

# **The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r**

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## **The Mass Line and the Struggle Against the Obama Administration**

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BC Guest Commentator**

The electoral arena is one of the arenas of struggle for political democracy. Unfortunately, it is too often viewed by the Black and general masses as the only arena of struggle for democracy.

There seems to be little historical memory about the power of the Black masses organized as a social movement in the 1950s and 60s to force the enactment of democratic legislation in the form of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts and policies on Affirmative Action when there few Blacks in government at all levels and that were even signed by Southern Dixiecrats like Lyndon B. Johnson.

These social movements, Civil Rights and Black Power were national in scope and international in outlook. Today, there is no single Black left and liberation organization able to organize at the national level and depth of those social movements. As a result, for example, there was no national social movement response challenging the governments failed and oppressive responses to the Katrina triggered natural a capitalist made disaster in the Gulf Coast region impacting the Black and working class majority, including a form of ethnic cleansing to reduce the Black majority.

The sad part, is that in a situation when the state and forces of capital have so clearly violated Black human rights, and of the character that reflects almost every stage of the Black experience of national oppression inside the U.S., was that many Black left forces refused to make serious efforts to unite to build a politically focused national movement challenge against the state and forces of capital to address the needs of the masses of people.

These have been the conditions and state of the Black left and national Black liberation movement, as we debate with each other over how to challenge capitalism and the role of the state in protecting the interests of capital over the interest of the masses of people under the Presidency of Obama.

Since the 2008 Democratic Party primaries, members of the Black Left Unity Network ([BLUN](#)) have been arguing that the question of support or non-support for Obama should not be used as a line of demarcation for building Black left unity. The BLUN never came out in support of Obama. However some BLUN members have engaged in criticisms over the email and others at the base in their mass work.

A comrade recently sent me a very insightful email pointing out a danger of "opposing criticisms of Obama", even days before the election. He stated that "Criticism of Obama and the Democrats is in danger of being censored as not support for Obama."

This was an important and comradely, as it was communicated with a tone and clarity aimed at getting me to look deep into the question of criticisms of Obama, and not mainly reacting to the negative features of name calling that the "two line struggle" between some Black left forces around the question of support or non-support of Obama often takes.

While I strongly agree with the comrades point about being censored; I think there is a wrong perception by some, that because the manner and tone of criticizing Obama is not using negative sound bites like "bootlicker" and "lackey", that there is no serious criticism being made of Obama, and especially where it counts, among the masses in their struggles against the impacts of the policies of the Obama administration.

Thus, the differences in the form and method of the criticisms of Obama between various Black left forces may reflect the main audience that our criticisms are being addressed to; and the main tasks we see for the Black left in this period.

One of the problems of the Black left over the past 30 years has been a level of fragmentation that stopped us from having real discussions with each other about assessing the conditions and consciousness of the Black masses and possible points and areas of unity for our various organizations to create a real national capacity to mobilize our people as a social movement.

For those concentrating on boring into the mass struggles, there has been sensitivity about how we wage criticisms of Obama. This is a tactical question related to how one understands the impact of the tone of the criticisms on Black people's feelings about voting for Obama as a continuation of our struggle for democracy. If the criticisms make the Black masses feel like they were fools for voting for Obama, they will become alienated and not educate and convince the masses about the real politics of Obama.

We must recognize when our movement is not prepared to deal with particular contradictions without suffering consequences that may have serious impacts for our ability to move forward in a given period. This is why particular tactics must be considered in how we make challenges. Otherwise, we are dealing with principles without regard to the state of our movement and the balance of forces.

I think a major question for the Black left is how to effectively apply the Mass Line in our criticisms; one that seeks to expose the role and decisions of Obama in order to win over the masses to embrace the criticisms and to mobilize against the Obama administration.

The right wing demanded that Obama fire Shirley Sherrod and Van Jones, but the Black and general left have not demanded that Obama fire anyone from his administration dealing with education, finances, housing, etc., issues that greatly impact our people. These could have been forceful demands made on the Obama administration that would have clearly gotten mass support. The impeachment and firing of Chaney and Rumsfeld were major demands by the left on the Bush administration.

We must take heed in the comrade's point about censoring the criticisms of Obama being a major danger. However, we also must better apply the Mass Line and challenging the Obama administration and not the personality, so that our people can see and feel more clearly that they are not being called fools for voting for Obama.

I feel that the major danger related to the methods of criticism of Obama and his campaign, is it further dividing the Black left and alienating us from the Black masses. However, speaking for myself, this view is not now, nor has it been during the 2008 democratic primaries and period of Obama's presidency that the Black left should be out campaigning for the support of Obama. On the other hand, we also must be concerned that the emphasis, frequency and sharp tones of some Black left criticisms of Obama are not coming across to the Black masses as the Black left having no criticisms of Romney's program, including his campaign's efforts to use voter ID and other measures to reduce and eliminate the impact of the Black and Latino vote in this election. The fight to win and defend Black voting rights has been an uncompromising demand and struggle of the Black masses,

We must struggle to find points of unity, first around issues and conditions that impact our people like the various forms of state repression that many Black organizations and activists are organizing around. In this period of deep capitalist crisis where state repression will only increase, including white supremacist attacks, why can't the Black left begin discussing and working for unity around a campaign under the slogan of Stop the War on Black America?

If there is no conscious effort to push for areas of unity, there will be nothing pulling against the long period of fragmentation and tensions. We cannot rely on spontaneity to unite the Black left.

The BLUN continues to call for a national dialogue on identifying issues, opportunities and challenges in building Black left unity.

Thanks to the comrade for sending his insightful thinking.

Unity-Struggle-Unity.

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