

## AHIDIANA: FORWARD (MOVING AHEAD)

We firmly believe that we are responsible for the education of our children. The founding and continuing operation of our school, AHIDIANA Work/Study Center, is a concrete manifestation of our belief.

Operating an independent black educational institution in postindustrial, capitalist, racist and sexist American society is difficult but necessary. Our struggle to educate our children has led us to assess our history, develop a rationale for our present course of action and project a vision of our future development.

### History/Where We're Coming From

Our school is but one of many independent black schools that have been established since the sixties. Our Work/Study Center is also one of a variety of programs of our organization, AHIDIANA. AHIDIANA is a Pan-Afrikan nationalist organization based in New Orleans, Louisiana. Ahidiana is a KiSwahili word meaning mutual agreement.

As Pan-Afrikan nationalists we are dedicated to the construction of independent alternative and affirmative Black institutions to our present conditions.

In order for institutions to survive and contribute to the development of our people, they must always be independent (i.e., self-determined and self-reliant). They must also strive to be an alternative (i.e., more dynamic and progressive than that which presently exists -- dynamic means that they are characterized by growth and results and progressive means that they are morally superior to that which already exists). And finally, our institutions should be affirmative (i.e., based on and propagating our own interests and ideals).

Any institution of power for our people must also be Black (i.e., controlled by Afrikan-American people who are Black). There are three criteria for Blackness: color, culture, and consciousness.

It is not enough that our institutions are controlled by people who are only Black in color because genotype is only one criterion for Blackness. Genotype is necessary but not sufficient. We must have people who are also culturally Black (i.e., those who constantly and consistently struggle for the unification, liberation and independence of our people). And we must have people who are consciously Black (i.e., those who possess self-awareness which is the emotional commitment to our Afrikan-American identity and self-control which is the discipline necessary to struggle for our people). From AHIDIANA Operating Principles page 5

AHIDIANA started in May of 1973. However, our roots in independent Black education extend back into another school, Dokpwe Work/Study Center.

Dokpwe Work/Study Center was founded on the initiative of Kenneth Ferdinand and Tayari Kwa Salaam. Dokpwe started in January 1971 and is presently operating today. During

the early development of Dokpwe, a serious disagreement developed among the membership. Although everyone agreed that political education was important, the dividing line was the question of whether the process of education should be dominant over political development or vice versa. Specifically, the discussion took the form of questioning the need for an organizational structure which would be a higher authority to the school.

After numerous efforts to work out these conflicts, including a plan whereby one part of the membership of Dokpwe would operate the preschool and the other would operate the primary school, we eventually split into two groups. Those of us who help to the necessity of a political viewpoint and organization being dominant founded and developed AHIDIANA.

In November of 1973 AHIDIANA began AHIDIANA Work/Study Center, our preschool. Since its establishment, our W/S Center has been the primary project of our organization.

In May 1973 when we founded AHIDIANA, we had no building and limited resources, but we were determined to build a Pan-Afrikan nationalist preschool. While at Dokpwe we had developed a vision of the type of institution we wanted to build. This vision was based on the practical work we did at Dokpwe, the example of other schools, particularly CIBI schools (Council of Independent Black Institutions), and the reading we were doing about development in Afrika and other parts of the Third World.

At Dokpwe W.S Center we had begun developing teaching materials and techniques, a basic curriculum outline and a budding political line. Our school staff started from that basis and spent our whole summer studying everything we could find that seemed to offer us relevant example, inspiration or instruction. Our initial staff consisted of three people, all of whom remain active staff members of our school to this day.

We met three, four, sometimes five times a week. We read Black thinkers and activists such as Nyerere, Garvey, Malcolm, Muhammad and many others. We also studied alien educators such as Piaget, Montessori, Neil, Holt, and many others. We began construction teaching materials, cutting, coloring, pasting, and drawing. The summer went by very quickly.

Simultaneously, our teaching staff was also an integral part of our organization and, therefore, we had other responsibilities, other meetings to attend as well as rallies and demonstrations to go to and political study to be completed.

This initial period of intense study proved to be both instructive and politically important. In November 1973 when our preschool was opened, we not only has a clear concept in mind which we moved to put into practice, but we also had a practical foundation in the difficult area of everyday working together, i.e., the process of meshing individual identities to produce a unified group.

