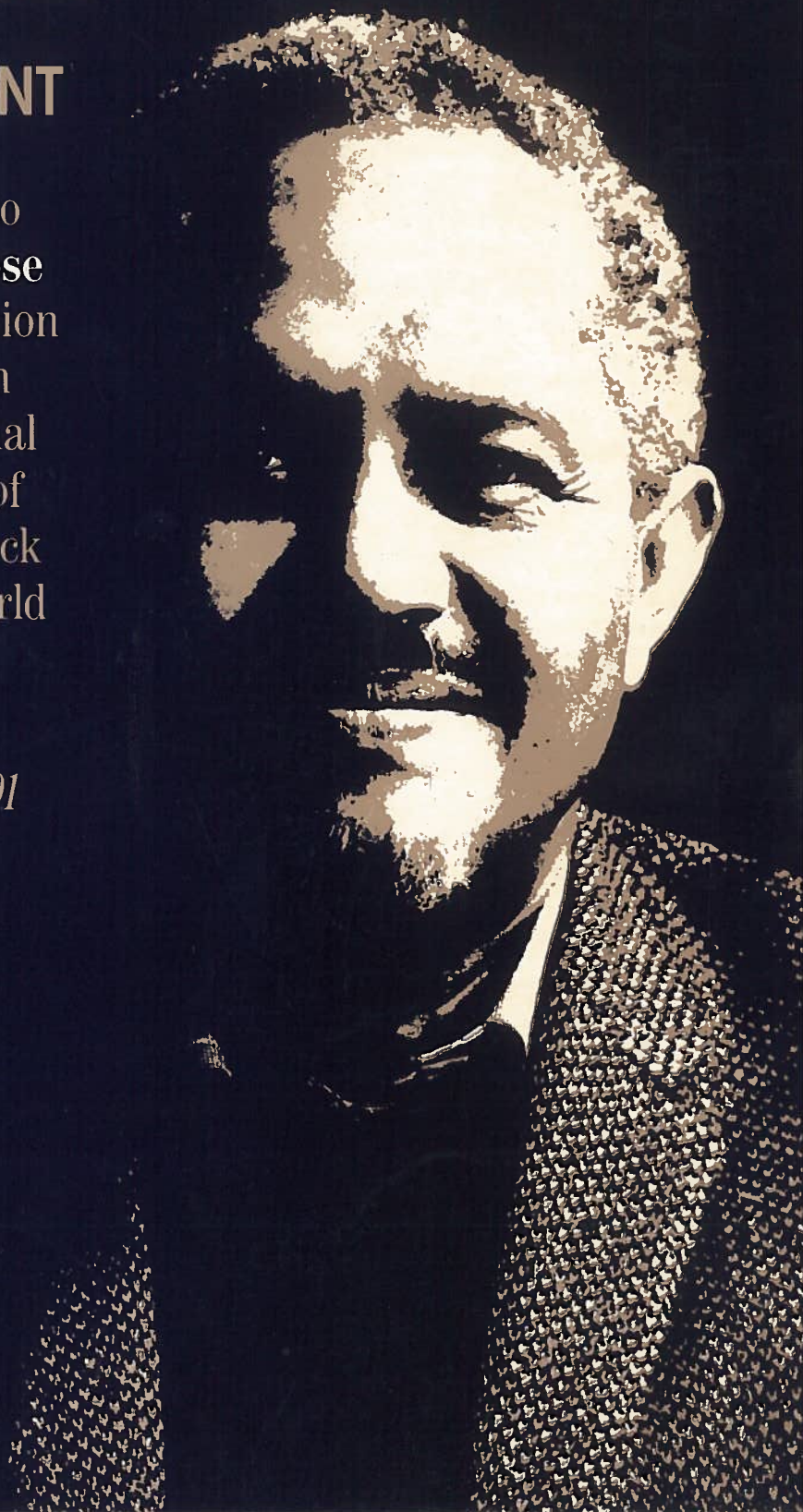


FOUNDATIONS OF A MOVEMENT

A Tribute to
John La Rose
on the occasion
of the 10th
International
Book Fair of
Radical Black
& Third World
Books

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FOR COMRADE JOHN, FOR WORLD REVOLUTION

The challenge one accepts in proclaiming tribute to a leading force in our struggle is an awesome one, and yet it is a frequent practice. We often speak of struggle in terms of our personal involvements, special personal lessons, insights into the past as lessons for the future. We continue this practice in sorting out our acquaintances based on our evaluation of what they have done, and whether we have been involved as well. Indeed this is what makes this commemoration of John La Rose so special. There is a quiet roar to his special contribution, a far reaching impact of immense proportions. What makes this task awesome is that to make his contribution clear is to define essential and necessary features of our movement, and place a challenging role model of revolutionary work in front of this and future generations of youth. To define the path chosen by John La Rose is an awesome responsibility as to do so is to begin walking it ourselves and calling for many more to do so as well.

