

KUJITEGEMEA: PUTTING UJAMAA IN ACTION

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A critical question is how do we finance our struggle? In answering that question, it is necessary to ask ourselves “what struggle” are we attempting to finance and to what degree are we attempting to finance it”? It is important to identify both the struggle itself and to identify the nature of economic work in the context of the struggle.

I. DEFINING THE STRUGGLE

We believe that we are struggling for African-American national liberation, i.e. political self-determination and economic self-reliance for our people.

Political self-determination, in our view, can take four possible forms: 1. Separate sovereignty within current continental American borders, 2. Separate sovereignty outside of current continental American borders, 3. Transformational sovereignty within current continental American borders, and 4. Transformational sovereignty outside of current continental American borders.

Separate sovereignty would be the establishment of a new state, such as a “Republic of New Afrika” within American borders or such as a country like Liberia outside America. Of course, separate sovereignty in and of itself is neither progressive nor regressive, positive nor negative. The political value of such a move must be judged by the ultimate nationalist criterion, i.e. is it good for our people? Which in turn can be answered only by accessing the material and social conditions and circumstances operant and the time period in question. Each effort while judged by the same criterion, must be judged within its own context. What was good in the past, may be passé in the present and negative in the future.

Transformational sovereignty would be the sharing of sovereignty with others through the transformation of ourselves and/or our host. Transformational sovereignty is not simply “integrating” into someone else’s reality, for it requires a conscious transformation, and not an unconscious negation, of both our selves and those with whom we would share sovereignty. Examples would be those who seek to form a multinational state in a post-capitalist, post-racist

America, or those, such as the “Black Hebrews”, who are struggling to establish themselves within priorly existing political entities. Again, the value of this move is not intrinsic but rather dependent on situations and circumstances.

We believe that at this point in our struggle, all four remain options to be considered either singularly or in combination. Although we may have personal preferences, in our opinion, all four are legitimate courses for us to follow in our struggle to actualize our nationalism.

II. HOW TO ACHIEVE POWER

None of these options are viable or valuable without the power to implement them. In the political and economic context of America as a whole we are a people of limited power. However, we believe that the best way to build on this limited power is to develop our own institutions, institutions which are specifically designed to foster the empowerment of our people. We have identified “four primary areas” of institution building: 1. Politics (community organizations, political parties, coalitions and alliances, and militia and armies), 2. Education (preschools, study groups and other institutions of vital education, i.e. those educational institutions controlled by us that define our needs and shape our wants in our own interest and on issues of our own choosing), 3. Economics (cooperative and businesses based on Ujamaa) and 4. Ideology (publications, conferences, lectures and workshops which present our values and political theories used to guide development and defense, make judgements and attain life goals.)

The process of creating and maintaining these four types of institutions is the essence of our struggle during the period of political and economic external domination.

III. FINANCING OUR STRUGGLE

While active, to a greater or lesser degree, in all four areas, the question remains how do we finance our efforts? We believe that economic self-reliance based on Ujamaa is the answer to this question.

Economic self-reliance (the ability to do for self while simultaneously being willing to help others and to accept assistance) is concerned with 1. The process of capitalization, i.e.

meeting start up and ongoing operating costs, and 2. The internal nature of economic relationships in the four institution building areas.

In practice, this means not only the development of cooperatives which save us money by the pooling of resources, but more importantly, the philosophical development of internal economic cooperativeness even as we battle in the capitalist marketplace outside the context of the institutions of struggle.

A. UJAMAA. It is critically important for us to be clear in our advocacy of Ujamaa that our economic activity internally reflects economically non-exploitative, egalitarian ideals and practices. This is important because an essential element of our oppression is the imposition of the capitalist system on our lives, regardless of whether the capitalism imposing the system of exploitation and oppression is white or Black, consciously oppressive/exploitative or simply unconscious agents of capitalism.

We must always remember that capitalism is a major contradiction in our lives. Contradictions between us and our main enemies (the white supremacists who impose capitalism, racism and sexism on us) and contradictions among us and various elements of our community require different methods to resolve the contradictions. However, just because the capitalist exploiting us is Black does not mean that there are no contradictions. The fact that a brother or sister may unconsciously be exhibiting and imposing capitalist ideals does not alter the fact that capitalism is being imposed and advocated in practice.

The economic structure which we establish to operate our institutions is an important aspect of our struggle, and indeed, in many cases here is the main line of struggle.

If, in practice, there is no difference between what we are doing and what the capitalists are doing, as far as how we economically operate our institutions, then something is seriously wrong and must be rooted out.

