

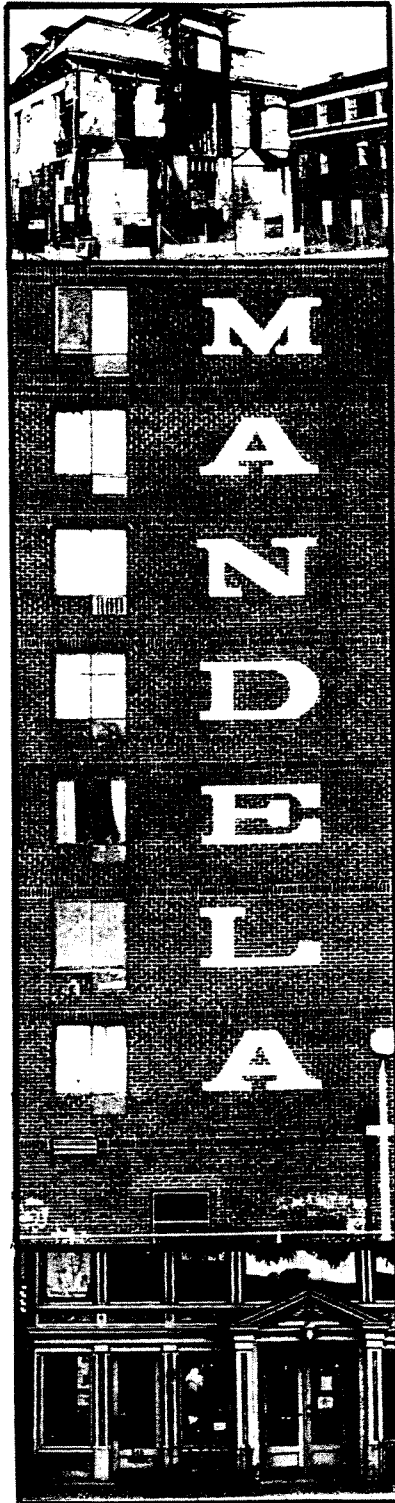
AFRICA IN BOSTON:

A Critical Analysis of Mandela, Massachusetts

by Monty Neill

*I tell you Americans! that unless you speedily alter your course,
you and your Country are gone!!!!*

-- David Walker's *Appeal* (Boston: 1830)



Amidst world-wide enclosures, some African-Americans living in Boston, Massachusetts, sought to turn enclosures to the advantage of the oppressed. The Mandela initiative captured the imagination of African-Americans across the US and was discussed in Africa. The idea of self-control, of constructing a liberated space in the very heart of a racist US city, is a powerful expression of hope and anger.

I have chosen a particular frame of analysis, development and underdevelopment. Since World War II, if not since 1917, the question of "socialist development" has been central to working class struggle around the world. It seems to me that knowledge gained from the history and debates over the issues of independence, self-determination, development and underdevelopment - that is, over what kind of society to construct and how to build it, given global factors of class composition and struggles - can shed light on the Mandela story.

Boston appeared in the landscape of US political economy of the 1980's as "boomtown," the "Hub" of the "Massachusetts miracle," the capital of high-tech corporate-university R&D for the new and growing sectors of US capital. Then in 1986, a proposal burst on the city to become its most intensely debated political issue: certain sections of Boston which had an African-American majority population should incorporate their own, separate city, to be named Mandela after the south African activists.¹

The Greater Roxbury Incorporation Project (GRIP), organized by Andrew Jones and Curtis Davis, quickly gained support from many African-American community activists and progressive politicians. The Mandela project was technically simple: GRIP defined the boundaries of a to-be-incorporated city of some 150,000 (see map p.59), and residents voted for or against a proposal to incorporate. However, any voter living in a precinct any part of which was to be included in Mandela could vote on the issue, whether or not their residence was located in Mandela. If the referendum passed, then the Massachusetts legislature would vote whether to allow the incorporation.²

An incorporated city in Massachusetts has certain powers. It can tax, but within sharp constraints: to levy a sales or income tax requires state approval (no city has it), and state law limits the property tax. A city can zone and regulate development, adopt a rent control ordinance, fund housing acquisition and construction, and provide such services as schools, garbage collection, fire and police. According to GRIP, cities and towns in the U.S. could use these powers in a truly democratic manner. Mandela's proponents sought to harness these powers on behalf of the excluded of what is now Boston.

Its opponents, including mayor Ray Flynn (a white progressive liberal), a number of prominent black ministers, politicians and developers, the city's big capitalists (organized as the "Vault"), and its major media, united in a campaign to defeat the ballot referendum. Nonetheless, the proposal obtained 27% of the vote, a powerful statement of protest by African-Americans against their situation in Boston.

In November 1986, Mandela lost 33,609 to 12,349 (*Boston Globe* totals), gaining one-third of the votes in some wards (a ward is an accumulation of precincts). Two years later, in the November 1988 election, the proposal again appeared on the ballot, only now as a smaller area of 125,000 people, in particular excepting Columbia point. This time there was little public debate in the media. The measure went down, 21,248 to 11,642, in much lighter voting (representing a huge drop in the votes opposing Mandela), but did win in some

heavily black precincts (author's tally from city data). Proponents argued that the significantly higher percentage in favor (up from 27% to 35%) accurately reflected a growing sentiment in favor of Mandela. The referendum is likely to appear on the ballot again in the fall of 1990.

Why did so many blacks want out of this boom, this neo-paradise? What was it about the idea of Mandela that caused such excitement? In part, it was that African-Americans largely were left out of Boston's economic boom.³ Only late in the growth spurt did the black unemployment rate decline to near the white levels, and blacks overwhelmingly occupy the lowest paid jobs. The old story, "last hired and first fired," continues to be read in African-American homes. But this "economic" fact is merely one part of the drama, because Mandela connects Boston with Africa with more than just a name: it poses the questions of "independence," "self-determination," and "development."

Development and Underdevelopment in Boston

Boston was a major beacon of capitalist development into the nineteenth century, based on slave, sugar and rum trade, opium wars and New England's textile mills. But well before World War I, Boston's capitalists began investing elsewhere.

