

From U.S. to Honduras: Socialism is vital to Black Liberation

written by John Parker

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Delegation from Black English-speaking community at the Inauguration of Honduran President Xiomara Castro, Jan. 27. Photo courtesy of Gerene Grant

On Jan. 27, I was fortunate to be one of a handful of delegates from the U.S. to

attend the historic inauguration of President Xiomara Castro in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Representing the Socialist Unity Party, I was part of an international delegation invited by President Castro and her Libre Party, founded by the National Popular Resistance Front (FNRP).

For the first time in 12 years, the people - service workers, factory workers, agricultural workers, unemployed workers, communities of African ethnicity and Indigenous communities - were also invited to participate.

That's a reflection of the policies and actions already taking place under the new administration, employing a path in line with socialist economic goals. In fact, in the first five days of Castro's presidency, she wiped out the electric bills of a million working and poor people in Honduras, in addition to ending much of the school tuition that also helped keep the poorest of the population destitute.

In addition, Castro's priority of ending the privatizations that have wreaked havoc on the environment - especially for Indigenous communities struggling to maintain clean water - is already being implemented.

Early on the morning of the inauguration, lining up to get into the stadium in Tegucigalpa, our 20-person international delegation witnessed the excitement and joy of the sea of people, some of whom had traveled far, and some of whom had slept there overnight to get good seats.

The gravity of this event was reflected in its open rejection of capitalist and imperialist policies, and, with the multi-ethnic diversity we saw in attendance, a rejection of racism.

Since I'm writing this during Black History Month, as a Black person I want to pose the question: Would the victory of a genuine socialist brought about by a grassroots struggle have the same beneficial effects on the Black, Brown and Indigenous

populations here in the U.S.?

And, if so, does the inauguration of Castro show the importance of the struggle for socialism for Black/African liberation in the U.S. and abroad?

Militant mobilization in the streets

Socialists and communists have long been a part of the Black struggle for liberation in the U.S., although hidden behind a wall of racist erasures in history books, state repression and anti-communist propaganda.

Today, the mantra from the ruling class, echoed by liberal politicians, nonprofits and educational institutions, is that the struggle cannot be in the streets, only electoral. It especially cannot challenge the ownership of a very small minority of billionaires and their institutions who hold the major industries of manufacturing, war, finance, education and health care in their possession.

In Honduras, however, although this was an electoral victory, it was made possible only by militant activism in the streets and growing organization of working-class and nationally oppressed sectors to challenge the frantic drive toward privatization that characterized the years since the 2009 coup.

The U.S. government supported the overthrow and kidnapping of then-President Manuel Zelaya with money and technical know-how. Zelaya, a socialist who was democratically elected in 2006 and is the husband of President Castro, defied U.S. imperialism by refusing to accept a cabinet chosen by the U.S. Embassy. He refused to abide by the policies of austerity and anti-communism demanded by Western monopoly banking institutions.

Like President Castro, Zelaya sought to make qualitative changes in favor of the working class shortly after becoming president. He raised the minimum wage of workers by 60%, infuriating Wall Street banks, the Obama Administration and then-

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

U.S. support continued with the military coup's targeting and killing of progressive activists, while also making Honduras the poorest country in Latin America. Repression and economic devastation drove waves of emigration by desperate refugees, who were then demonized and brutalized when they tried to enter the U.S.

Still, a very strong youth movement grew in number and influence during the last 12 years, led by socialist youth. After the coup they put their lives in danger with militant protests. Many belong to the Libre Party and some are actually part of the Castro administration.

Their militance was an echo of that of the Indigenous communities, as represented by slain activist and Indigenous leader Berta Cáceres, whose photo was enlarged on the stadium walls in her honor during the inauguration.

Unity of workers and oppressed

It was that type of militancy in the streets and unity with the oppressed that culminated in the electoral victory of Xiomara Castro. And that unity continues. It will be needed, because the U.S. continues to occupy major military bases in Honduras, and is already plotting to undermine the new government with its right-wing allies.

At the inauguration, I spoke with a member of one of the Black community organizations that received a special invitation to attend and participate in the ceremony.

There are two groups in Honduras of African ethnicity. One is the Garifuna people, an Afro-Indigenous community. The other group lives near the Bay Islands and on the Honduran coast of the Caribbean sea. Because of British colonialism preceding the ownership of their lands by Honduras, these are English-speaking Black

communities.