In our view there is a central contradiction between Ujamaa (literally the workers or laborers being in command) and capitalism (literally the controllers of wealth being in command). A “good capitalist” is not a worker but rather is a financier often far removed from the actual process of labor. A financier is one who contributes capital instead of labor and whose wealth is usually the result of unearned income (e.g. rent, interest) or income derived from

exploitative schemes. Good advocates of Ujamaa are workers who derive their wealth from the fruit of their labor and who consciously control the process and fruit of their own production.

Whenever we establish an order or system of ownership and control the principles of Ujamaa demand that we collectively own and administer what we produce, nothing more, and definitely nothing less. We do not believe that an Ujamaa institution can be owned by one individual nor by any subset of the productive labor force. Nor can such an institution separate the “cadre” who control and administer the institution from the people who work in the institution under “contract” as employees who work but have no voice and decision-making power.

B. SUPPORTING THE STRUGGLE IN THEORY AND PRACTICE. Using our own experience and practice as example, let us now discuss specifically how our economy works.

We believe that theory should guide practice and be developed out of practice. Theoretically we have been guided by four principles in our economic structuring and decisions making. 1. Put politics in the lead, 2. Put conscious kazi (productive labor) in command, 3. Put social development over making of profits, 4. Diversify the economic base.

1. Putting politics in the lead means that there must be a political reason for everything we do as an organization, particularly so in the economic sphere.

A critical aspect of our continued development and the defense of that development is the questioning and constant clarification of the character of our movement: are we practicing Ujamaa or capitalism? How does what we do economically support the political struggle?

It is incorrect, in our opinion, to justify an economic effort by saying that “it’s ok, because we’re using the money in the struggle.” This is nothing but “the end justifies the means” argument in disguise.

We believe that the end justifies the means only to the degree that the means do not contradict the end. We can not use slavery to achieve liberation, we can not use capitalism to achieve Ujamaa, because in the process of achieving the ends by the use of such means we are transformed into the very opposite of what we say we are struggling to become.

We can not become better by being worse. Yet day after day we sometimes forget to pay attention to the character of our economic structure because we unconsciously and/or inadvertently ascribe to the theory of the end justifying the means.

Does this mean that we can not operate business? No.

We do not believe that operating a business is synonymous with being a capitalist. Free enterprise: buying, selling and bartering in the marketplace, although paid lip service by capitalism, is actually not advocated by capitalist who use every tool at their disposal to wipe out any and all so called “competition”.

Extensions of Ujamaa into everyday economics implies that because the majority of our people are poor, it is important that the economics of our institutions be labor rather than capital intensive. We must prohibit membership based solely on workers be conscious of why they are working, otherwise we are not building an economy supportive of our struggle for national liberation.

2. Putting conscious kazi in command means more than simply having the workers make decisions. It also means favoring the use of conscious labor force over the use of an unconscious labor force. Conscious kazi in command requires that the workers know why they are laboring and know also to what use the fruit of their labor will be put visa-a-vis our struggle for national liberation. Among other things, this means that every worker must receive ideological education and must be required to practice the agreed upon ideology.

Our economy for national liberation will fall flat if the workers are politically unconscious, either that are inevitably become controlled by a clique of self-proclaimed managers. Bothe cases are the road to failure and/or capitalism rather than national liberation and Ujamaa.

There is no room for unconscious laborers in the cadre of people who are building the four primary institutions of struggle. We should never allow people who do not believe in the principles of our affirmative and alternative independent Black institutions to work in those institutions. For in fact, their very presence and practice, the ideas they put forward and the behavior they exhibit, are contradictory to our goal. In effect, they sabotage what we are struggling to build.

We must always remember that the purpose of our institutions is to advance the struggle and not simply to employ people.

Yes, our people need jobs, but more than jobs, we need national liberation. And while we should be able to work with any and everyone who is willing to work with us, we must always make a distinction between what we do externally with others and how we operate internally among ourselves.

3. Putting social development over the making of profits is a central concern of our institutional development. Does this mean that we make no profits in our business ventures? No, it does not. Rather, we are simply putting profits in their proper perspective.

Social development is the mobilizing, politicizing and organizing of our people. If we do not keep this in mind it will be simple to justify our business ventures as revolutionary because they “employ us”, thusly making it possible for us to avoid working for “the man”.

There is nothing wrong with a business venture supporting those who work in it, in fact that is correct. However, employing is not the same as advancing the struggle. Are we struggling to employ ourselves or are we struggling to win national liberations?

“Both” is not an adequate answer. One has to take precedent over the other. Our struggle must not be reduced to a “hustle”. Economic schemes which are designed to provide us with income are an entirely different question from the development of an Ujamaa economy within the four primary struggle institutions.

Two things we should remember:

First, we are struggling to win the hearts and minds of our people and not to win their dollars and dimes.

Second, any profit-making economic venture which operates in the overall capitalist economy and is established solely to make money off of our people is reactionary. Servicing the Black community is one thing, exploiting it is another.