Unlike Detroit or Chicago, Boston did not become an industrial city based on mass production. To a great extent, it was bypassed by the mass worker based organization of production in the US from World War I into the 1960s and did not "develop." Its population declined by 25%. Its prototypical worker became the "civil servant" and its culture the insular offspring of Anglo Puritanism and Irish Catholicism, producing a politics not of class but of ethnicity. Its large university population was and is essentially unintegrated into the rest of the city.

Though some southern blacks migrated to Boston early in the twentieth century, and Caribbean blacks followed, into the 1960s Boston had a very small African-American population that wielded little power. One consequence was that a significant percentage of Irish- and Italian-Americans were forced to share the bottom of the labor hierarchy, doing jobs that in the industrial midwest tended to be reserved for blacks. However, Irish political dominance in Boston ensured steady if low-waged employment in public jobs for ethnic whites -- and it helped ensure both residential segregation of African-Americans and their exclusion from city jobs. This was Boston's adaptation of the U.S. pattern of creating "race" as a hierarchy within the working class.

Being on the fringe of the accumulation cycles dominated

Samir Amin, Delinking and Class Struggle: A Note

Samir Amin has been, over the past 15-20 years, one of the major writers on "underdevelopment." He is particularly noted for proposing "delinking," a process whereby third world nations "delink" from the world market to pursue their own development. This is necessary, he argues, because the structures of the world market ensure continued "unequal exchange" between developed and underdeveloped nations. (He ignores that in capitalism exchange is **founded** on the unequal exchange between the possessors of labor power and the owners of capital.)

Yet, in these same works, Amin also argues in favor of these nations availing themselves of the most advanced forms of technology existing in the developed areas (i.e., the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD, nations). Thus, he (not unreasonably) supports both separating from the OECD-dominated market and using OECD-capitalist controlled technology. Given his view of the structural necessity of unequal exchange, it is unclear how a delinked nation can then pay for the high technology (as he assumes a continued capitalist OECD—indeed, the world revolution will proceed from the "countryside" to the "metropolis"), or even persuade its owners to sell to them (as Amin also points out the tendency for developed nations to sell only obsolete and second-hand machinery and technology to underdeveloped nations).

Most telling, and underlying the contradiction between delinking and obtaining the OECD's finest products, Amin fails to address the consequences of the **delinking of the working class**. Historically, though some nations have partially isolated themselves from the world market, this separation has first and foremost served to separate the

national proletariat from the international proletariat. It becomes the imprisonment of the proletariat in a jail separate from that holding the rest of the world's working class, and for that reason has been until recently in effect supported by the ruling classes of the OECD. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the struggles of the delinked proletariat from Burma to China to the USSR to East Europe, the workers' refusal of this arrangement is inescapably clear.

Yet Amin's problem—and more importantly that of the international working class—remains: how to gain access to the useful wealth of the world without paying capital's price and without "reinventing capital's wheel" through autarkic accumulation? While we do not have the answer, this much is clear: neither autarkic delinking nor subservient integration (which is of course what most workers, as well as nations, are most of the time) can solve this problem.

Why has Amin (and most of his colleagues) failed to see and grapple with this fact? The answer lies in the absence of working class struggle from Amin's writings. His narrative histories are of competing exploiters and the class struggle against exploitation is not seen as shaping history. His fundamental political category is the nation state. His political economy is nation-building marxism that reproduces, finally, the Stalinist project of the construction of the proletariat - the accumulation of living and dead labor that defines capitalism. As a result, he is not looking for proletarian liberation, but only for development to be attained through a multi-class deal. His perspective leads him always to the wrong questions and such non-solutions as delinking the world's working class from its own struggles.

by the mass worker meant relatively low wages and rates of unionization and an early arrival to the end of the epoch of the mass worker. The much discussed "fiscal crisis of the state" that pretexted the smashing of the wage gains of city workers and the welfare working class hit Boston in the mid-1970's.⁴ But it was also the birth cry of the "Massachusetts miracle." In the next downturn, 1981-82, Boston was virtually untouched, announcing the dominance of the "service economy" that spanned MIT and McDonalds, the computer wielding doctor and the bedpan wielding aide.

The dawn of the new economic order was ushered in with a race war that reached its highest pitch in a battle over school desegregation. African-Americans in Boston had been part of the civil rights/black liberation movement of the 1960s. Though total city population remained stagnant, the numbers of blacks increased, mostly migrants from the US south. With growing militance and numbers, African-Americans fought to end being

spurred anew the push for integration. The mid-70's recession coincided with court-ordered desegregation of the city's schools. This move cemented the dominance of the integration project for the next decade and more.

Black children on buses were stoned, riots exploded in schools and streets, and blacks fought for the right of access to the public spaces of the city, the schools and streets. The city's big capitalists remained aloof from the battle, pleased with the working class fratricide, until after two years it threatened to get out of hand.

Blacks won the battle for school desegregation and along the way made some gains. Yet in many regards they lost, not only because the school system remains among the worst in the nation, but because the subsequent economic transformation of Boston left African-Americans outside and underneath. The combination of development (e.g., a local economic boom) and underdevelopment (e.g., the Reagan cutbacks on a national



defined as a sub-human race and excluded from the politics and economics of the city.

As with the US African-American movement in general, Boston's blacks have simultaneously demanded integration into the system and their own separate, black-controlled development, with one then the other aspect gaining prominence.⁵ Following the 1968 riots protesting the assassination of M.L. King, most of Boston's black organizations joined a Black United Front (BUF). Five thousand blacks assembled in Roxbury to approve 21 demands, stating, "We must begin here in Boston to build a new Black Nation." They sought \$100 million, partial payment on the 40 acres and a mule African-Americans did not receive after the Civil War.

They raised tens of thousands of dollars. The bulk of the money was poured into small businesses, most of which failed. Some went into cooperative community housing. The BUF's actions reasserted the division between production (here including sales and services) which remained privatized, and reproduction (including housing) which could be cooperatively owned, and did not challenge capitalist organization of production.

