

To even embark on a strategy of rebuilding and realization — to renew a liberating vision of justice and human rights — we must be clear about the strengths of state power and be prepared to defend ourselves against that power. The repressive apparatus is powerful, with its fingers stretched into every crevice or crack in the state's hegemony it can find. In Europe the resistance was initiated against fascist states. In both France but particularly in Italy, those groups led in large part by radical and revolutionary forces had the potential to claim state power in favor of the masses of people. In Yugoslavia, Tito and the resistance did succeed and created a society much more beneficial to all its members than are the fragments of that society today. If no such consciousness of these forms of struggle exist or develop soon, then I think the potential to advance will be severely compromised.

People fought back against European fascism. People worked in clandestine movements. Would the imperialist big-bang war have ended German and Italian fascism and aggression without the internal resistance movements that were led in large part by anticapitalist forces? Think about that! Or think how many more people would have been massacred. . . We need the capacity for, understanding of, and willingness to resist and use whatever means necessary to stand for justice, human dignity, and liberation and against national oppression, white supremacy, class exploitation, and the oppression of women and of gay people. Without this, there will be no forward-moving change in the conditions of existence for the vast majority of the peoples, at least not here in the U.S.

I do not believe that there will be forward-moving change in this country without both changing the system and dismantling this nation's state as an oppressor nation. I also believe this struggle can only succeed if led by oppressed peoples and nations. How we — as progressive, radical, or revolutionary white people — relate to the objective, material conditions of struggle will in large part define our historical ability to play a role in making the changes necessary to open the way to liberation and justice for all.

That is our responsibility and our challenge.



Resistance in Brooklyn (RnB)

RnB is an affinity group that came together in 1992 to combine political action, study, and a sense of community. Coming from a variety of organizations and tendencies within the progressive movement, we bring together a history of work in a broad range of struggles. We have been active in anti-imperialist work, including in Puerto Rican, Central American, African, and Black liberation solidarity movements; we've been involved in groups doing anti-militarist, anti-nuclear, anti-Klan, prisoner support, women's liberation, pro-feminist men's, AIDS, and lesbian and gay liberation work. We thus understand the tactical need for "single issue" or focused campaigns. We created RnB as a space where we could discuss and work around these struggles in an interconnected and holistic way.

Some of us have been most strongly influenced by Marxism, others by anarchism, all by at least a little of both. One of our hopes is to learn from the strengths of both ideologies, honoring the Red and the Black in an effort to learn from the mistakes and successes of the left and from our own past work, we have tried to remain open to a range of approaches, ideologies, and contributions. Responding to the current period, we have tried to hold on to the principles that have guided OUR lives, while reevaluating those past assumptions that have proven faulty in today's changing world. Though we do not have a set policy on internal process, we use consensus to arrive at most of our decisions. We value our differences rather than legislate them away. We spend time supporting one another personally as well as politically, believing not only in the theoretical interconnectedness of the two, but also in the practical strength gained by being in a group where comrades are also friends.

True Leap Press: Zina Diore
P.O. Box 6045
Concord, CA 94524

Marilyn Buck



Marilyn Buck was among the first women to address the national Students for a Democratic Society (SDS, a radical, mass anti-war organization) around issues of sexism. Her experiences working with the Black community and protesting the Vietnam War led to her consistent resistance. Marilyn was an early worker with Newsreel, an educational institution which documents people's movements through film and video to this day.

A long-time anti-racist ally of the Black Liberation Army, she is serving an eighty-year sentence for conspiracies to free political prisoners — allegedly Assata Shakur, to protest and alter government policies through the use of violence, and to raise funds for Black liberation organizations through expropriations.

BLACK LIBERATION ARMY (BLA): a network of armed, clandestine local collectives active from about 1970 to 1981, primarily composed of former members of the Black Panther Party, aiming to use military means (such as bombings and attacks on police officers) to support the broader struggle for Black liberation in the U.S.; some collectives were aligned with the wing of the Black liberation movement advocating independence for New Afrika.

