

From *How This System Has Betrayed Black People: Crucial Turning Points*

by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA

The fact is, as *Cold Truth Liberating Truth* puts it, discrimination is not working “in reverse”; it is working in the same direction, the same ways it has always worked throughout the history of the U.S.: to promote and enforce white supremacy and male supremacy.

Now, looking at this in broad historical terms. Here were these major turning points—after the Civil War and then again after World War 2, with Reconstruction and then with the Civil Rights Movement—where the question was sharply, directly, and decisively posed: will the system give everybody equal rights? And the system answered NO! It was not simply a matter that the ruling class would not do this, but more profoundly it was the fact that they could not. They could not because it would have torn up their whole system, it would have undermined their whole economic base and their whole superstructure to do this.

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From Slave Ships to the Superdome in New Orleans

New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. People trapped amidst squalor and chaos in the official shelters. People facing death from starvation and disease on the streets.

Most of the people trapped in the misery and chaos of post-Katrina New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast were Black. When people took what they needed to survive, they were condemned as animals and dangerous criminal gangs by the authorities. What were they supposed to do — just die quietly?

This is what the authorities must have thought. In a hundred thousand ways Katrina laid bare the unequal and oppressive relations Black people are forced to endure under this system.

Why are the two major oil pipelines running out of the New Orleans Gulf area called the *Plantation* line and the *Colonial* line? This underscores the reality confronting Black people in this country. Black people remain concentrated on the bottom rungs of this society. This is the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow segregation and continuing oppression of Black people *as a people*. The sight of thousands of Black people packed into sports arenas brought back haunting visions of the holds of the slave ships which forcibly dragged millions of Africans to the shores of the New World in chains.

But the masses weren't going out like that. They defiantly went into the streets to see to their survival. Some organized efforts to meet not just their own needs but the needs of groups of people trapped in the mass shelters like the New Orleans Convention Center.

The *New York Times* reported that: “On Friday morning, some young men broke into the kitchen of the Marriott Hotel, across the street from the center, fixed a gigantic batch of scrambled eggs, grits and bacon and served it to storm victims.” A retired teacher at the Convention Center praised these youth as “Robin Hoods”—bringing food to the people.

It is especially outrageous to watch federal and state officials threaten people who were put in this desperate situation by government inaction with imprisonment and even death. The Governor of Louisiana said, “I have one message for these hoodlums. These troops (being sent into New Orleans) know how to shoot and kill, and they are more than willing to do so if necessary.” The Mississippi State Police Chief promised to deal ruthlessly with any looters. This is Mississippi, where the police used to arrest people and hold them for the KKK to lynch—where sheriffs and judges and preachers would often join lynch mobs in carrying out murderous deeds. And this is New Orleans, where a person's racial ancestry was calculated down to great-great-grandparents. Being found to be even 1/32nd Black would subject someone to a life as a second class citizen.

George Bush said there should be zero tolerance for any lawbreaking. What about zero tolerance for a system that *has not* and *cannot* end the oppression of Black people? Or a system that now threatens people facing starvation and disease with official violence for trying to feed themselves and others? These rulers have shown what they and their system are capable of in how they dealt with this hurricane. As long as power is left in the hands of these capitalist exploiters, we'll continue to see the kind of suffering seen in New Orleans and the Mississippi Delta area in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

It's Way Past Time To Throw Off the Chains of Oppression and Get With the Emancipators of Humanity!

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Voices from Louisiana—“We're Way Past Angry”

Revolution correspondents in Louisiana submitted this report:

On the way towards New Orleans, I talked to a man from Thibodeaux who had flown into New Orleans by helicopter to help repair generators. “They're not telling people what's happening there,” he said. “There are bodies everywhere. There are dead bodies on the streets of New Orleans. A natural disaster has become a human catastrophe; a furious storm has broken open a torrent of fury and bitterness among the people.”

A man who grew up in New Orleans' 9th Ward—right up against the levee and the banks of Lake Pontchartrain—spoke to me. He broke down sobbing as he said he still didn't know where his mother, aunt, and sisters were. He then told me this: “Don't say they didn't have a plan.

That ain't the problem. They had a plan, and this is their plan. Block off the city and let the people who don't get out die. They're poor, and they're black. Let them die, that *was* their plan.”

A woman called in to a radio show, desperate for help. She told of an elderly friend who had been holed up for days, desperate, sick, and dehydrated. On Friday, he tried to walk across the Mississippi River bridge. But he was turned back by heavily armed troops because he had an Orleans Parish ID, and wasn't allowed to cross the “border” into Jefferson Parish. “He's going to die in his apartment,” she said.