African-Americans also demanded control over their own schools, which were completely segregated, but were thwarted by white politicians. The inability of community control to prosper, coupled with a national retreat of black militance,

scale) enclosed and decimated large parts of the black community. *Development does not erase underdevelopment, it reorganizes it.*⁶ (See box on Amin, page 55.)

Enclosures throughout the world have sent millions into migration. Thousands, from Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Ireland, have arrived in Boston, often without documents. Blacks, Latinos and Asians now total nearly 40% of the city population. They compete with each other for the low-wage jobs in the service sector and for the remaining housing available to the poor. A far higher percentage of whites are now rising a step on the labor hierarchy while African-Americans remain at the bottom. The job structure of Boston's new economy created professional jobs at the top and technical and office/clerical jobs in the middle. At the bottom, some 40% of new jobs in the 80's were jobs as janitors, security personnel, restaurant and child care workers, hospital aides, and some light production, frequently paying wages below the official poverty level for families.

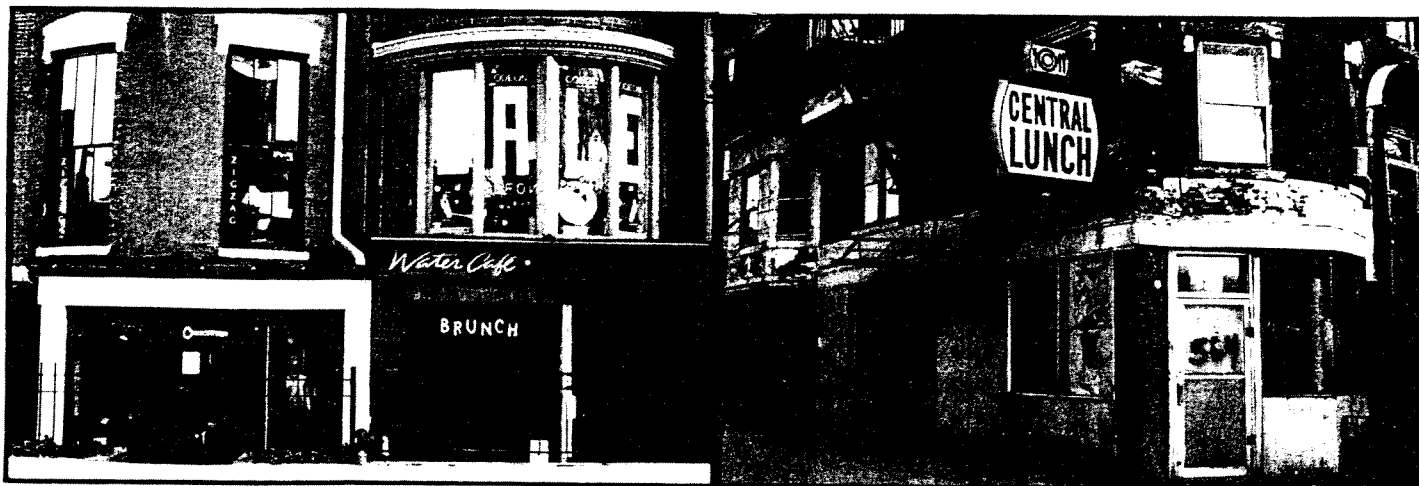
Jobs and wages are found outside the black community. Young black men, and women, often refuse school and steady employment on grounds that they do not want to become "white," to participate in the system on the system's terms or work for less-than-subsistence wages in the service economy. Individual capitalists remain terrified of these still-too-rebellious youth, particularly the men, who display their hostility to

and rejection of the system. This rejection meets continuing systemic racism, so employers often refuse to hire those who do seek waged work.

The boom of the 80s brought large numbers of more affluent whites back into the city. Even earlier, the South End began to be gentrified, its ethnically heterogeneous and low income population pushed out to make way for the "young urban professionals." (Not only have real estate speculators and the "gentry" benefitted, so too have rats: Their population became the second highest in any U.S. city as large apartments were broken into small condos and restaurants proliferated.) A large swathe of lower Roxbury was bulldozed to make room for a highway that community resistance finally prevented from being built.

In Boston's older and lowest-income black neighborhoods, little property is owned by residents. These neighborhoods are close to the downtown business districts. Sections of Roxbury

for Boston blacks approach rates in the third world), hunger and malnutrition, disease (including AIDS and a resurgence of tuberculosis), and homelessness in low-income communities. African-Americans are disproportionately located in low-income class sectors and are thus disproportionately affected. This can be seen in the fact that the life-expectancy for African-Americans has, for the first time in the century, begun to decline, while it continues (for now?) to rise for whites. Fanon observed that in the absence of an attack on the boss, the "wretched" attack each other. In Boston, as in other cities, some youths have organized illegal-drug-selling enterprises; with this and growing impoverishment in the community has come a rapid escalation in homicide and other forms of intra-community attacks. The use of force, armed struggle, has taken a purely destructive turn; it is not substructive (substruction being the combination of subversion against the system and construction of an alternative society). The other side of force, that of



have been bought up in a land-speculation frenzy that could result in the expulsion of African-Americans from their current neighborhoods. Much of Roxbury has been burned by arsonists and many buildings have been left vacant to decay. Thousands of apartments, many publicly owned, are warehoused, kept off the market though they could easily be made habitable. Banks have generally refused to provide mortgages to residents of black neighborhoods. The very high prices of land and housing produced by urban development require the enclosure of the urban sectors of underdevelopment, leaving low-income workers with few places to go, a process paralleled across the US and internationally in cities such as London, Zurich and Oslo.

In the old ghetto, African-Americans constructed their own class hierarchy. Now, blacks with a more stable wage have moved into Mattapan and Hyde Park, or even to the still-inhospitable suburbs, leaving behind in Roxbury and North Dorchester a population overwhelmingly low-waged, welfare-waged and unwaged. The class geography of Boston's blacks has thus dispersed and segmented, and the poorest have been left more poor and more vulnerable to gentrification.