BLACK PANTHER PARTY (BPP): full name: Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, begun in 1966 by followers of Malcolm X, advocating Black nationalism, militant armed self-defense, and Black community control; at its height, had chapters in many cities throughout the U.S., an international wing based in Algeria, and a broad following among the Black community.

COUNTERINTELLIGENCE PROGRAM (COINTELPRO): an FBI program formally run from 1956 to 1971, whose aim was to "neutralize, misdirect and destroy" radical-left and progressive movements in the U.S. Heaviest emphasis in the 1960s was on Black Liberation Movement, which endured forged divisive letters, violence-practicing agents, office burglaries, phone/mail surveillance, police harassment, police assassinations, and frameup criminal charges, among other tactics. Exposed in an FBI office break-in by radicals in 1971, thereafter formally "discontinued," but actually continued under other names up til today.

RnB: Over the past years that you've been in prison, many changes have taken place in the world and in our movements. When you made your decision to take militant action, there was a sense of worldwide revolution on the rise. Now, although there are many trends of protest and fight back, reaction appears to have consolidated. In this context, do you regret the sacrifice you made to fight against U.S. imperialism?

MB: Though the war between the forces of reaction — the imperialists and their lackeys — and the oppressed and exploited peoples and nations of the world may have been won by the former, advances have been made. The story of this next century has only begun to be developed. Perhaps it may seem that there is not an ascendant movement that can win against such a powerful corporate military enemy, but he is corrupt — eating away at his own entrails; and, true, there are millions of people beat down, angry, protesting, and fighting back. Look at the Zapatistas. Their voice circles the globe, fiercely crying out resistance. Who will join them next? Can we not say that at some moment before us, the movement for liberation and social justice will coalesce to challenge the power of the international financial lords who rape and pillage? Do there not continue to be contradictions among those who rule? How long can the poor, exploited, and dispossessed endure? The enemy of humanity is not invincible!

So, you ask, was it worthwhile to sacrifice, when we have lost — this round? Absolutely. To give up my values and belief in the rights of human beings to be free from oppression, to be free and safe to live and develop societies based on inequality and injustice — that would be a sacrifice of the soul.

There's no doubt that the prices paid and gains made have me saddened, angry, with a taste of bitterness in my mouth — the taste of blood spilled, the bodies and minds crippled and interred. I feel immense sorrow that the human potential of so many millions — including my own — has been cut off, shackled, and chained.

Revolutionaries are lovers of humanity with all its/our greatness and weakness. Who among us — the political prisoners and POWs in the U.S. — would not be doing something socially or politically progressive if we were released from behind these walls and concertina wire. We bring an incredible amount of history, experience, and humanity to all that we do.

Despite the constraints, I am not dead. I am alive, looking always to the future, always looking to be a part of political-social progress. I have too much to offer — I can still think, analyze, be a productive person. I, along with all the other political prisoners, provide an example, experience, and the potential of resistance, steadfastness, hope. Those who have died are remembered, even if not by name. We are the fertilizer for the future, but are not ready to be relegated to museums, to be objects to be displayed.

I feel the pain of every single day here. I regret and miss the simple things — family, children, a lover, separation from comrades, and involvement in political struggle. But after each nightmare of a day passes, it is history and I look forward to what is to come.

Nevertheless, my name is not Pollyanna. I believe the political, social, and economic conditions will only get worse before movements consolidate to seriously take on state power. I don't look forward to all that means, either here in the deepest belly of the beast or there in the streets. Suffering does not wear well. I see a much more brutal fascist regime on the near horizon. The legal machinery for it is in place — from the death penalty, to the prison warehouse/factories, to laws based in racial genocide and class extermination. More and more people — particularly those of the colonized nations — will be sacrificed to its blood-consuming appetites. Who will stand up, who will be part of the resistance force that refuses to accept barbarity, genocide? I will be, however I can be.

political prisoner work to the side as if it and prison work are not relevant or strategic to the U.S. internal program and strategy then how can political prisoners/POWs and prisons be integral to the strategies of justice and liberation?