Moreover, we should also remember that Ujamaa, during the period of capitalist domination, means both familyhood and cooperative economics. Working within the context of

our struggle should become a binding process that brings us together rather than an alienating process that enriches a minority of us by taking money out of the pockets of the majority of us.

4. Diversifying the economic base is a principle of protection for our struggle institutions.

Firstly, we should have more than one source of income. We have only to look at the single crop economies of many third world nations to understand the limitations of that approach. The various sources of income need not be large, but they do need to be varied, thusly guarding against the whole struggle economy collapsing because one aspect fails or because of a crisis in the “major funding source”.

Needless to say, we are opposed to using grants as critical foundations of our economic structures and day to day work. We believe that our foundation for development should be our own labor and the resources that we can save or for which we sacrifice.

We have witnessed too many projects which were solid and worthwhile I conception, go down the drain because of a dependence on outside, single source funding. When such funding pays salaries , rent, utilities and other major aspects of any program, it is almost a certainty that not only is the program not independent, but indeed, once the funding ceases the program also will cease or be thrown into serious crisis.

Furthermore, it is not simply a question of who runs the budget and makes the administrative decisions. It is a question of self-reliant, independent development. We believe that only the producers develop, as development is a direct outcome of full participation in the process of production. Production, from our viewpoint, is the meeting of human needs and desires through conscious kazi and includes all steps from conception to consumption. The putting together of resources is an integral and inseparable function of the process of production.

Secondly, our economy should be mixed in sources of capitalization as well as sources of income. We should depend not only on income from production, but also on reinvestment of profits, investment and reinvestment from the membership, loans and other forms of aid, all within a “legal corporate” structure which technically diminishes the individual liability of the members of the organization. There are laws which have been established to benefit corporations and we should take full advantage of those laws rather than subject ourselves to unnecessary risks simply because we did not incorporate or do not keep proper financial records.

Thirdly, we believe that within the context of America, it is beneficial for some (if not most) members of our organization to work outside of the organization. This is a most important form of economic diversification. It is often easier to raise capital this way, plus it diminishes the pressure to “sell” commodities and services at substantial mark-ups in order to make large profits. If our business is not a source of livelihood for the majority of the organization, then we can also be competitive in the general marketplace.

We can not overstate the importance of members working outside and bringing capital back into the struggle economy rather than attempting to develop a profit-making business that provides for our livelihood at the same time that we are attempting to wage national liberation struggle. Moreover, many times what is necessary in the struggle is not “good for business” in terms of making a profit.

In practice, we have found that we are better able to help each other when most of the membership works for wages outside of the organizational structure. Whether it be financial or social support, we are not only better able to help, but moreover, a crisis of an individual member does not place an undue burden on the struggle institution.

Fourthly and finally, we diversify by keeping our structures at manageable proportions and by offering qualitative, rather than merely quantitative, alternatives to what exists.

The catch phrase “small is beautiful” contains a significant element of truth. However, small is also relative. The point is to keep the size of the structure within the grasp of the work force. Sometimes, rather than constantly grow larger, it would be more advisable to divide and form two cells. The new cell could develop in another location or work in an entirely different field. It is important that we never allow our economic structures to grow larger than we can manage both from a capitalization and a labor standpoint.

While big business may look like the road to development, as long as we live under monopoly capitalism our only success at big business will be as capitalists. Capitalism makes us good at making money, but the revolution demands that our organizations oppose the class and profit exploitative aspects of capitalism.

Additionally, those economic structures which are succeeding are those who offer in quality what the larger economy does not rather than those who offer more of the same, only a so

called “Black” version. In the long run, even to succeed as a capitalist you must offer a qualitative alternative to what exists.

Our schools, for example, can succeed only by being qualitatively better than other available sources of education. If our Blackness is not better than it will be dismissed and ignored by our people, and rightfully so.

IV. SPECIFIC PRACTICE

In practice we have supported our institutions by:

1. Holding all cadre members responsible for the ongoing development of the institutions. We require capital investment as well as conscious kazi. We govern by consensus thereby assuring, at this stage, collective decision making. Consensus requires the consent of all the members in order to establish or change policy, and also requires that all members submit to the authority of the organization. Because each member has a veto at the time of decision making, once a decision is made each member is required to carry out that decision.
2. We have geared our capital acquisitions to our own ability to acquire them without grants and to sustain them based on our own labor, the productiveness of the particular structure and capital subsidization from the cadre membership. This is our self-reliant economy.
3. We have borrowed both internally and externally for major capitalization and have placed an emphasis on investments in real estate, buildings and productive equipment which minimizes and/or negates our dependence on outside services and facilities.
4. We have stressed the development of printed materials, not only as a source of documentation but also as a means of propagation of our ideology.

This is a general overview of our theory and practice of economic development within the context of our national liberation struggle.