

[for the Political Committee]

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Report on Robert Allen and Ron Karenga Meetings

by Malik Miah

The following is a summary of two meetings I had on the West Coast with Robert Allen, editor of the Black Scholar, and Ron Karenga, leader of NIA, a nationalist organization based in San Diego.

I met with Robert Allen on Nov. 16 in Berkeley for over two hours. It was a very good discussion. We discussed NSCAR and the party's antiracist work, the Black Scholar and party membership.

He considers NSCAR as a very important development in the Black movement. He considered the October conference a great success and said he plans to continue speaking for NSCAR as often as he can. He has agreed to be on NSCAR's speakers bureau. He has spoken at several SCAR events in the Bay Area. He also said the next issue of the Scholar would carry an article on NSCAR done up by the Boston office.

It was during this discussion on NSCAR that Allen made the point that he considered the SWP as the only radical group out in the streets fighting for Black people. He sharply criticized the Maoists for spending so much time debating amongst themselves over the national question and Marxism but not carrying out any activity. He said none of these groups understand what self-determination means either and tend, in his view, as indicated in their articles, to dictate to Black people what self-determination is (e.g., Black belt theory, etc.). It was in this context that he asked me to write a piece for the Scholar on what self-determination means and what perspective is needed for Black people in 1976 and beyond. I agreed to do an article for the April or May issue. He also asked me or another Black party leader to do some articles on Africa and other aspects of the Black movement for future issues of the magazine. This includes doing book reviews.

He also praised, as he's done in the past, our work against FBI harassment. He only mentioned this.

We then discussed the party. I asked him if he had read the political resolution or Black resolution. He said he hadn't and would do so right away and drop me a letter with his comments. He said he reads the Militant regularly and basically agrees with our general politics on domestic questions. I asked him about Portugal and Angola but he didn't comment on the situations, saying he hadn't formed a clear position yet. He then offered us the opportunity to do a couple articles on Africa and Portugal. I asked him if he read the IP -- he said he didn't have a sub -- and suggested he read Ernie's articles on the three Angolan groups he wrote over the summer.

He also said he had some questions about our position on China but we did not discuss it at all.

I asked him if he considered joining the SWP or any other organization. He said he had thought about it but viewed his independence on the Scholar as most important at this time. He also said he wanted to think out his role more in the Black movement, which, he repeated, would be best served by being an independent.

Overall the discussion was quite good and we plan to stay in touch. I think maintaining national collaboration with Allen is important and can be very useful in our Black work especially because of the authority he has among many Black intellectuals and independent Blacks. His friendship, and the fact he has opened the pages of the Scholar to us, can be quite useful. We should take full advantage of it. Both branches and locals in the Bay Area plan to continue to involve Allen in their activities -- not only NSCAR and PRDF.

#### Discussion with Ron Karenga on Nov. 18

My discussion with Ron (or Maulana) Karenga lasted for 2½ hours and occurred at his office in San Diego. We discussed a number of issues -- strategy for Black liberation, Black party and running an independent Black candidate in 1976 elections, busing and theory. Two of his lieutenants were also involved in the discussion.

I initiated the discussion on perspectives for the Black struggle and the need to build an independent Black party. I asked Karenga if he had read the two articles in the Black World about the state of the National Black Assembly and their discussion of running an "anti-Democratic, anti-Republican" presidential candidate in 1976. His main lieutenant (Msomage) spoke first and said he considered this idea as "silly" and "counterproductive." He said the majority of Black folks are in the Democratic party and thus the job of conscious Blacks (those conscious of the problems) is to go into the Democratic party and fight for control over the Blacks in it (that is, the Black Elected Officials). Msomage also attacked the idea of socialists running an independent campaign for the same reasons. Karenga then spoke and said he agreed with me that Black people needed an independent party, but the road to get it was through the Democratic party where Black folks are at (Baraka of old!). He said a Black candidate nationally can't win, so it would be a fruitless effort. He stressed the need to build a "base" first. He, however, disagreed with his lieutenant about socialists running their own campaigns for propaganda purposes. I think he mainly did so to not look as though he was attacking Baraka for his plans to run such a campaign.

We discussed this back and forth for a while. I sought complete clarity on his views. I finally asked him if an independent Black campaign was launched in some city where a Black Democrat was running -- thus limiting chances of victory -- who would he vote for. I gave the example of John Conyers in Detroit. He and his lieutenant without hesitation stated they would vote for Conyers because of his Black "base."

We then had a brief discussion on busing and school desegregation. As a nationalist organization (also socialist, they say) he said they oppose busing because it divides the Black community. Many of his facts were wrong but the essence of his remarks were: our main job today is to get that "base." He said he was against integration -- what busing meant to him. I didn't pursue the discussion because of the lateness of the meeting but told him I would send him some material on busing.

Finally we spent a few minutes discussing theory. He told me he was still planning to write an article for the ISR. He hadn't done so yet because he was completing his PhD in urban affairs. He asked me to send him some literature on the national question -- positions of the Third and Fourth international. He made a special point to mention that Trotsky's articles on Black nationalism surprised him and were quite good. He explained that he was a revolutionary nationalist and did not view Marxism and nationalism as counterposed. He also made clear that he was studying the thought of Chairman Mao. We didn't have time to really discuss this much.

In general the discussion was friendly. He praised our consistent work in the Black community and like Allen criticized the Maoist groups for talking but not acting on the day-to-day problems of Black people. He said he wanted to stay in contact with me. Right now he is still on probation and cannot leave the state of California. This may change by the end of 1976. It is clear that Karenga's evolution is toward Maoism but it is highly likely that his Maoism may not lead him to leave the Democratic party and his attempt to build a Black caucus. He is an opportunist and a cultist. Like Baraka, Karenga's thought is number one, not Maoism or anything else.

I plan to maintain my contact with him.