RnB: What are your thoughts on the current political climate and on possible strategies for movement building?

MB: I think we are in the midst of a fascist consolidation. The iron fist has not yet manifest itself fully, but it will. It appears to me that the white Left in general does not share such a view. Of course, in Germany in the late '20s and early '30s most German citizens did not experience rising Nazism as dangerous to their social existence — not until military bombings, food shortages, etc. Most people were little concerned about the death and concentration camps. Dead and imprisoned communists, mass genocide of Jewish and Gypsy peoples and Soviet citizens, were not of concern to the vast majority. But these camps and prisons were hell for the imprisoned and money-makers for the capitalist class — seizure of property, slave labor, etc.

There is a crying need for stronger anti-racist organizations. I do not believe that any white person who says he or she believes in and supports the goals of justice, human rights, liberation, cannot engage in organized anti-racist activity and still call her- or himself progressive, radical, or left. How can any woman who identifies herself as a feminist not struggle against racism, white supremacy — after all, those peoples who are oppressed are at least 50 percent women! W. E. B. Du Bois posed that the problem of the color line is the problem of the 20th century. It still is and will be in the 21st century. Issues of class and gender-sex oppression cannot be separated from the issue of racial domination and white supremacy. And if we white people who are progressive will not stand up to resist racial genocide and barbaric U.S. policies, what other white people will.

In the U.S. the conditions of scapegoating setting up a group (or groups) of people are well entrenched. People of African descent have been treated historically as the enemy, the scapegoats, the "other," and most of all as inferior because of one of the pillars and justifications of American history — white supremacy. Not only African people are under increasing attack. All other people identifiable as not "American" by their skin color or name or physical characteristic are also targets. There needs to be a refocusing on issues of liberation and justice. More anti-

imperialism. It is not enough to hate the state because it is a state; we need to be able to support peoples around the world who are in opposition to imperialism to support ongoing national liberation movements from the Zapatistas to Puerto Rican *independentistas* and Black liberationists. We are in an objectively difficult period of history, where the forces for liberation and justice have lost the momentum. We, as a broad front, do not yet seem to have found a strategic vision to rebuild our forces, much less how to slow down the trampling of capitalism.

A strategy to rebuild and provide a basis for advancing forward with a radical vision of ending this brutal system is not easy. We already have learned about U.S. imperialism's ability to regroup after its own losses and setbacks (the loss of the war in Vietnam, the inability to reclaim Cuba for example). We know how the State disables national liberation and class struggle internally — using white supremacy, bribery and co-optation, force, COINTELPRO, assassination, and low-intensity warfare. We have definitely learned a lot in this century. These lessons should be used to empower us, not to make us more scared of fighting back, not to make us backtrack into reformism or accommodationism. When one is white in this society, there is always something to lose. Rejecting one's white privilege for the sake of a realizable potential that is not yet experienced is hard, but definitely worth struggling for. We need to fight the growing intellectual/psychological construct that reasserts and reinforces the inferiority of non-European peoples and justifies barbarism and genocide. Let's not forget how the architects of fascism in Spain, Italy, and Germany created an enemy.

There is a growing index of white on black violence including assaults by racist white youth, even preteens. The entire social climate has degenerated. The state can kill whom it wants regardless of issues of law and justice. The lynching mentality is becoming prevalent. Will we let the struggles led by **IDA B. WELLS**, **W. E. B. DU BOIS** and countless other African people to create an antilynching climate and social contract be tossed into the waste bin of history?

I am also a strong advocate to free political prisoners/POWs and also to take on the U.S. prison plantation system. Being a political prisoner is not my only work. I think it is wasteful and short-sighted to relegate political prisoners to only working around themselves. Just because we are prisoners does not mean that we have lost our reasoning, analytical powers. We still have a world views based on long years of experience. Too many, even in our political movements would prefer to relegate us to museum pieces, objects of campaigns perhaps, but not political subjects and comrades in an ongoing political struggle against imperialism, oppression, and exploitation. The state tries to isolate us, true; that makes it all the more important not to let it succeed in its proposition. We fight for political identity and association from here; it is important that political forces on the outside not lose sight of why the state wants to isolate and destroy us, and therefore fight to include us in political life — ideological struggle, etc. In many struggles many militants have been exiled yet they have still been considered part of their struggles, not merely objects. We, we here, could be considered internally exiled. Don't lock us into roles as objects or symbols.