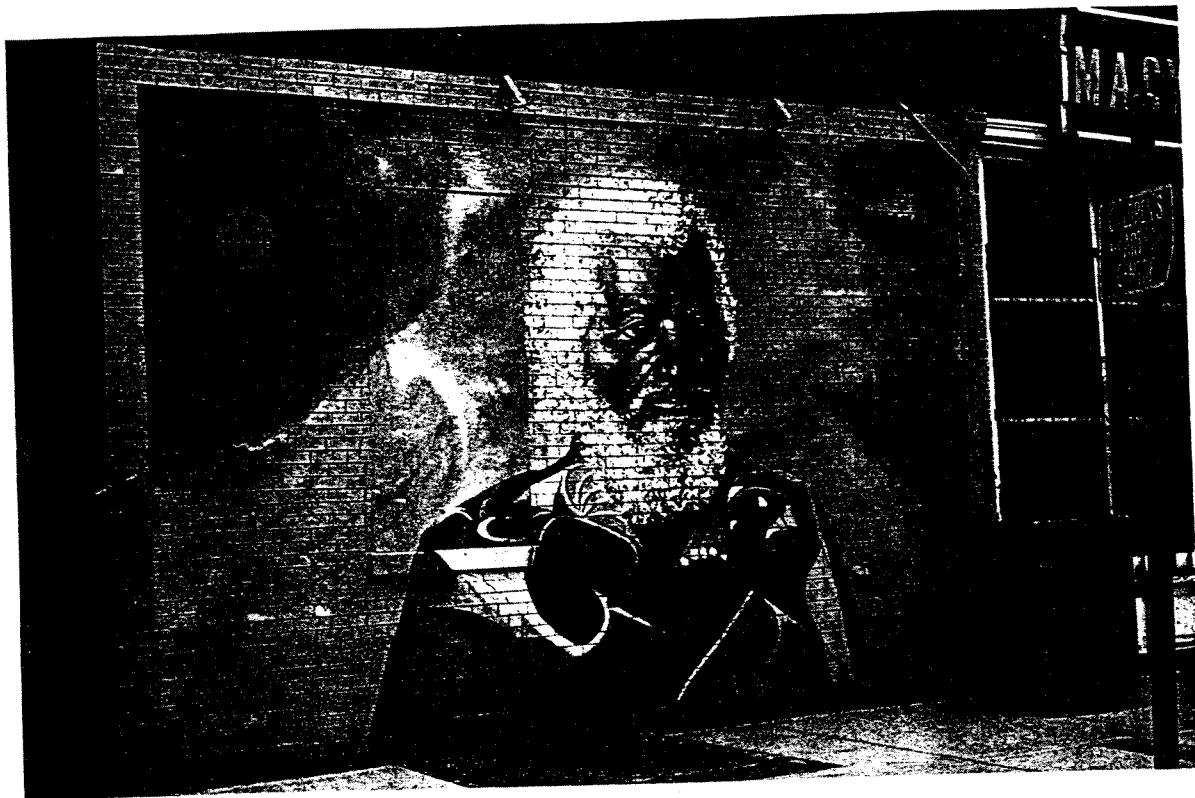
In the 80s, Reagan (together with the Democratic Party-led House of Representatives) cut huge holes in what he termed the "safety net," and the low- and un-waged fell through. The effects of the attack can be seen in rising infant mortality (rates

the state, has revealed itself in police strip-searches and other harassment of young African-American and Latino men. In at least one instance, youths have retaliated with Molotov cocktail attacks.

As if these murderous assaults were not enough, the African-American community is then condemned for suffering the consequences of genocidal state and corporate policies. Though cocaine addiction is also prevalent in middle-class suburbia, the media focus on "crack-addicted babies" born to the urban, black poor. Though the rate of childbirth among all U.S. teenagers, including blacks, has declined over the past several decades, the media, liberal and conservative, bemoan the "epidemic" of "out-of-wedlock" black teen pregnancies. Birth control information, medical care, child nutrition programs and housing assistance for these women, however, have been reduced, not increased. The increased impoverishment of the lower-waged has been an essential condition of the Reagan "boom."

In the mid-80s, however, at the height of the boom, Boston's big capital, experiencing a labor shortage and consequently increasing wages, proclaimed the need for blacks to be properly trained to occupy jobs in the clerical and technical fields. Corporations even donated a few million dollars to various school projects and formed the "Boston Compact," an agreement that became an international model in which schools

Frederick C. Douglass, wall mural by Arnold Hurley and Gary Rickson



were to become more able to produce and identify the potentially good workers in exchange for job-offerings to those youth. However, when in May 1989, Mayor Flynn suggested a 0.1% payroll tax to help fund the schools, local businessmen immediately opposed the idea. Perhaps they were moved by the developing slowdown in the local economy which has increased the unemployment rate and decreased capital's short-term need for employable young blacks.

The "Massachusetts miracle" with its myth of "good jobs at good wages" (the battle calls of Mass. Governor Michael Dukakis in his pitiful, losing race for the US presidency) never existed for many, particularly for blacks, many of whom have been enclosed and restructured into ever deeper misery and isolation, an intensified underdevelopment that has assisted Boston's development through provision of low-waged workers. The absence of a form of integration that even appears to be heading toward a structure of racial equality allowing African-Americans into white society has again fueled a call for separate development and provided support for the Mandela demand.

The Mandela Initiative

In the face of the assaults, Boston's African-American community has not been passive or succumbed to despair or fatalism. Activism has continued on many fronts. Mel King gained over one third of the votes in his 1983 mayoral campaign, including one-fifth of the white vote, as he became the first African-American to reach the finals of a Boston mayoral race. Social service activists have fought for improvements in welfare, health, day care and more. Housing and community groups have repeatedly attempted to gain control over development in Roxbury. They have opposed, with some success, plans of the Boston Redevelopment Authority to reconstruct parts of

Roxbury to serve downtown business, and they have proposed their own plans for development of housing and other community services. It was in the combination of increasing devastation and recomposition of much of the black community and continuing struggles over housing, jobs and social services that the Mandela initiative appeared.