Everyone we talked to is seething with anger and bursting with sorrow. People are shocked—that they are being treated like refugees; that they are being called refugees. They are shocked that govern-

ment at every level did nothing to help them. “How can we be refugees in our home state? My family has been here since slavery days,” a man from Kenner said. “And now I'm supposed to be a refugee?” “We're not angry. We're way past angry,” one young man from Uptown New Orleans said. “If someone could look inside us and see how we feel, they'd see that. We're way past angry.”

New Orleans is now under military occupation. Tens of thousands of military personnel have been sent in to suppress and control the remaining residents. Orleans and several surrounding parishes have been put under martial law. After days of letting the poorest people in a major city struggle to survive in a sewage-filled, water-soaked, disease-ravaged city, with temperatures approaching and festering at 100 degrees, with no

food, water, or medical supplies, the government sent in the military. A brother named Reginald spoke what is on many people's minds. “They've got the port here they use to send things to Iraq every day to kill people. But they can't use that port to help the people of New Orleans?”

The shockwaves from this storm will be felt for a long time. How they influence the future depends a lot on how the people respond right now. Looking around at newly homeless kids playing on a makeshift basketball court at a shelter in Baton Rouge, one young man said, “The city is gone, but we're still here.”

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World Can't Wait: On Hurricane Katrina and the Bush Regime

The following is an excerpt from a statement by World Can't Wait:

People are dying on the streets of New Orleans. This is criminal! The natural disaster of Hurricane Katrina was magnified by the culpability of the Bush administration and Congress for cutting \$71 million from the budget for levees and for other environmental policies that contributed to the devastating floods that were predicted and could have been prevented. Scientists agree that global warming has had a direct impact on the severity of this hurricane. The Bush Regime has refused repeatedly to sign the Kyoto Protocols to stop global warming.

Bush's callous refusal to end his vacation even as the hurricane was killing people and the terrible devastation was happening is outrageous. What is going on in New Orleans is in no small part a concentrated example of how this administration views and treats Black people, thousands of whom were left without the resources to evacuate, and were not immediately rescued.

Billions of dollars and huge resources, including massive transport and medical capabilities, are being devoted to slaughtering people in Iraq, while people are dying in New Orleans for lack of these same resources.

This statement, and the call “The World Can't Wait — Drive Out the Bush Regime” is available online at worldcantwait.org.

The World Can't Wait! Drive Out the Bush Regime! Mobilize for November 2, 2005

The Hurricane Brought Misery and Death... THE SYSTEM MADE THINGS WORSE!

Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf coast region of the United States—and in its wake, it left untold devastation and revealed in a hundred ways what is wrong with this system of capitalism.

In New Orleans tens of thousands packed into the Superdome and the Convention Center as instructed by authorities. Thinking they would find safety, food, and shelter, people tried their best to cope, after wading through waist-high water sometimes for miles. Many shared what little medicine, food, and other necessities they had with others worse off.

But shortly after thousands started to converge, the conditions became intolerable and it was clear it would only get worse. After just 24 hours kids and older people started suffering effects of dehydration, and some died. People became desperately hungry, there was no electrical power, and shit began to back up toilets. They were surrounded by disease-ridden water and death.

These people were doing what they thought officials wanted them to do—but the government's "hurricane relief" actually *made things worse for the people!*

When no help came, people in the city were forced to take initiative to help themselves. They found food and water wherever they could, including taking it from abandoned stores. For this, the people have been deemed criminals and threatened with death for taking such measures.

The people have been heroic in the face of this situation, and all this brought forward their potential to organize themselves and take matters into their own hands. One 20-year-old man, for example, commandeered a school bus to bring people from the streets of New Orleans to the Houston Astrodome, where the authorities promised help for refugees. The group, mostly teenagers and young adults, pooled what money they had for gas and necessities like diapers. There were other examples like this—no doubt more will come when people's stories come out.

And there has been a broad outpouring of sympathy and support throughout society for the victims of this hurricane. Many in the middle class have been completely outraged by what they have seen in the aftermath of Katrina. Some newscasters reporting from Biloxi and New Orleans were nearly brought to tears and expressed outrage that more wasn't being done. Many have rushed to volunteer help.

Instead of actually saving the people, the government and its armed forces have treated tens of thousands of desperate, starving, and sick people *like an enemy*.

A group of hungry people who broke

into the Convention Center's kitchen to prepare food for themselves and others were driven away by National Guard troops. One of the people said, "They pulled guns and told us we had to leave that kitchen or they would blow our damn brains out. We don't want their help. Give us some vehicles and we'll get ourselves out of here!"