RnB: What do you think are the most urgent situations facing political prisoners in the U.S. today?

MB: The most urgent issues in the U.S. are not exclusive to political prisoners. While we may be in the most repressive conditions, the degree of repression correlates to the overall condition of society. Our issues are extreme versions of yours. There are several aspects of the U.S. situation that are most critical: white supremacy and racial, genocidal oppression; fascism; and the brutal face of capitalism. The in-your-face contempt for human beings is alarming.

Prisons are being built and overfilled. Fascism is upon us; folks do not seem to understand that the rise of the prison economy is central to that. The propaganda and pseudoscience prepares folks to believe and accept that whole sectors are born to be criminals and therefore undeserving of social programs, much less human rights. Money is being made — off the commiseration of the "prison class." If one believes that the state of a society's prisons reflects the state of the society, then the clamor for more inhumane treatment of prisoners only reinforces what is the current of society as a whole.

But yes, we do have urgent problems — increasing repression — most cruelly expressed in the control units, special housing units, etc. — ripping away the full civil and human rights we have, squeezing every penny possible from us (and our families, friends, comrades) as well as our labor. The conditions are deteriorating rapidly. Cruelty has been unleashed full force. Most of the U.S. political prisoners have walked through hell for more than 10 years now, some for 25 years or more. It is getting worse. I guess one could say that the most urgent situations facing us are those of staying alive, maintaining our political and social identities. We need more support. However, I see many folks leaving



RnB: Looking back over your own personal and political history, how did you first become politically aware and active? How and why did it lead you in an anti-imperialist direction?

MB: I became politically aware before I became politically active. Awareness is a process of observing the world around you, integrating your own experiences to those beyond yours. Nevertheless, without action, awareness is unrealized, or even suppressed, potential.

My father was a civil rights activist — a minister. So I was raised with a set of human-oriented values and ethics. But as a teenager I did not join in the civil rights movement. I did nothing. Instead I wanted to fit in, be popular, though in one sense I could not be, because of who my father was. I resented that then. I understood not too many years later. The seeds of my own discord lay in being "female" in this society. This was an oppression I could identify, understand, and ferment from

this place. I could see beyond dry intellectual awareness of injustice, inequality, oppression, to the need to do something to break out of this bondage. But I did not know what to do, except be angry, alienated.

So even when the war in Vietnam escalated in 1965, I still did not protest. My awareness had not gone beyond my own subjective white, middle-class, female reality. Then, in college, I did transcend that subjective isolation. There was a lot of social and political ferment. I was skeptical that sit-ins and moral outrage could end the war. But more militant sectors were rallying. When the Black Power movement emerged from the civil rights movement, raising questions of power, I was vitalized, yanked up out of my chair of skepticism and alienation, and moved to activism. Of course that also meant having to learn about and understand power and the system — imperialism, colonialism, white supremacy, male supremacy, capitalist exploitation. The Black Power movement gave me the tools to put in perspective my own oppression as a woman in relation to issues of national oppression and class exploitation. It also challenged my complacency as a good white person who does no harm to others, but also had not confronted the haters and murderers — the state, the Klan, etc. I had not acted! I joined SDS, an activist, vital student organization at that time (1967). The concept of participatory democracy — for all people — motivated me. So did socialism. I also began learning more about national liberation. I went from being against the war in Vietnam to being actively in support of the **NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (NLF)** and North Vietnam. These women and men not only wanted to be in control of their national territory, but they wanted to construct a new society in which all citizens could participate and gain equal treatment. And if the Vietnamese had the right to build a new society, did not every other colonized, oppressed nation have that right, including right here in the U.S.?