During our beginning years our membership in CIBI was a key point in our growth and development. We attended meetings and conferences and in January of 1974 hosted one of the quarterly CIBI central committee meetings. Such activity was expensive and often called for sacrifice and the delay of other projects and programs, but fortunately we made the decision to forego the immediate in order to obtain the distant. We realized that we had to have contact with others who were doing similar work. Contact and communication between ourselves and other, who share the same struggle, is critical not only for own individual growth as a school but also for the growth of the independent black school movement as a whole.

The give and take of comparing notes and discussing school development with people who were and had been very active on both a theoretical and practical basis was both

instructive and inspirational. We noted the similarities and differences between ourselves and others, and among the schools as a whole. We learned from everyone we met and from every school we saw. Some of what we learned simply reinforced the direction in which we were striving to go and made us more determined. Some of what we learned, challenged and/or changed our thinking and caused us to modify what we were doing. The opportunity to see such examples and meet the people moving those schools forward was an overall boost to our belief in ourselves and in our ability to reach our goals.

In our first two years we sorely needed such outside re-enforcement. We were isolated by distance in New Orleans, completely outside the main currents of nationalist activity in America. We ended our first year with five students. We had started with nine. Needless to say, this was a period of test and transition. But the re-enforcement we received from the example of CIBI institutions, along with our own beliefs and resolve to continue struggling, convinced us that we were on the right road, although it was a very long and difficult road to travel.

Another source of inspiration was our study of world struggles. As Pan-Afrikan nationalist we believe that the struggles of Afrikan peoples all around the world are one struggle which have many fronts and that these struggles are interrelated to the struggles of Third World peoples. We studied these struggles and attempted to internalize lessons learned from our study of Tanzania, Guyana, China and liberation movements such as PAIGC, FRELIMO, ZANU, MPLA.

At the end of our second year we were able to get a loan from the Southern Cooperative Development Fund to buy our own building. The house we bought was located within walking distance of our old building which we had been renting. Our organization believed that the acquisition of a building was a big step forward in our efforts to turn our school into a true independent black institution.

All during this period we continued to define and develop our political understanding, our curriculum and teaching methodology. After five full years of struggle we believe that we have built a foundation from which will flower an example of the potential and possibility of independent Black education.

People who visit our school today are sometimes amazed at our simple beginnings. But we always stress that any group of committed people can do what we are doing. We are not exceptional. We started with commitment and developed skill and ability as we worked. None of our beginning staff had a college degree. None of us were formally trained in education. This is neither good nor bad, but rather is a fact of our development. To us it simply means that the only prior qualification necessary is total commitment and a willingness and ability to learn. We encourage all our brothers and sisters to do the same.

Briefly, this is the history of our development.

#### Course of Action/Our Organization is Our Foundation

AHIDIANA is the basis on which we build our Work/Study Center. The fact that we have an organization has made it possible for us to develop to a level of legitimacy, stability and independence that would not otherwise be possible.

The chief advantages of organizational development have been, first, consistency of practice; second, self-reliance; and third, clarity of thought.

A. Consistency of Practice

We have been operating for six years without interruption with a consistent core staff. Having a consistent staff means that our development increases as we build on what we have learned. We are not caught in the position of having to bring in new teachers every year. We believe that this consistency has made it possible for us to develop our teaching methodology to the level that we have.

The social and material support of other members of AHIDIANA give both assistance and inspiration to our teaching staff that works at an unrelenting pace. Our organization helps by offering willing hands and other resources. Everyone helps our organization make teaching materials, helps keep the building clean, babysits, substitutes when someone is sick, and in general has the re-enforcement of people who appreciate although they do not work in the school.

As a result, our practice, as a teaching staff at an independent black educational institution, has been consistent and at very high level.

B. Self-Reliance

We have been operating for six years and, regardless of the number of students or the amount of income from tuition and fundraising, we have continued to follow our plans of development. From the very beginning our organization was committed to supplying the backup necessary to make sure that the school was independent in both theory and practice. The members of our organization monthly contributed a portion of their personal income to the organization for organizational use. During the first two years the bulk of these funds went directly to the school to keep it operating.

We deliberately did not want to start our school based on government or foundation grants. Although, we agree that such monies are monies that are due to our people, as those monies coming in the main from taxes and corporate profits generated from business with an economic exploitation of Black and poor people, at the same time 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 believe that there is a big difference between the monies we make directly through our own labor and sacrifice or savings, and the monies that are given to us by others, regardless of their motives for giving it or the conditions under which the money is given.

