



**OVERTURNING OURSELVES:
TURNING WEAKNESSES INTO STRENGTH AND GREATER STRUGGLE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

IN CELEBRATION OF THIS 52ND ANNIVERSARY OF our organization Us, this is an excerpt from an article from my book, Essays on Struggle: Position and Analysis (University of Sankore Press, 2016), a collection of essays I wrote for the Black Scholar during my political imprisonment in the 70s. They represent continuity and continuous development, constantly seeking ever better ways to continue the struggle, keep the faith, hold the line and define, defend and advance our interests as a people with due consideration for others and the well-being of the world.

Read into revolution what you will, it is essentially a question of enduring and expanding, of transforming discontent into organized and effective action, defying and defeating the enemy and building alternative solidarities that assure the defense of our interests and the development of our potential. And regardless of what was thought or hoped, prayed for or promised, revolution and liberation will not be handed to us by history; nor can it be sloganized, talked or televised into existence. Neither can we, disoriented by frustration or imagined defeat allow ourselves the luxury and lethargy of withdrawal. Our commitment must be continuous; our moral fiber and internal strength great enough to sustain us in our struggle to turn sound and fury into substance and fulfillment. This is an age of quick transition and profound transformation, a time like no other in terms of the depth and dimension of people's aspirations and demands. It is a time of turmoil, tumult and overturning.

Each struggle or successful revolution offers lessons to the others of the same period or afterwards, but neither one is the final word in change. Each raises questions as it solves them and leaves more questions for other generations and peoples to struggle with and solve. So, it is with our struggle; it is instructive as well as augmentative, teaching us new ways to win, extending our perspectives and thus raising the level of our aspirations and the method of realizing them.

But in order to grasp the lessons learned, consolidate and keep our gains, we must engage in constant reassessment both of the internal and external conditions of our struggle. We cannot afford to allow our opposition to interpret our history, pass political judgment on the effectiveness of our acts or contentions and disguise his racism and repression as proof of the futility of creative struggle.

Every movement in the struggle of a people for the right to determine its destiny and realize its aspirations has its meaning, each act its importance and every experience some value. It is a question of who is interpreting it and for what reason. And regardless of what is written or said or felt in silence, the period of struggle between 1965 and now had and has its meaning and message and it is up to us to assess and absorb it so we can transcend it and promote transformation on a higher level. What is demanded now is a strong readjustment vitality, a flexibility that will allow us to view every experience we encounter as a lesson not a letdown. Only then can we claim to have the profound grasp and commitment this struggle demands.

We say the debate over what was erroneously called revolutionary nationalism vs. cultural nationalism was false, because the division in reality does not exist. Revolution, Cabral says, like "national liberation, is necessarily an *act of culture*," "the organized political expression" of a people's culture. And if, as has been admitted in revolutionary circles around the world, nationalism is a precondition for revolution, it is culture that is the primary vehicle for achieving this national awareness and commitment. But culture was confused conveniently or ignorantly with song and dance on one level and manifestations of African origins on another. It was not conceived as the crucible in which the struggle took form and the context in which it ultimately succeeded and blossomed into continuous reconstruction.

When we talk of cultural revolution, we're talking essentially about cultural reconversion,

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the conscious and programmatic restructuring of attitudes and relationships that aid us in our aspiration for national liberation. We are recognizing and responding to the fact that the first resistance in any national struggle is cultural resistance and that as we said elsewhere, the crucial struggle is to win the minds of our people, for if we lose this struggle we cannot hope to win the political one.

Moreover, culture must and does give a *moral dimension* to the struggle, establishes rules and systems of association and behavior as well as resolving contradiction among its people and harmonizing diverse yet interdependent interests. And the stress on the moral element of the struggle is essential for without it we turn on ourselves, arguing abstracts and forgetting or frowning upon the needs of the people. Power, undefined and not placed in its proper perspective cannot be advocated, for it not only frightens people unfamiliar with power, but raises serious questions concerning the use of it once it's obtained.

Given these conditions, our people will deny us support for fear once we obtain our objective, we will use it to impose our own brand of oppression. In order to create a new faith, a new positive force for our people to support and promote, we must emphasize not the physical or purely political force, but rather the moral and humanistic basis of our struggle, authority and legitimacy. *The worth of any act or idea must ultimately and always be determined by its moral and social benefit to our people as a whole*, not to distinct and contending groups. For national liberation requires political and moral unity, a confluence of all aspects of our culture, tying together each group and level of our people into a knot that will not break or unravel in the stress and strain of constant struggle.

National liberation requires organized and unified responses to oppression and anything less than this leaves us at an almost total loss. We must somehow transform our needs into *collective structure and movement*. A *real organization* is a *base of commitment, a method and an instrument*. It is a base in which a non-productive and/or neutral body of people are transformed into conscious committed and active advocates; it is a method of arranging relationships and roles and creating and maintaining a model to be emulated; and it is an instrument to realize our will through the acquisition, retention and exercise of power. We must have permanent structures that engender lasting loyalties not loosely knit clusters of brittle brothers that break under stress and never express anything more than episodic allegiance to both structures and our struggle. Organization implies common *identity, purpose, and direction* and speaks of a viable and expansive structure that can absorb, transform and utilize the latent and untapped talent and creative potential held in check misused and misdirected by oppressive measures.

Our first and fundamental aspiration is our profound unalterable commitment to our people's expansion and growth, to create and consolidate a body of people capable of and committed to internal and external transformation. We want a body of committed people, men, women and children, capable not only of physical courage, but of mental and moral expansiveness, a revolutionary solidarity capable of confronting and dealing successfully with problems on various levels in the struggle, a nation, conscious of and committed to its role and responsibility in terms of human history, actively and emotionally associated with the continuous evolution of mankind. (1972)

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