Young Black men and women, young Chicanos, Asians, and Native Americans were making demands on the American state. They were — and still are — just demands. I, along with many other white radicals, grasped the justness and the necessity of these demands. We supported those liberation movements as well as those beyond the borders — from Vietnam to Cuba to Angola, Mozambique, and Palestine. We supported insurgencies in Colombia and Uruguay, in Iran and Eritrea.

Frederick Douglass said, "Power concedes nothing without struggle." Che Guevara said two, three more Vietnams and went to Bolivia, giving up his secure, relatively comfortable place in building a Cuban revolutionary society. He died there, murdered by the Bolivian army supported by U.S. CIA/military advisers. Malcolm X said that Black people must gain their freedom "by any means necessary." How could I as a white person, a socialist, and an internationalist sit by and support people struggling here and around the world, without standing up as well? It is a risk to live; one can sit still and die. When I and others were called on and challenged, we responded. We were already prepared to act: we had been moved by the experience of the Tupamaros in Uruguay who engaged in urban guerrilla warfare. We had a wealth of experience to draw on and believed it possible here, particularly because of the rise of the Black Liberation movement.

In the late '60s and early '70s, those who fought against oppression and challenged the state were not called "terrorists." That is a term the U.S. government began to use later, after it lost the war to Vietnam, once it began to revise history and try to regain its position and power, once it had begun to have success in suppressing the revolutionary, liberation movements in this country, using COINTELPRO and its repressive apparatus. So now I am here, an enemy of the state, called all kinds of things from criminal to terrorist, everything but what we are — political prisoners.

RnB: We hear all the time about people who were revolutionaries in the 1960s and who now have bought into white corporate America. What have been your experiences with this?

MB: I have been treated as an enemy of the state — a traitor to the white race. So I am not holding my breath waiting for any calls. Well, I've not been asked to join white corporate America so I have no experiences in that realm. Thank goodness. Since I lost my desire to become a woman economist, Wall Street type — a very short-lived desire, from a high school senior until about three weeks into Economics 101 — I haven't wanted to join in the system. In fact, white U.S. culture as a whole, I find to be very deadening, even though I'm white and live in it. Perhaps it's because it is not only deadening but deadly to most people of the world (and plants and animals, by the way).

But we all live in and experience this white-supremacist-based society. Our education, point of view, is formed and framed by this world we live in. Even though there are white people who have morals and ethics who reject as unjust, inhuman, the oppressive nature of this society. It is very difficult not to succumb to the privileges and comforts of this society. Even many from oppressed nations and minorities have access to some of the materialistic-consumer benefits of this society — if it can be paid for in cash or on credit. It becomes easy to buy into the society but still see oneself in opposition to its excesses and injustices. Therein lies the material base of many debacles over social democracy, revolution, etc. What is most difficult is to challenge the system that makes this society and culture so alluring and habit-forming. If you believe your eyes, and open them up to find yourself an addict, though perhaps you deny the addiction. After all, there are some good things. But do they outweigh the vast array of negative, deadly, disastrous consequences heaped upon the majority of the world's peoples?

So it is not unexpected. I understand it. But I do not condone such accommodation, not even after nearly fifty years of living here. However, until there is a rise of progressive, radical, and revolutionary struggle, many will continue to burn out, dropout, "take a break."

It is hardest to be a revolutionary in a nonrevolutionary period. And we've been in a nonrevolutionary period for more than fifteen years. There is cynicism, despair, defeat, and self-protectiveness and, of course, that monster, "fear." A whole generation has grown up under such conditions.

Che Guevara was a visionary when he talked about the necessity to build the "socialist man" — and woman. Women have fought in liberation wars from Vietnam to Zimbabwe, have made gains in the former "socialist" bloc, and have been beat back (and betrayed). National liberation and socialism in and of themselves have not ensured our liberation as women; because in the main, we women in struggle have believed that these struggles and projects would naturally include our liberation. So we have become more strategic, more determined that we must be equal in revolutionary struggles. We cannot be token, or lulled into standing aside. I believe more than ever that if we want to rebuild the forces for revolution and social change, women must assume more ideological and active leadership. Our brothers, if they truly want to see revolutionary change, need to wake up. Liberation cannot be truly achieved off of anyone else's back.

