

CHICAGO COMMUNITY DIALOGUE # 4

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Opening Statement

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Brothers and Sisters  
Comrades and Friends

We have gathered to discuss a rebellion in which at least 60 peoples lost their lives and way over 200 more are hospitalized with serious injuries. This is a time to be serious. Times like these require one to take a stand.

Let us listen to the words of Claude McKay:

**If we must die, let it not be like hogs  
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,  
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,  
Making their mock at our accursed lot.  
If we must die, O let us nobly die,  
So that our precious blood may not be shed  
In vain; then even the monsters we defy  
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!  
O kinsman! we must meet the common foe!  
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,  
What though before us lies the open grave?  
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,  
pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!**

Welcome to the fourth Community Dialogue. We established this new political institution to break the silence, with focused discussion and debate over the conditions we face in this city, in this society, all over the world. We aim for the community dialogues to be a forum to speak the truth, to raise our voices against our enemy in search for unity, a unified voice against a common enemy. Also we aim to be a common voice for the defense of friends, for defense of people who have dared to fight back. This is a time for clear thinking, and political courage.

Los Angeles 1992 has clarified once again that we have entered a new political situation. I will even go so far as to say that its strategic symbolic value is that it was a revolutionary rebirth to May Day (1992). The original May Day was tied to the fight for a redefinition of the work day, as a result of gains in the productive forces and relations within industrial production. Today the fight is for an even more radical rupture by redefining society around distribution (social reproduction) rather than (material) production. This is a revolutionary process required to conform to the current new economic reorganization.

Things are polarizing rapidly -- The Gulf War and now infamous Norriega Trial, was recently followed by Bush being humiliated, and US policies being rejected, in Panama and at the Rio Global Summit on the Environment. Life at the bottom of U.S.

society is even more in the grip of homelessness, joblessness, deep cuts or the elimination of various forms of welfare, the lack of medical insurance and neighborhood based medical care facilities, and police terror tactics such as severe beatings, torture, and even murder.

Los Angeles is generally regarded as the city that most embodies this polarization, and the struggles breaking out because of it. The class structure is set up for things to get pretty vicious. In the 1980's in Los Angeles, the % of people making over \$50,000 increased from 9 to 26%, while people making less than \$15,000 increased from 30 to 40%. Nationally, this pattern is quite similar, the richest 1% owning more wealth than the bottom 90%, with 75 million people living in poverty.

The Rodney King incident was a fuse for something that ran very, very deep, and was very, very powerful. A traffic violation led at least four police officers to viciously beat King, while nearly 20 watched (61 blows in 81 seconds). 15 months later, a month long trial ends in an acquittal for all charges, except one charge for one officer. The judge had moved the jury to a white bedroom suburb of LA, Simi Valley, home to thousands of LAPD officers. Of the 400 prospective jurors drawn from the registered voters of Ventura County (33% minority), only 6 were Black. No Black people were chosen for the jury, which while it did have one Latina and one Asian, its composition is more accurately reflected by the fact that nine of them had strong personal connections to the military, and three were members of the NRA.

Prior to this case, the legitimacy of the judicial process in LA was weakened considerably. The previous month a Korean shopkeeper was given a suspended sentence of 5 year probation and \$500 fine for shooting a 15 year old Black woman in the back of her head for allegedly stealing some orange juice. The decision in the case of this murdered young girl, Latasha Harlins, issued shortly before the King trial, was an outrageous green light for shopkeepers to shoot the poor. A Philadelphia survey has found that 50% of all people who shop in chain food stores shoplift from time to time. Clearly the class struggle is entering a new qualitative stage.

Then finally, the decision to release the racist thugs who attacked King was too blatant, especially since the incident was captured on video, the trial was televised, and the cast of characters was so classic, the poorly educated, heavily built Black male accused of attacking cops, and mainstream white cops sworn to protect the property and privileges of capitalism. Afterwards, the people at the trial had to be held off the cops, and later a demonstration attacked police headquarters and the LA Times, while also attacking people and property in an attempt to repudiate the decision, and the overall structure and practice of racist police violence, and finally to seek a moments relief in this deep deep crisis.