"We are the Black English-speaking people, we are located in the Bay Islands mainly, we are in La Ceila, Puerto Cortez and Puerto Castilla. We are actually the only group of Black English-speaking people in Honduras. And for many years many people didn't even know we existed because we had been so excluded," the community representative explained.

"But today, with the government of President Xiomara Castro, it was one of her goals that the Indigenous and Afro groups be present in this historical moment. It's the reason we are here today showcasing a little bit of who we are, because many don't even know that we are one of the nine ethnic groups that exist in Honduras, since we once belonged to the British government."

About a week after the inauguration, it was announced that - for the first time - a member of the Garifuna community, Dr. Luther Castillo Harry, who studied at the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) in Havana, Cuba, was appointed secretary of Science, Technology and Scientific Innovation by President Castro.



Claudia Jones addresses a crowd in London's Trafalgar Square, 1962.

Socialist activism in the U.S.

Claudia Vera Cumberbatch, who changed her name to [Claudia Jones](#), also had roots in the Caribbean. She was born in 1915 in Trinidad, and came to Harlem in 1924 where she began advocating for socialism. Jones' advocacy was so threatening to the ruling class here that she was later deported for her communist activism before she could get citizenship.

She described her experience as a Black woman: "It was out of my Jim Crow experiences as a young Negro woman, experiences born of working-class poverty, that led me in search of why these things had to be, that led me to join the Young Communist League and to choose at the age of 18 the philosophy of my life – the science of Marxism-Leninism — that philosophy that not only rejects racist ideas but is the antithesis of them."

Jones saw the crisis of working people as a direct result of capitalism in its modern stage of imperialism: "Imperialism is the root cause of racialism. It is the ideology which upholds colonial rule and exploitation. It preaches the 'superiority' of the white race whose 'destiny' it is to rule over those with colored skins, and to treat them with contempt. It is the ideology which breeds fascism, rightly condemned by the civilized people of the whole world."

Jones, whose analysis is so relevant to today's struggles against white supremacy and the rise of fascist forces, is just one of the many socialist voices of Black peoples in the U.S., starting as early as 1904 with the Rev. G.W. Woodbey in his books "The Bible and Socialism" and "The Distribution of Wealth."

Woodbey, born in 1854, was a member of the Socialist Party of America, and saw the struggle for socialism as a next step after the struggle against slavery and key to

fighting racism and economic exploitation.

Then there are George Jackson, Lucy Parsons, W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson, just to name a few of the Black historical figures from the U.S. who advocated the economic system of socialism.

So yes, Honduras provides further evidence that Black liberation is tied to the struggle for socialism.

Other examples include the independence of 17 African countries from European colonial bondage during the 1960s, due to the military and financial support of the Soviet Union and China; or, here in the U.S., the rise in power of the union movement in the 1930s and 1940s, eventually greatly benefiting Black workers due to socialist/communist leadership and their growing influence; or the defense of Black workers in the South during the Great Depression by communists; or the fact that our very own Assata Shakur is alive and well, in spite of the U.S. bounty on her head, protected by Cuba's revolutionary socialist government.

Claudia Jones expands on this in her comments that take into account not only national oppression, but also women's oppression: "For the progressive women's movement, the Negro woman, who combines in her status the worker, the Negro and the woman, is the vital link to this heightened political consciousness.

"To the extent, further, that the cause of the Negro woman worker is promoted, she will be enabled to take her rightful place in the Negro-proletarian leadership of the national liberation movement and, by her active participation, contribute to the entire American working class, whose historic mission is the achievement of a Socialist America — the final and full guarantee of woman's emancipation."

Anyone who tells you that socialism is not relevant to our struggle as Black people either has no clue about our history or does not want to see any real struggle against

this racist system of exploitation, poverty and war.

But, in spite of the lies the ruling class and their collaborators throw at us, the struggle for liberation will continue. Just ask the people of Honduras.



Struggle-La Lucha's John Parker at an educational center in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. SLL photo

John Parker is the Socialist Unity Party candidate for U.S. Senate in California, running on the Peace and Freedom Party ticket. Learn more and how to get involved in his campaign at Socialist4Senate.



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