Finally, regarding the U.S. in particular. We face a century of true barbarism, more pronounced than this one in which we have at least glimpsed the potential for liberation and justice. . . unless and until white people who do argue for liberation, justice, and human rights take on white supremacy and do active battle against racism and genocide. This means supporting the oppressed and colonized nations' right to self-determination and independence — Puerto Rico, the New African/Black nation, Native American people, Hawaiians, Mexicans. Without equality of nations, there can be no justice. There will be no economic-political system that will emerge that has the potential to defend and nurture human beings.

RnB: Once you're in prison, does your political work end, or does "being a political prisoner" become your political work?

MB: One can never rest on one's laurels. Without engaging in ongoing political work and struggle one does not remain politically centered. The purpose of prison is to stifle, attack, and destroy a person's ethical, political, social character. Unless we resist that, then we begin to lose who we are. It is through political work and struggle that we can maintain our political and social identities. It is easy to lose a sense of who you are. To enter prison is to enter another world where the basic propositions are different — deformed. A defective mirror world that recreates the world of capitalist relations.

Each of us finds different ways to work, not unlike the vast extent of political life for you who live in the world. There you may be ideologues, community activists, organization builders, solidarity and support groups, and/or cultural workers. Here we do the same. I see my daily existence as political work. This means first and foremost that I not succumb to corruption, that I be principled, honest, and straightforward in my dealings with everyone. That is not a simple undertaking. Resisting corruption is a reality for you in the world as well! I engage in political projects, including AIDS peer group work, support for cultural activities, education projects, etc. I have taught classes and am now tutoring. I see education as an important role here. Most of this work has a primarily social character but reflects my own political beliefs in the necessity to secure the tools for reliance. And of course I along with others struggle over conditions when and where possible and confront racism. Our political work would be comparable to that of you who engage in community political work. Presently most of us are actively involved in building the campaign to save Mumia from the death penalty and ultimately to free him along with all political prisoners and POWs. I participate in some of the control unit work and am an advocate that we in the left take in more strategically the death penalty as a particular embodiment of racial genocide as a class bludgeon. The left as a whole has not paid much mind to fighting the death penalty. We have been wrong not to do so. The climate created by the restoration of the death penalty has led to open hunting season against Black people in particular; the police have more license than ever to attack, brutalize, frame, and murder black people.

However, we as actors in the creation of human history can build our forces, strengthen our own subjective conditions to the degree where objective conditions can be affected. We also have the necessity and responsibility to defend against oppression and exploitation. What will happen if the forces of fascism — the U.S. government — “go ballistic” and implement aspects of its repressive machinery? Will political folks be ready to resist — to survive! — to function as a resistance movement. Or will there be small groups of individuals being brave but not able to fire up the popular will to fight back against genocide and terror. The war for liberation is indeed a battle for hearts and minds. I also still believe that it will be the international class struggle — primarily the former and continuing colonies will be the motor force of a resurgence of revolutionary struggle. Nevertheless, as people of the imperialist nation, it remains our responsibility and desire to support and act in solidarity with emerging struggles, as well as to create the vision and strategy to change the nature of this society! After all, is not this U.S. with its corporate capitalism and military expansiveness not a primary cause of human misery worldwide. Would we not be better able to develop human potential, democracy, justice, liberation in a nonoppressor society?

RnB: How have your years in prison — and the changes in the world over these past years — affected how you view and understand the systems of imperialism and oppression?

MB: Being in prison hasn't affected my view of imperialism. The objective reality of what imperialism is and how it functions does not change because the individual's relationship to it has changed. Prison does expose capitalist relations, at its crudest exploitation of labor, repression and very stark national oppression, white supremacist ideology, and how it all plays out in the consummate institution of repression.