The Greater Roxbury Incorporation Project (GRIP) was not and is not much of an organization; it is an idea, a suggestion, a media event, a rallying cry, a statement of protest. Its organizing efforts have been to twice get the signatures on petitions to get the referendum on the ballot.

The political forces seen as "progressive" or "left" have supported Mandela. Mel King was probably its most prominent supporter. A number of black state legislators supported the measure, as did some black members of the city School Committee. Other black elected officials at the city and state level, who hold to more "moderate" political positions, opposed the referendum. Housing and community control activists and groups have publicly supported Mandela. These groups, who represent as well as anyone the African-American working class in the persona of renter and community resident, face the looming power of the city development agencies, speculative capital, and black entrepreneurs.

Mandela, "invented" by a few "outsiders" (Jones and Davis had not lived long in Boston), in fact touches deeply a nationalist, community control, progressive reform agenda for housing, schools, medical care and community empowerment, a tradition reaching far back into African-American history. Mandela speaks to the desire to change the fact that most of the African-American working class has not improved its well-being, material or social, in the past decade.

The instincts of Boston capital to oppose Mandela were accurate: if the bottom moves, the entire structure may collapse. In 1986, the Mandela initiative terrified the city's political

establishment. Had Mandela been successful, millions of dollars of development schemes could have been jeopardized, and with it their reorganization of the city. While Mandela's proponents raised merely hundreds of dollars, thousands were raised from "the Vault," an organization of over two dozen of the city's largest banking, investment and industrial firms, insurance and real estate companies, retail stores and utilities officially named the "Coordinating Committee" and labeled the Vault because they first met at the Boston Safe Deposit & Trust. The Vault bankrolled the "Campaign for One Boston," which was headed by a number of black ministers, particularly Charles Stith, and developers who had obtained a "piece of the action" in Boston and wanted more; but the Vault's involvement did not become clear until after the referendum.

The primary weapon used against Mandela was fear. The Campaign for One Boston largely succeeded, with the aid of the media, in establishing the terms of the public debate as being whether a new city would be financially viable. The mayor's office released "data" claiming to prove the city would not be viable, that its expenses would be staggering and its taxes either inadequate or exorbitant or both. This was implicitly a threat to ensure that Mandela would be financially impoverished.

Though Mandela's proponents claimed the city's figures were pure political fiction, they offered no proposed budget for the new city. Jones explained that people who were going to develop a financial plan never did so, though one may yet be forthcoming. In 1986, Jones rebutted the financial argument with the observation, "If people have to haggle over the price of liberation, then it means they do not want it" (*Boston Globe* 11/1/86).

Opposition to Mandela united specific interests with a particular vision of development for Boston's African-Americans. Most prominent among the specific interests were those of real estate developers. For example, Deborah Prothrow-Stith, the state Public Health Commissioner and Rev. Stith's wife, was involved, according to Mandela supporter and housing activist Ken Wade, in a development project with the city. The

Campaign for One Boston, explained Wade, was composed "primarily of people who were directly or indirectly receiving something from the city."

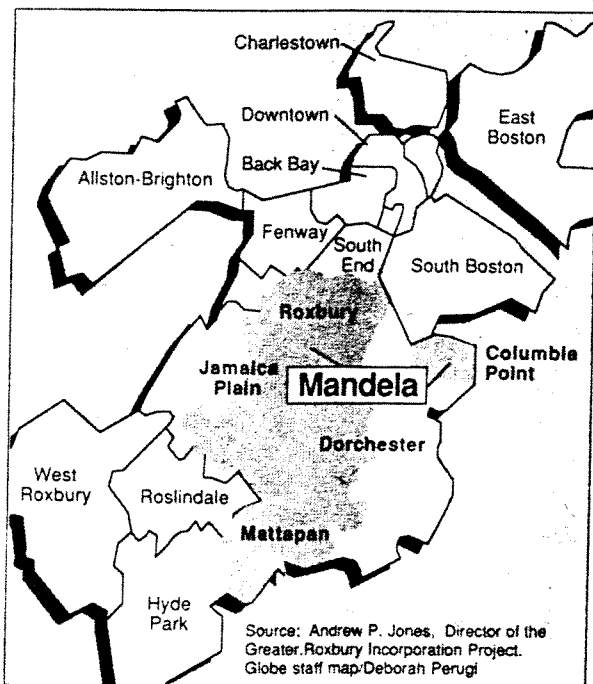
Richard Taylor, a founder of One Boston, also helped found the Minority Developers Association (MDA). Taylor criticized the "negative antidevelopment tone" of various black community housing groups and the MDA proposed that in their projects only 35% of the new houses go to "low and moderate income" people, though the median income in black neighborhoods is at the "poor to moderate" level. That is, they want to develop projects in the black community primarily for whites and the handful of upper-middle-income blacks. These developers have received substantial support from the Flynn administration, which is often at odds with neighborhood groups that want to control and limit development in ways they see as beneficial to, in the words of activist Chuck Turner, "the broader community" (*Boston Globe* 1/8/89).

Not all black developers and small capitalists opposed Mandela. According to Jones, many who saw their small businesses threatened by gentrification supported Mandela, as did some developers who, he said, prefer a more cooperative vision of the African-American community. But on the whole, black capitalists seeking enrichment and power via real estate development and related schemes or through connections to large white capital supported One Boston.

One Boston offered a classic alliance of "foreign" and "local" (but subordinate) capital. For example, One Boston claimed that if African-Americans remained Boston residents, they would be able to gain preferential access to Boston-based jobs. Thus, Stith argued, "Once you absent yourself from the political configuration [Boston], you don't have the political leverage" to obtain jobs and development resources. "The city is ours, too," he claimed "and we need to share in its bounty" (*Boston Globe Magazine*, April 12, 1987). This has never been an issue for the multitude of European-American towns surrounding Boston, many of whose residents obtain employment in Boston without any preferential access (their skin color being sufficient), while African-American Boston residents have been excluded, not preferred. Moreover, development as planned by the Vault, the BRA and the minority developers, will most likely drive most African-Americans out of Boston.

