticulate and

pathological. In fact, it is quite articulate. The reality is that when the Uhuru Movement opens its mouth, it is the masses of poor people who are speaking. That is the concession that we've won that I think is crucial to the development of our movement here and throughout the country.

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This has been a powerful struggle. The *St. Petersburg Times* ran an article that talked about, "Uhuru leader met with the mayor. Uhuru leader met with the head of the Police Benevolent Association. Uhuru leader has written articles in the *St. Petersburg Times*. Uhuru leader goes mainstream."

But I said, wait a minute. I never said I wouldn't meet with the mayor—the mayor said he wouldn't meet with me. It wasn't us chasing the police and shooting tear gas at them—it was them shooting tear gas at us. Last November, the CEO of the *St. Petersburg Times* posted a memo on every bulletin board in every department of the newspaper offices that characterized Omali Yeshitela and Curtsinger, who was a thuggish, Ku Klux Klan-type police chief, as the same.

So if the mayor calls and has a meeting with me, if the police chief meets with me, and I have an article in the *St. Petersburg Times*, it seems to me the logic is not that I have gone mainstream, *but that they have gone Uhuru!*

It is so important that African workers cannot be trashed in the same way they used to be. They have to say that the people have the right to economic development. White folks are sending me letters saying they agree with me. White folks are telling the solidarity movement that Omali Yeshitela is the best black leader we've ever seen, and this kind of thing.

Right now we control the high ground. There's a lot that we still have to learn. We're just beginning to understand how funding happens. We've never been that concerned about these

issues, but the city of St. Petersburg gets \$15 million from HUD every year in the form of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)⁴ funds.

We don't know anything about a Community Development Block Grant, never cared anything about that kind of thing. But now we're in the situation where we can decide what's going to happen with it, or have a lot to do with those kinds of decisions. We can move it in directions that enhance our stature with the people and actually contribute to changing conditions for the masses of African people. So that's where we are in St. Pete.

Uhuru!

- 1 Weed and Seed is a federal police program that targets the most impoverished areas of African and oppressed communities. In the target area crimes are prosecuted on a federal, rather than local level, with correspondingly higher sentences, thereby setting up Jim Crow law. A variety of federal and state police agencies band together to enforce martial law and containment policies, allowing extra-constitutional acts by the State such as wire-tappings, preventive detentions and other tactics. The "seed" aspect, which supposedly brings resources into the target area, never benefits the African community.
- 2 Then-U.S. president William Jefferson Clinton.
- 3 The African People's Solidarity Committee (APSC) is an organization of white people working under the leadership of the African People's Socialist Party. APSC organizes in white communities building support for the movement for the liberation of African people.
- 4 CDBG funds are granted to cities based on their statistics of poverty, yet the funds never benefit the African working class.