In this post-Vietnam war period (the postcolonial — now neocolonial — period), the imperialist states in concert with their financial bourgeoisie masters and cohorts have regrouped and redeployed their forces. Because they have to scramble harder than ever for profits, control of resources, and markets worldwide, the silk gloves have been stripped off to free up the iron fist to grab more voraciously. Working people worldwide are forced into worse conditions than ever before. Here prisons have become the vehicle of cultural and national genocide and, perhaps as importantly, a new “captive” market and cheap labor force. The nearest institution to slavery — but a kind in which to live, we must pay to be enslaved! Being in prison makes me understand, every single repressive day, how dehumanizing, cruel, and avaricious imperialism is. I am a more staunch anti-imperialist than ever.

I've learned much from the disarticulation of the socialist camp. Socialism can not develop and maintain [itself] very well in one country, certainly, not when it is under attack by imperialism and international finance capital. Cuba is the strongest example remaining of what is possible under socialism; they have not lost the war. (And we all need to support them in their resistance and battle to not be washed back into the sea of capitalist corruption and imperial domination.) We have also learned how socialist principles can be corrupted. We have learned that war of national liberation does not ensure liberation from the masses of capitalist exploitation, male domination, racial discrimination, or homophobia.

I think about Bertolt Brecht's observation: There are those who struggle for a day and they are good. There are those who struggle for a year and they are better. There are those who struggle years and they are very good. But there are those who struggle all their lives, and they are the indispensable ones.

RnB: Some movement activists have expressed the idea that violence cannot be justified for any reason, and even a few political prisoners have said that they were wrong to engage in violent acts. What are your feelings on this? How have they changed over the years?

MB: Violence cannot be justified for any reason. . . . Does that mean that an individual or group or nation cannot justify defending themselves when they are beaten down, murdered, starved, worked to death?

Without resistance to the evils of oppression and exploitation, colonialism would still be in full force worldwide, women would be beaten and murdered with impunity, chattel slavery would be the order of the day. Resistance and violence from the oppressed can never weigh heavier than that of the rulers and state power! Should Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, Emiliano Zapata, Ho Chi Minh, Sitting Bull be dismissed as heroes of the oppressed because they fought?

Even bourgeois law recognized the right to self-defense. The Nuremberg Conventions written after World War II state that citizens have a moral obligation to resist immoral and genocidal governments. I think many people have lost a sense of perspective — a view of justice; they are intellectually and emotionally caught up in a false dichotomy successfully constructed by U.S. state power: everything that is active may be considered as violence unless carried out or condemned by the state itself; state violence equals the natural order of things, bestowed by power. (The state exists to ensure that the ruling owner class maintains power and control over all other classes.) In particular, political responses are criminalized, demonized. We should not allow ourselves to get caught up in government-speak. The whole hysteria over violence is whipped up to divert from the real issues of power — who has it and is therefore permitted to use it against those who do not.

This society is plunged into an orgy of senseless violence. It is promoted in TV, radio, movies, sports. This is truly horrifying, particularly because it is so well orchestrated and promoted by the state. Again, such violence is diversionary; to make the violence of poverty, white supremacy, against women and gay people, and of capitalist exploitation seem acceptable, natural. It is abhorrent to me not to challenge and resist such forces of death. If I did not resist, would I not be condoning state violence and terrorism? Wouldn't you?

Over my many years of struggle I have learned that overthrowing this vile, people-hating system is not a simple, direct task. It is not to be achieved by random actions or acting to be acting or to relieve frustration. Action without a clear strategy based on a materialist analysis of both the objective and subjective conditions will not either necessarily advance the struggle, nor spontaneously organize the masses of people to join. At the same time, change and victory are not possible without acting.

Seizing power is by its nature a violent act, even if one does not march in with rifles. Social and political change are slow conditions. In the final analysis, it will only be through organized resistance that imperialism and capitalism, with all their intrinsic forms of violent oppression, will be overthrown. And only winning will enable any of us truly to speak of justice or justification.

RnB: What were the specific historical conditions that were the context for your decision to take up armed struggle?