The Louisiana governor threatened that National Guard troops will "shoot and kill" those taking things from stores. And Bush declared "zero tolerance" for "looters."

Millions have seen the brutal suffering of the people all over the news. Millions have asked themselves where is the help!? Why has it taken so long! But the authorities have betrayed the basic needs of the people and on top of that answered the masses' desperation with guns and police-state measures.

What kind of a government puts people in an utterly inhumane situation like this in the first place—and then threatens to gun them down in cold blood when they try to survive the best they can?

It's a government, and a system, that puts profits and the preservation of capitalist property relations above people and whose utmost concern is with maintaining social control, at the point of the gun, over the masses.

A system and its ruling class that operate like this are utterly worthless and illegitimate—they have NO right to rule.

Even a voice for the ruling class like conservative commentator David Brooks, coming from his reactionary viewpoint, had to admit, "Floods wash away the surface of society, the settled way things have been done. They expose the underlying power structures, the injustices, the patters of corruption and the unacknowledged inequalities."

As they stand exposed, those in power are only promising more misery and repression for the people. Brig. General Gary Jones, commander of the Louisiana National Guard's Joint Task Force, told the *Army Times*, "This place is going to look like Little Somalia, we're going to go out and take this city back. This will be a combat operation to get this city under control."

This repression of the people must be opposed and resisted. Everything that is happening in connection with this hurricane has revealed how fundamentally rotten and deeply criminal this system is. But through these events and how millions have responded to them, we can also see the seeds of another future—the real possibility and potential of getting rid of this system through revolution and bringing into being a whole new society. How this immediate situation may develop in the coming weeks and months is not clear. In these truly uncommon times, what the people do can change history.

Natural Disasters...

If the People Ruled Society— We Could Do Much Better!

Look at what this capitalist system with its rule of profit in command has done in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. But there is an alternative to such madness: A socialist society, ruled by the working class, in which production meets the needs of the people and serves the revolutionary transformation of society.

The dictatorship of the proletariat would have *fundamentally* different priorities, principles, and methods in running society and this would lead to very different results in the event of a disaster: The suffering of the people would be immediately addressed and lessened—not made worse.

Imagine a socialist state that represents the interests of the people and puts this at the center of everything it does. Where the leadership relies on and mobilizes the people to solve problems together in every sphere. Scientists are not only listened to, but help educate people to understand things like hurricanes—and in this process learn from the people. Schools give youth a scientific understanding of nature and human society. There is broad, public debate and discussion over how to deal with things like hurricanes, preventative measures, and government money and resources allocated to deal with such problems.

As for the oppression of Black people, so sharply on display in New Orleans, as the RCP's Draft Programme says, the policy of a revolutionary socialist government would be to "move quickly against the institutions and legacies of national oppression. Discrimination, for example, will be immediately and forcefully banned in employment, housing, and all other areas... The state will give preference in resources and assistance to the less developed and backward areas, in coordination with and on the basis of the overall development of society. And in the immediate situation after the seizure of power, the policy of "raising up the bottom" will be applied across the board."

Capitalism reinforces and requires people competing with each and fosters the dog-eat-dog mentality that

goes with this. But a socialist state reinforces and requires the opposite—people working together to uproot inequalities and to remake society. Hurricanes and other natural disasters would still pose very serious challenges. But people would fundamentally be in a different situation to deal with this. People all over the country would be immediately organized to figure out how to get food, medicine, aid and transportation to people. Extraordinary measures would be taken to utilize all possible resources in society—hotels, houses, hospitals, doctors, bus drivers, etc. The needs of all would be met, with first priority to those most urgently in need—the sick, wounded, and poor.

We can not only imagine such a society—we can look at what was accomplished in China under the leadership of Mao Tsetung, when China was truly socialist. When a new revolutionary government came to power in 1949, the waterways, dykes and embankments were long out of repair and almost every year hundreds of thousands suffered from floods and drought. Millions of peasants were mobilized with a "serve the people spirit" in immense water projects aimed at changing the very landscape to prevent massive floods and droughts. And the masses completed a large-scale flood-diversion program that involved repairing and reinforcing existing dykes and safety areas to accommodate 170,000 people in case of evacuation during a big flood. Three hundred thousand soldiers and civilians were mobilized and the whole project was completed in seventy-five days.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina we can see the total inability of the current system to meet the needs of the people. AND we can see the potential for the masses to do things a different way. Look at the examples of how the people—under extremely difficult conditions—took initiative, stuck together, and found creative ways to try and survive. This was done *in spite of and up against* all the forces of dog-eat-dog capitalist society. And this shows the potential for what could be accomplished if society were set up in a whole different way.