My perspective is that of a revolutionary rooted in the African-American liberation movement and the fight for a revolutionary socialist critique/practice. It is from this vantage point that I joyfully proclaim John La Rose to be my comrade, my co-conspirator, my advisor, and my friend.

On John: With his trusted partner/comrade Sarah White, and his extended family of comrade friends and kin, John has basically pursued three major practical areas of work: building movements in England, building networks/campaigns of international solidarity and support, and promoting cultural activism of art and popular culture. This work is a critical pyramid of politics and culture, a linking together of the immediate reality of ones direct experience with the global context of forces present but unseen. This is the insight and courage of a veteran activist intellectual/artist.

The promise of revolution is that a total and qualitative transformation is possible by which peoples lives become both empowered with responsibility to choose the future (within the objective historical context of course), and that they choose the path that leads them toward social progress and greater human emancipation. This conception points us to the people as an active revolutionary force. John constantly reminds us of this

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and often leads the way in accepting the ambiguity of working in pre-revolutionary times when we are defending liberty, and building institutions and movements by which people learn lessons from struggle and raise their consciousness based on these lessons.

John has built three institutions of revolutionary education by which he and his comrades are a bridge over which many have discovered a path to expanded consciousness and linkages to anti-imperialist struggles. The first is New Beacon, the first Black publishing and bookselling institution in England. This is a foundation stone upon which virtually every subsequent effort has drawn inspiration and lessons, both direct (through hours of political discussion and practical professional consultation) and indirect (through setting forth and maintaining an example of political principles, professional competence, and personal integrity). Against the logic of capitalist doctrine, but with a rational grasp of market forces, New Beacon is a publishing/bookselling institution that embodies the possibility for building institutions of education rooted in the community of working class people, of artists and intellectuals, and of progressive and revolutionary movements.

For the past 10 years the New Beacon collective has been the main force guiding the Radical Black and Third World Bookfairs under the creative inspiration of John La Rose. Many have proclaimed the elevated status of continuing something from the past. The annual Bookfair is an innovation, an original contribution to the politics of Black and progressive forces in England, as well as a forum for international debate and discussion. The Bookfair is a new international institution of revolutionary importance.

New Beacon and the Bookfair are great public institutions, but the contribution of John La Rose and Sarah White continues into their private lives. Not only did they found the bookstore in their living room, the politicalization of private space, but today they continue this practice by preserving the political culture of the extended conversation, the personal network of comrade friends as a fundamental assertion that new forms of human relations are possible, and that revolutionary people are good people and oft times fun to be with.

Now all of this, what John does and the institutions he has founded, is happening at a critical time in history, and therefore has a special meaning for us. First of all

this work is profound in grasping personal and social mechanisms for producing and reproducing struggle. John's life is a text for preparing cadres to build the infrastructure of a revolutionary movement dedicated to educating people to initiate popular institutions of resistance and revolutionary social transformation.

It is true today as it has always been. It is dangerous to teach the exploited and oppressed to read and write, to think critically about their experiences and to become self conscious of their interests and possibilities.

We face the necessity of preparing ourselves for the new world we live in. There is no orthodoxy that stands firm, no formula that can be relied upon, no catechism worth memorizing. This is a new world: the unification of Europe under the banner of imperialism and the IMF, the defeat of the Soviet Union and the capitalist transformation of Eastern Europe and China. At no point in the 20th century have we faced the challenge of racism and economic barbarism for Black and third world people as we do in the 1990's, partially because it is such a reversal but also because to rebuild the privilege of western capitalism will require forms of accumulation equal only to slavery and child labor.

This era requires independent revolutionary forces contributing to an international consciousness, analysis of what we face and the courage to propose solutions of solidarity and struggle. A major statement that revolution is possible, one blueprint for action can be found in the life and practical work of John La Rose. This is no casual statement, and is not intended to contribute to any kind of cult of the individual. It's time to be for real and when we find a path to the future it must be proclaimed to all who might listen and accept the challenge of taking up the call as one's own mandate for action. It is in this spirit that I write in tribute to John La Rose.

It is for our future that I stand on his shoulders. They are broad, and as his strength is rooted in the cumulative consciousness of our revolutionary tradition, when I invite you to join me I do so with the confidence that it is possible to continue our unbroken chain of linking generations in revolutionary movement.