The collective response to the decision is likely to be one of the defining moments as we enter the 21st century. **The collective violence that began April 29th in Los Angeles was a rainbow rebellion of the international working class against global capitalism in the US and its police forces.** Lets break

this down into four basic points:

1. **It was a rainbow rebellion.** The 1965 Watts rebellion was a Black outburst, but in 1992 it was joined equally by Latinos and some whites. In 1970 South Central was 74% Black, but in 1990 it was 45% Latino. Since 1980 over 750,000 immigrants into the US have settled in Los Angeles, so that by 1990 40% of the population in LA was foreign born. Of the total population of Los Angeles County (8.8 million), 60% of the total is Latino, Black, or Asian. Of the first 8,000 people arrested in the City of LA during the rebellion, 50% were Latino, 36% Black, and 12% white.

2. **The rebellion was the international working class rising up against global capitalism.** LA joins with Tokyo to define the Pacific Rim axis just as New York and London rule the Atlantic Rim axis for global capitalism. Japanese capital controls most of the corporate real estate in down town LA, and LA is second in the US in bank capital and corporate headquarters. On the other hand, LA is the largest region of manufacturing jobs in the USA, although 1 in 7 people are on some form of welfare (1.3 million people). In South Central LA 17% of family income was below \$7,500. LA has the greatest number of homeless people, on the one hand, and the largest number of engineers and high tech scientific personnel on the other. It is estimated that over 45% of the aero-space jobs in the US are in the LA area, and that the workers in the garment industry are overwhelmingly undocumented women from Mexico and Central American countries especially El Salvador. It is estimated that the rebellion resulted in over a 20,000 job loss in the LA area.

3. **The rebellion brought on the massive use of police forces.** During the 1980's in California there was the largest prison construction program in the country, building 15 prisons and increasing official capacity from 35,000 to 96,000. The LAPD has only 8,000 officers but they are armed with high power equipment including 75 combat helicopters and 9mm weapons as standard issue. The LAPD had anticipated the rebellion by setting up an overtime fund of about \$1 million, but they pulled back and let it begin without any strong measures. (Was this "War Games?") Almost 30,000 armed troops were involved before it was over: 8,000 LA county sheriffs, 8000 LAPD, 6000 national guard (veterans of the Panama invasion), 4000 marines and army (veterans of the Iraq invasion), 1000 federal officers (including FBI, Border Patrol, Bureau of Prisons, Immigration and Naturalization, Federal Marshalls, Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms, the Texas Rangers, and others.) At least 60 people were killed (Blacks - 42%, Latinos - 34%, and whites 21%) and several hundred have been seriously wounded.

4. **The rebellion is giving birth to a new debate,** including a proposal being circulated under the alleged authorship of a joint command of Cripps and Bloods. There are two community based coalitions in LA that have been waging campaigns against police brutality that have programs, and all over the country new life has been breathed into political discourse. This debate is over what happened in LA, and how progressive forces should move after LA.

Let me repeat my position on what happened in LA: The

collective violence that erupted on April 29 in Los Angeles was a rainbow rebellion of the international working class against global capitalism in the US and its police forces. This Community Dialogue has been set up to debate and clarify this general conception.

After all is said and done today, this community dialogue will be summed up best by our political motion, the strategy and tactics we employ to move beyond the spontaneous violence of the rebellion with consistent programs of action, political line and organization. I think that the main point is this. **The mass rebellion of Los Angeles in 1992 was a grass roots vote of no confidence for the current Black leadership, the current Latino leadership, and the options presented by the US political mainstream.** After LA is different than before LA, Revolution is possible once again, once again there is a mass demand for revolutionary leadership. The masses have once again marched ahead of the intellectuals, but it is clear that intellectual clarity and planning is required to go any further.

Who dares to take up the challenge? Who will dare to fight the beast and win? The responsibility we face is to build institutions of community dialogue in every city in this country, and help give birth to this new revolutionary process of unity and struggle, intellectual debate and social activism.

We once again ask you to play an active role in this dialogue. We will be here all day so everyone will have ample time to make statements, to raise questions, and to propose concrete plans for unity and struggle.

Before going any further we would like to express our gratitude to the Director of the Carter G Woodson Regional Library Center, and the to staff of the Vivian Harsh Collection, especially Michael Flug.

Here we would like to have everyone join us in a moment of silence to give tribute to Ed Manning, a librarian here at the Vivian Harsh Collection who many may have seen at previous Community Dialogues, who supported our efforts but has recently died. And, while we remember Ed, let us also remember the hundreds - no, thousands of people being murdered through IMF World Bank barbarism or the fascist thug culture of Inkatha, the Haitian military, the military governments of Nigeria and Ghana, and Neo-Nazi skinheads and fascist electoral advances all over Europe. In our moment of silence let us recommit to taking names and in the end taking full revenge!