However, Mandela's proponents did not explain how the "independent city" could shape itself if it were separate from Boston and what it might look like, other than being predominantly African-American. Boston lacks black working class political practice and effective political organizations, except at times around specific projects, such as an effort to obtain a guaranteed share of city construction jobs for minorities and women (a gain often honored in the breach), and some battles around housing. The organizational impoverishment allows most political activity to revolve around individual electoral candidacies. In this regard, the Mandela referendum was an exception (being an idea, not a person) but also true to form - the reduction of politics to its electoral form.

According to Jones, most of the black political leadership has paid only lip service to Mandela while continuing their essentially personalized politics. This process, he says, corrupts the black community, which ends up seeing Mandela as a radical fringe project and ultimately does not take it seriously.



That Mandela has not yet won is presented by Jones as caused by problems of information, education and mis-leadership.

But neither GRIP nor anyone else developed an effective means of organizing around the issue. One group that claimed it would do grassroots organizing, FATE, in Jones' opinion did only a little, though he thought their efforts were positive. The community housing groups did not make Mandela a priority. The organization that came out of Mel King's mayoral campaign, the Rainbow Coalition, was not active on the issue, and King himself did not support Mandela when Jones and Jesse Jackson debated the issue, Jackson having come out in opposition to Mandela. The Nation of Islam, said Jones, has attacked him for criticizing the Nation's role in the Mandela debate. So it seems that while Mandela increased its share of the vote, its self-proclaimed allies and supporters among the political leadership (State Rep. Byron Rushing was the only exception named by Jones) either vacillated or did not take the issue to the public as a key element of their own campaigns and projects.

One Boston has twice carried the day in the electoral arena. Perhaps fear that further disaster would befall the community if it separated from Boston was dominant, or perhaps voters believed that development in Boston would produce benefits. Perhaps also the lack of unity and strength for Mandela among even the progressive African-American leadership raised doubts about what would happen if the initiative won. The hope generated in the idea of a separate city and the anger against continuing, entrenched racism together have not been enough to sway a majority of voters in other than a few overwhelmingly African-American precincts.

Mandela: Just More Capitalist Development?

"Do we want to be 'sharecroppers' on a Boston plantation, or have an independent city to ourselves?" asked Andrew Jones (*Boston Globe Magazine*, April 12, 1987). This view is typical of the ideologies underlying the Mandela conception: third world nationalist concepts of development, the local town meeting of New England, and voting as a means of change.

As Fanon anticipated, the nominal state independence obtained by third world nations between 1820 and 1970 (Latin America, Asia, Africa) has rarely led to anything more than continued underdevelopment of the nation as part of the world system. Integration into the world market has been subordinate

and unequal. Attempts at autarkic development have occasionally been partially fulfilled, but the walls denoting separate "socialist" development are collapsing. The failure of both integration and autarky poses the essential problem for the underdeveloped: is there a way out?

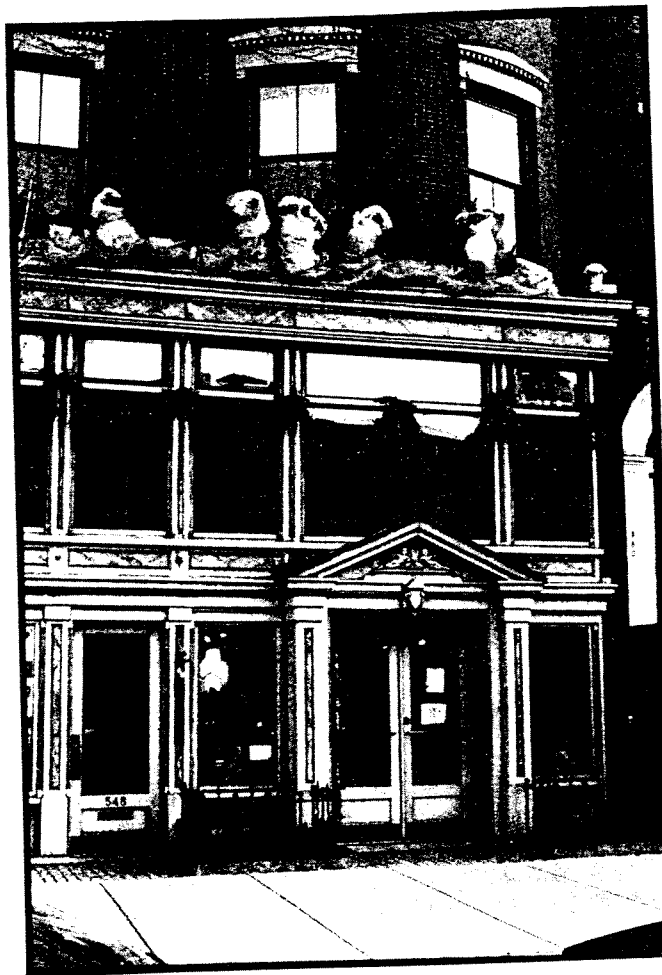
It is in this context that the proposal for Mandela must be examined: the failure to obtain full and equal integration in Boston and the concomitant construction of intensified underdevelopment and stratification in the black community, the crises of both integration and autarky on a world scale, and the defeat of working class movement in the 1970's and capital's recom-

position in the 80s. It is not that struggle (or history) ended in the 1980s, in Boston or around the world, but that struggles in the 80s remained isolated and failed to generalize. This, in turn, has encouraged proposals for "progress" and "development," presented as benefitting the working class, that have left out the most crucial piece: the class struggle.

The absence of an African-American working class political presence has encouraged the politics of "community," of multi-class alliance with political leadership shared among the moderate and progressive sectors of black political activists. The Mandela plan itself is couched as a progressive class alliance for community development via self-control, a multi-class populism in which "the people" come together to choose Mandela while deferring the debate over what Mandela is to look like. It thus avoids confronting class and other contradictions within the

community. Jones, for example, argued that people in the Mandela area only needed to agree on the need for democratic government. This, by default, allows a capitalistic definition of community.