MB: At the end of the Second World War, there was a rise in the anticolonial struggles worldwide. Nations chained and gagged by European and American colonialism rose up, ripped the gags from their mouths, and cried, "Freedom." National liberation was on the march. Vietnam was one of those nations. They defeated the French in 1954; within a short time, the U.S. was trying to reestablish domination from the South over the North. Cuba threw off the shackles of a dictatorship so corrupt that even the U.S. felt embarrassed to be supporting it and the mafia; it was when it declared itself independent that the U.S. instituted its war.

In the U.S. after Black soldiers had returned from fighting in World War II, there was a rising up to demand justice, civil rights, economic inclusion; Latinos, Native Americans, Puerto Ricans demanded self-determination and independence. It was a historical moment. There was a sense of a new world, standing up poised to emerge from the dungeons in which it had lain shackled and gagged. People worldwide picked up arms to take back their lives, their lands, their human rights and dignity. Armed struggle was a means to drive out the imperialist dictatorships of the colonizers, to force the military or oligarchical dictatorships that were bleeding to death the masses of people in many countries. My consciousness was stirred; my complacency as an American woman was challenged. I had been brought up to believe in justice, democracy, equality, and to question. And as a woman I felt held back, constrained. All the little inequalities fueled by anger and the necessity to be part of the new world. However, it was the Black Power movement and the Black Panther Party that awakened many young people to the fact that there was a war raging against the dispossessed led by this very country — the belly of the beast, as Che Guevara referred to the U.S. — and it was time to fight back. The Palestinians, in their own way, also had a boldness of "dare to struggle, dare to win" — which electrified the whole world. How many more could I name. . . .

This was our generation's moment. A time when even those of us from the oppressor nation could step forward to call capitalism and imperialism for what they were — and continue to be — the oppressor of humanity. We joined the tide of humanity to throw off the chains of our own role in the white privileged oppressor state and stand side by side in a class and national liberation struggle.

Liberation and justice benefit everyone, including those of the oppressor nation. Perhaps it does not look like it on the face of it, but to live in a society defined by injustice, cruelty, genocide, violence, and exploitation can only crush the spirit and inevitably, as it has now happened, create such a deformed, decadent society that the dominant social manifestation is fear and mental illness.

I still believe we can live in a different kind of society where we all contribute according to our ability but share according to our needs, where there exists an equality among peoples and nations, regardless of skin color, language, culture, sex, or sexual orientation. Nevertheless, we now live in a moment when revolutionary momentum has been set back gravely and the forces of totalitarian fascism and capitalist greed are prevailing. Therefore, it is crucial to analyze how to rebuild the forces of liberation and justice. We must not succumb to defeat, but learn from that defeat and breathe strength and endurance back to our march forward to justice and peace.

Despite all the setbacks, the increasing genocide, and commiseration of the vast majority, we are a step ahead of where we were. We have experiences, glimpses of the possibilities we did not have thirty years ago. I hear many folk bemoan the corruption of the Vietnamese economic relations, saying in the end, they are lost. But imagine, what would Vietnam be like today had they lost the war to the U.S. in the '70s? Where would the Cuban people be if they had capitulated to U.S. imperialism? Or where would young people in the U.S. today who experience the losses, the increasing exploitation, marginalization, the racial genocide, be if there were not the experience of the Black Panther

New Afrika: the name applied by one sector of the Black liberation movement to the colonized nation of Black people in the U.S., which they say has a rightful claim to the land of five states in the South (South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana) where African slaves were most heavily concentrated, and which they advocate should become an independent nation called the Republic of New Afrika. One current voice of the New African movement is the New African Liberation Front, and its newspaper, *Nation Time*.

ASSATA SHABAZ: woman activist in the Black Panther Party forced underground by FBI harassment in 1970; became a leader of the Black Liberation Army; wounded when arrested in New Jersey in 1973; acquitted of numerous false charges of BLA bank robberies; convicted of a frame-up charge of murdering one of the arresting cops; freed by a BLA break-out in 1979; fled to Cuba, where she lives today after being granted political refugee status.