We have found that accepting grants and gifts, as our capital foundation, effectively and reductively diminishes and/or negates any and all efforts toward true self-reliance and self-sufficiency. In addition to putting us in a posture of dependence on the generosity of others, grants and gifts foster a welfare “give me” mentality.

We have witnessed too many projects, which were solid and worthwhile in conception, “go down the drain” because of a dependence on outside funding. Initially the outside funding makes it possible for the project to operate but eventually the outside funding

ceases, particularly if the project being funded fosters and advocates struggle against the American systematic oppression and exploitation of our people.

When outside funding pays salaries, rent, utilities and other major aspects of any programs, 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. It is not simply a question of control of the program. 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 (labor) and includes all steps from conception to consumption.

The putting together of resources is an integral and inseparable function of the process of production, especially when the production unit is a school or other unit whose output is not commodities but rather values, beliefs, skills and knowledge. For this reason we believe that gifts and grants cannot be used as an adequate or acceptable foundation upon which to build an independent institution.

Self-reliance on the other hand necessitates independence from outside economic forces. This independence is relative and not absolute, because as long as capitalists rule America, none of us that live, struggle and die here can be totally independent. However, our inability to achieve total independence without the eradication of capitalist domination of our lives does not mean that we cannot achieve relative independence. Relative independence is economic bases being built on our own labor, savings and sacrifice rather than the grants and gifts of others. Certainly we are still subject to the dominant economic system but we need not necessarily have our programs and projects subject to the personal and political agendas, the vagaries and inconsistencies of others for the day to day operation of our independent institutions.

The difference is essentially one of welfare versus warfare. While we accept aid and assistance, we in no way consider the enemy the prime source of support. To achieve this relative independence is difficult but necessary. Indeed, we believe that the achieving of relative independence is a step in the struggle and will actually assist and enable us to carry on the struggle against our exploitation and oppression to a higher level of competency and effectiveness.

Actually, what we are doing is attempting to carve out "liberated zones" in the midst of capitalist, post-industrial American society. Every liberated zone, to be effective, no matter how rudimentary or how elaborate, must be a self-reliant base of operation that offers an affirmative alternative.

C. Clarity of Thought -- Nationalism, Pan-Afrikanism, Ujamaa

Without systematic, continuous and concrete analysis and planning, we will inevitably fall victim to opportunism and spontaneity, and eventually will fail in our struggle to unseat the status quo and introduce the new social order we desire and dare to fight for.

1. Nationalism

We are nationalists. This means that the cardinal principle of our struggle is and must be that the correctness and positiveness of our struggle is measured by how well our work defends and develops our own people.

We specifically characterize our struggle as a struggle for national liberation. To liberate is to set free or to bring into existence. To set free is to remove external constraints and controls. In order to liberate anything, from cars and clothes to people and nations, it takes power. So then, when we are asked what are we struggling for we must point out that we are struggle for the power to control our lives. Power is the capability (ability and will) to self-determine, self-defend and self-respect ourselves. Control is the capability to command the use of our productive forces (people, land and tools).

At this point in the development of world peoples the pinnacle of a people's development is the establishment and maintenance of an independent (liberated and self-reliant) nation. This is so because objectively every inch of earth is claimed by one, sometimes two or more, nation/states. Therefore, our claim to control the space we presently occupy, or to control the space we may choose to occupy in the future, will have to be done within a context of seeking sovereignty over that space. In 20th century terms, the struggle to seek this sovereignty is a struggle for national liberation, a struggle to establish and maintain a nation.

We define a nation as a social and material unit determined by people with a national consciousness, sovereign land and self-government. The people need not be homogeneous, i.e., all alike. However, the people must have a national consciousness, i.e., an awareness of their collective selves as a distinct people with a common and distinct future, and a capacity to self-control themselves or to struggle to fulfill their future as best they can. The land area need not be large but it must be defined and dependable. In a word, the land must be sovereign. The government need not be modeled on or similar to any form of government that exists today or has existed in the past, but that government must be representative of and formed by the people the government leads. Briefly stated, this is what we mean by a nation.

2. Pan-Afrikanism

In practical terms this means that we have a responsibility and political imperative to help and assist other Afrikan peoples wherever in the world our people may be found. In addition, we cannot entertain the isolationist folly that we can create an independent nation politically and economically distinct from

the rest of the African world. The continued defense, development and independence of any one segment or nation of African people is dependent upon the struggle for (or actualization of) progressive defense, development and independent for all African people everywhere.