One Boston's position perpetuated the illusion that integration will lead to development that will benefit the working class. It also effectively defines development as becoming assimilated, "white" at last (as over time European immigrants became "white"). Thus there would be African-American big owners and managers as well as little owners, workers and unemployed, but in "just" proportion to the class composition among various Euro-American ethnic groups in the US. However, One Boston's "trickle down" would actually result in the completion of the current cycle of enclosures in Boston through the removal of the major obstacle, the African-American neighborhoods.



Mandela implicitly stands in opposition to enclosure. However, by making the issue narrowly one of voting for city incorporation and not one of class confrontation over the shape of the future, Mandela has left unaddressed the questions that confront it and failed to mobilize those who must be active if the conception is to become real. Without a class goal in opposition to development as accumulation of capital, Mandela is not likely to gain the necessary working class support to win at the polls.

But even if electoral and legislative success could be attained despite the absence of working class power, without that power it would mean only that local control could enhance the tools of social discipline conducive to capital accumulation in the individual and the community. Accumulation would proceed socially through utilization of African-American cops, teachers and social workers, community organizations and churches, and small (but growing) businesses. In exchange for this form of development, Mandela would (perhaps) enable African-Americans (and other low-waged workers) to physically remain in their current neighborhoods and some of them to rise to higher levels on capital's ladder.

An independent city could also yield such significant benefits as reduced police harassment and improved city services, though Mandela's proponents have not explained how this would happen. (It could, its opponents argue, turn into East St. Louis - an economic disaster.) These improvements are also the promise made by One Boston (though, as argued here, not likely the reality). Absent working class power, in both instances the working class would remain subordinate to local capital, be it black, white, brown, yellow or rainbow, inevitably operating in alliance with "external" capital. Is this not something Mandela should oppose? Should it not propose working class plans for Mandela? Mandela thus far is not more than a debate with One Boston over the best route to development. The debate over what kind of development has not risen beyond the Mandela claim that being independent is itself a sufficient difference.

In fact, the multi-class perspective underlying Mandela reveals itself in the absence of a compelling vision or plan of the results of Mandela: what kind of lives would people be able to lead, to create for themselves, beyond having nominal independence and democracy? Such plans are class plans, and if the working class does not make plans, capital will plan for them.

For example, profiteering from high rent, even a deal for "moderate" rent, is fundamentally antithetical to housing controlled by and for the working class. Mandela's proponents have suggested incorporation will lead to truly "affordable"

housing, but not indicated how. Nor have they addressed what kinds of housing are to be available to different sorts of people: singles, teenagers and young adults, people without children, those who want to live communally or in extended families.

Mandela's proponents have not broached the issue of how the community might cooperatively control both production and social reproduction. There is no guarantee it will offer a higher wage. Blacks in Boston have long sought control over schools, but no plan has been proposed as to what the schools would look like, how they would be run and operated, or how and for what ends children should be educated. In short, Mandela has not considered the political, economic and social relations that could exist within the would-be liberated zones.

The shape of new relations would be determined in part by access to material wealth. But Mandela appears to have ac-



cepted giving up wealth in exchange for "independence," a reflection of autarkic socialist positing of a contradiction between the two. But material wealth is close at hand, controlled by the aptly-named "Vault" that opposed the creation of Mandela.

Understanding the need to gain access to wealth has not escaped Boston's African-American community. The Black United Front of the late '60s demanded money to be controlled by the African-American community. In 1989, State Sen. Bill Owens and Rep. Rushing filed legislation in Massachusetts to require the state to pay reparations to the descendants of slaves in compensation for the pre-Civil War slave trade and subsequent generations of racial economic exclusion.

The demand was legislatively impossible in a year in which the "Massachusetts miracle" stagnated. However, the proposal did pose the questions of what is social wealth and who ought to have a share of the "Commonwealth of Massachusetts." Winning the demand could overcome a major objection to Mandela, that it would be a city with minimal material wealth. Taken together, the two propose that African-Americans (and

others in Mandela who choose to participate) define their own space and have a proportionate share of the social wealth that has been accumulated capitalistically for centuries. Yet beyond voting, neither proposal is based on mobilizing those who could benefit.

The political formality of the Mandela proposal corresponds to the lack of class struggle in its conception. Jones proposes the town meeting as an example of democracy whereby the population determines its own fate. He claims that the powers of the city can thus be harnessed to the benefit of the oppressed. However, the argument has two flaws. First, the town meeting is, in New England, a bourgeois democracy founded on the inequality of ownership. In town after town in modern New England, developers, speculators and all the other forms of ownership of capital control the town meeting to obtain, protect and squabble over their class interests. In this, it is like all bourgeois democratic dictatorships.

Bourgeois democracy does provide forms in which the working class can battle for a better deal. A Mandela City might provide a better deal than a Boston. But, and herein lies the second flaw, cities in Massachusetts have sharply circumscribed powers, so what Mandela's majority could do is limited by state and federal laws and constitutions that, above all, protect property rights. (This fact is likely to be sharply asserted by the US Supreme Court over the next several years.)

Voting, the formal method chosen to attain Mandela, is a moderate means to a possibly radical end. A process that submerges differences in a short-term campaign for electoral gain, voting encourages a politics of not confronting contradictions among those who may vote for the proposal, i.e. not addressing contradictions among Mandela's potential supporters. Rather than being a class activity, voting is an isolated, individual act that reduces solidarity to an abstraction. The Mandela proposal, as a referendum only, reduces and channels the deep anger African-Americans feel over their status in Boston to a matter of voting. The call for reparations has also taken electoral form, beseeching those with power to "make amends." Neither are as yet bound up with a struggle to develop the levels of autonomous power that would force the owners of capital to concede reparations and independence. While a plan may be couched as a proposal on which to vote, for Mandela to have working class value it must be treated as far more than an electoral exercise: it must emerge as class struggle. Only then can Mandela create the possibility of escaping the polarities of underdevelopment and development.