However, we do not believe that romantic Pan-Africanism is a solution. We espouse, instead, the day to day practice of progressive Pan-Africanism in the particular and the concrete. Far away battles are easy to fight in absence. Romantic Pan-Africanists sit in the safety of one locale and lobby for the struggles of African people in another locale, while ignoring and conspicuously abstaining from the struggles of Afrikan people in their very own locale. Pan-Afrikanism to be positive and progressive must be particular and concrete, i.e., it must have a specific focus and must be an actual engagement in struggle for the defense and development of a particular nationality of Afrikan people.

We are not true Pan-Afrikanists if we exist in the midst of Afrikan people and do not actively wage struggle with our people against exploitation and oppression, and for the empowerment of our people. We are not true Pan-Afrikanists if our people are in need of concrete defense and development and we offer only theories and analysis. We believe that to be Pan-Afrikan is to be active in our advocacy of the defense and development of the Afrikan people with whom we live, struggle and die. We are not opposed to choosing where and with whom in the Afrikan World we struggle, for clearly, if Pan-Afrikanism is valid then, our struggle need not be confined to the place of our birth. What we are saying, however, is that while we need not live, struggle and die in the place of our birth, we do need to live, struggle and die in the place of our existence and as part of the people with whom we share that space. Our primary struggle must be wherever we actually are, rather than where we abstractly think we would like to be.

3. Ujamaa  
Finally, we are advocates of Ujamaa (Familyhood and Cooperative Economics). To be for Ujamaa means to be communal rather than competitive, helpful rather than exploitative, and socialist rather than capitalist.

Historically, Ujamaa meant communalism. But the necessary preconditions of communalism no longer exist, indeed those very preconditions were destroyed and denied its rebirth by the imposition of imperialism on our lives.

Contemporarily, (for our people who live within a capitalist system), Ujamaa means cooperative economics, i.e., the pooling of our resources and profiting together from the pooling of our resources. At present we have no choice but to be cooperative if we are to advance economically as a people. We cannot go

back to communalism and today, like it or not, we control neither land, major tools of production, nor even our own skilled and technical labor.

However, once we achieve nationhood, then Ujamaa will mean socialism. Socialism, in essence, is basically the ideals of our traditional communalism practiced in a 20th century form and context.

That in brief is the political line that shapes the thrust of our educational program.

### PUTTING POLITICS IN THE LEAD

Many of our schools are debating which should take the lead, technical competence or ideological development. As we have already argued, we believe that ideological development should command the acquisition and use of technical competence. It does make a difference whether the people who are technically competent are political or not. What we are after is developing technical competence among politicized people.

Furthermore, we believe that the absence of conscious political development means that unconscious political values will take root during the process of gaining technical competence. For example, medical doctors are not inherently money or profit-oriented and elitist by nature. However, they are often the products of (1) the circumstances they study and live in, (2) the subliminal political indoctrination that accompanies their acquiring a medical education, and (3) the structure of a capitalist and elitist mentality and reality reinforced by society at large.

Traditional western approaches to education assert that there is a separation of political line from educational development, ideology from technique. But that is false. There is usually a dominance of one element or another but there is never the absence of one element when the other element is actively practiced.

A full appreciation of AHIDIANA W/S Center's educational program requires a simultaneous appreciation (although not necessarily an acceptance of) our political program. For it is our political line that has led the development of our educational program.

That is the basic foundation of our rational program of development to which we have fully committed ourselves. The further clarification of these points will come about as we work and study on them and further clarification is necessary. If we honestly and resolutely work and study, if we successfully wed the ideal to the actual, ideological clarity will result from our efforts and thusly better equip us to win, for we will have both the theory (abstract) and the practice (concrete) as the basis for our ongoing movement. Where we are wrong, reality will contradict and correct us and if we are serious, we will correct ourselves.

But then again the real clarity will be the sparkling beauty and force of our concrete creations shining in the sun as the world turns! That will be the real beauty, along with the plans and accomplishments our daughters and sons defend and develop as a result of being raised by what we are able to do in the sphere of politics and education.

From our point of view, the development of independent Black educational institutions is a key aspect of our people's struggle for unification, liberation and independence.