From Development to Class Struggle: Toward a Strong Mandela

Our essential critique of the Mandela project is that it does not go as far as it could. That it gets as many votes as it does indicates the widespread desire for fundamental change. Mandela should be a matter of class struggle to obtain the power to implement a new and different use of land and social space by and for the working class. That is, what has been proposed is a weak version of Mandela when what is needed is a strong version of Mandela.

But how can this power be attained? Mandela might, for one, look to South Africa for more than a name. The black

townships, despite a military occupation, were able to organize massive, long-term rent strikes. Youth involved in the cocaine industry (which now pays low hourly wages to its sales clerks) might be persuaded to provide community protection against arsonists to rent-strikers and to occupiers of habitable but vacant apartments. They could even demand "high wages" to reconstruct housing to be made available to those with no and low incomes (the financing for which should come from reparations). Surely this would be as "useful" as the "high wages" soon to be paid to workers to rebuild one of Boston's major highways so that commuters can more easily go to and from their jobs.

In South Africa, workers who travel from townships and "Bantustans" and even neighboring countries have organized mass strikes in the teeth of martial law. True, in Boston African-American workers are rarely the majority. But they are far from the only low-waged workers. They are joined by the emigres from Cape Verdes, the Caribbean, Central America, Mexico, South America, SouthEast Asia, and many European-Americans, all of whom have been essentially ignored in the Mandela proposal. Boston's hotel workers (who among them speak dozens of languages) demanded and won a housing fund in their latest contract. At one point they threatened to disrupt "business and usual" in the hotels, a major Boston industry. Many of these workers live within the bounds of Mandela.

Education on the issue need not be reduced to electoral petitions and the utterances of elected officials. In England, people used to "beat the bounds," walk the boundary of their parish or village once or twice a year. This could be organized, including for youth, for "Patriots day," currently a state holiday marked primarily by the Boston Marathon, which runs from suburb to Boston, never approaching Mandela. Imagine the impact of hundreds, perhaps thousands, walking together and physically saying, "This is to be ours!" Perhaps they could also engage in another old ritual, "cursing the neighbors" for determining the boundaries and using the armed force of the police to keep African-Americans at bay, as, for example, does the adjacent town of Brookline. Would it not in this process become clear that the bounds are not merely town lines?

These few suggestions have in common mobilization, organization and activity to empower and increase the material and social well-being of the working class. Mel King, in a paper written after the first vote on Mandela, argued:

"transformation starts with the belief that we can fashion a community that is free of the oppressive, elitist dominance that currently characterizes the relationships in this country....Our first step is to define the community and the direction in which it would proceed. [He then proposed an organizational structure for Mandela.] Everything being suggested here are things we have already done....I am convinced that failure to organize at this level will mean that we are moved off this turf."

King's ideas do not appear to have circulated or engaged public attention, nor have any others been proposed.⁷

The form, Mandela, could be a useful form, but Mandela can only have electoral success for the working class when it is

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functionally already autonomous from Boston and a threat to it, when the "Vault" is already paying reparations, thereby inverting the "normal" flow of value and truly "integrating" the African-American proletariat, and when independence has already been shown through the power to refuse the production and reproduction of value.

Such working class demands no doubt appear as Quixotic, purely frivolous in this continuing Reagan era, as "unrealistic." But our realists need to consider the utter bankruptcy of "realism" in politics and economics: it is only the realism of starvation of body and soul. Mandela has the asset, as does the demand for reparations, of "unreality." Thus far, Mandela makes too many concessions to the "reality" of class compromise. It needs to complement the proposal for a new city with an idea for a new society and open the discussion of just how the first can in fact contribute to the second, and it needs to become the politics of activity, not voting. While there are no guarantees of success, capitulation to integration or proposing class collaborationist separate development are guarantees of non-success. They can only produce development designed to serve accumulation, an at-best limited and formal independence with a real lack of control by and independence of the working class. By rooting itself in class struggle, Mandela has the possibility of becoming more than either "socialism in one slum" or an alternate path to capitalist development and integration. Mandela could have the possibility of spurring further struggle. Indeed, only if it were such a launching pad could it hope to strengthen itself and thereby survive and create more elements of a new society.

A strong Mandela would also have a value beyond what it can provide to its own residents. It would be a significant obstacle to the "new enclosures" that are a precondition for the intensified extraction of surplus labor power, itself a necessary precondition for the success of capital's planned leap in organic composition to ever higher levels of technology.

Success at local levels, such as a proletarian Mandela, will

produce capital strikes and the threat of economic strangulation, making more necessary the production of Mandelas and Karthagos and Tepitos (Mexico City, see *Midnight Notes* #9). But that is the battle to bring the new society into being, the one that Mandela could fight, but thus far has not.

Notes

¹ Much of the information about the Mandela proposal comes from interviews conducted with its supporters.

² Approval by the legislature was viewed as extremely unlikely. Ironically, New York state's governor has allowed nearly all-white Staten Island to vote on whether to secede from New York City.

³ For a brief history of Boston and its African-American population see Donald Montgomery Neill, *The Struggles of the Boston Black Community for Equality and Quality in Public Education: 1959-1987*, Ch. 1 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1987). See also, Mel King, *Chain of Change* (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

⁴ On the fiscal crisis of the cities, see Demac & Mattera, "Developing and Underdeveloping New York," *Zerowork 2* (1977). On its effects in Boston, see Neill, *op. cit.*

⁵ Rather as a matter of convenience, I am using "integration" and "desegregation" as near-synonymous terms, and am similarly using "community control" and "separatism." It might be useful to conceive of these terms as a spectrum of overlapping sets of socio-political views and actions from integration to desegregation to community control to separation. I did not believe further delineation of these terms necessary for this article.

⁶ We remind the reader of Walter Rodney's essential point: underdevelopment is not a "natural" state but is constructed as a necessary pole of world capitalist development.

⁷ King, Mel. "Mandela Proposal," unpublished paper, August 1987. May still be available from Mel King who teaches at MIT in Cambridge. (My own view is that it shows a keen sense of a cooperative community, but is too much organization, too little mobilization, and does not deal directly with the issue of capitalist modes of accumulation.)