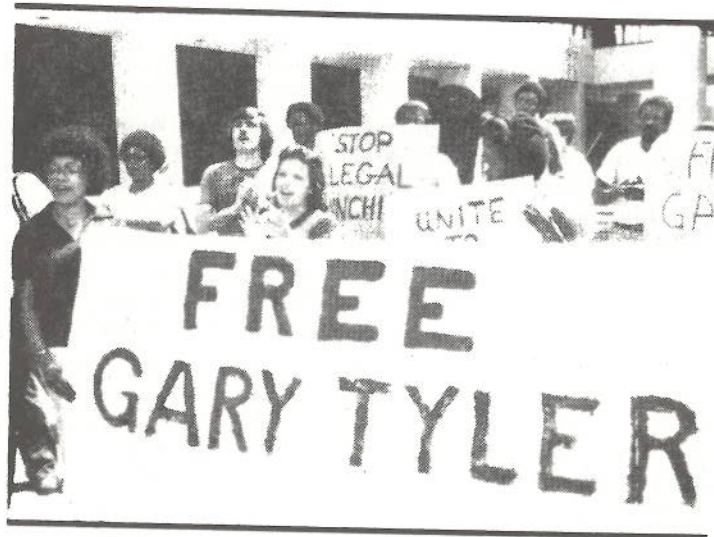

Against Opportunism in

**THE STRUGGLE TO FREE
GARY TYLER**



AGAINST OPPORTUNISM IN THE STRUGGLE TO FREE GARY TYLER

Almost four years ago, on October 7, 1974, a 16-year-old Black student in Destrehan, Louisiana was arrested and charged with the murder of a white student. The shooting occurred during an attack by a white mob on a schoolbus filled with Black children. Today, the name of Gary Tyler is known throughout the world as an example of the continuing resistance to national oppression of the Black people in the Black Belt South of the United States. The case has been compared with the frame-up of the nine Scottsboro Boys in the 1930's in its political significance. Thousands of people all over the world have demonstrated, written letters of protest, presented resolutions to their unions and community organizations, signed petitions, and participated in defense committees and mass meetings in the struggle to free him. This movement has prevented the state from executing Gary so far.

Today, Gary Tyler is in maximum security at Angola prison in Louisiana, serving a life sentence. He is now 19 years old and has literally grown up in prison. He has become an eloquent and powerful speaker against the atrocities of prison and the sham justice of the United States legal system. He has pinpointed the imperialist system as the source of national oppression and the exploitation and oppression of the masses of working class and poor people. Even as his case proceeds through the courts he calls upon the people to free him, for he understands that the courts are part and parcel of the imperialist system. They function to uphold the bourgeois state and only reflect mass sentiment when the masses of people are mobilized as in the Scottsboro and Joann Little cases. His firmness and strength in the face of daily degradation and brutality has become a powerful example to the masses of people fighting for their liberation all over the world.

At the same time as the real nature of the imperialist system of justice has been increasingly exposed through the course of the struggle to free Gary Tyler, so it is that various forms of opportunism have been revealed. A broad variety of individuals

and organizations have participated in the Tyler campaign, coming from many different and opposing political views. At every pivotal point the opportunists have sought to gain control and sometimes have succeeded. There have been gains and setbacks, various tactical plans, political struggles and splits. In order to chart the course ahead it is necessary to analyze the movement to free Gary Tyler, to isolate and repudiate errors and to sum up the general truths which have been learned and proven. It is only possible to do this when we understand that the fight against imperialism and opportunism go hand in hand.

We must analyze the struggle to free Gary Tyler from the perspective of united front work. It has been the view of the MLOC that we must build a united front of all those willing to struggle for the freedom of Gary Tyler. The united front is an alliance of classes and strata to pursue a specific goal. This alliance may be temporary or of a more long range nature. We hold that at the core, the leading force of this front must be the proletariat, for it is only the proletariat that will carry the struggle to free Gary Tyler through to the end.

The analysis in this article flows from the MLOC's work in the movement to free Gary Tyler which is centered in New Orleans. The particular criticisms of the opportunists and reformist forces result from years of struggle trying to build a united front and to work within such a front to free Gary Tyler.

An objective base existed to build a united front around Gary Tyler's defense. Most organizations and the masses of working class and Black people agreed that his was a case that clearly revealed the continued national oppression in the Black Belt South. But instead of pushing to build this front, the opportunists and reformists have used the Tyler case to further their own careers. The position of the MLOC has been to unite with these forces and struggle within the front for the correct line and proletarian leadership to guide the work. We have upheld and consistently fought for two points: 1) Gary Tyler's case must be aimed at U.S. imperialist oppression of the Black Nation and the struggle for self-determination, for Gary Tyler's case only represents the oppression of the Black Nation and the thousands of Black people railroaded daily. 2) If Gary Tyler is to be freed, the masses have to be mobilized; no reliance on the courts or lawyers.

The opportunists and reformists have sought to defeat and undermine these principles on every occasion, yet we have diligently worked for a united front, placing our faith in the masses

that these two points would ultimately be adopted. The actions of the opportunists must be judged on the basis of their promotion of unity and the freedom of Gary Tyler.

This Case is Not Unique

Initially, it is important to understand the historical significance of the struggle to free Gary Tyler. As Gary points out, his case is not unique. In fact, the importance of Gary's case lies in its lack of uniqueness, its ordinariness. The frame-up and violence against Gary Tyler is typical of the daily, fascist attacks against the masses of Black people in the Black Belt South. This oppression takes many different forms which are typical of the Black Belt — the theft of land, grotesque prison plantations, Ku Klux Klan terror, wretched housing conditions with thousands of families living with leaky roofs and no running water or electricity.

When outright slavery existed, the exploitation of the Black people in the southern plantation areas of the U.S. (the Black Belt) was opposed by rebellion, revolt and militant struggle. These rebellions were met, in turn, with fierce reprisals and attacks. The uprisings of Nat Turner and John Brown, though numerically small, had great historical significance. These rebellions, though short-lived, displayed great courage and heroism and the determination to be free. Numerous uprisings occurred throughout the South, despite efforts of the plantation lords to suppress them. Their tactics were similar to those used today against the Black liberation movement. They would assassinate the leaders while unleashing wide-spread terror against the masses of people.

The terrorism following Reconstruction far exceeded earlier reprisals in its duration, scale and scope. This was because the ruling class was faced no longer with occasional and separate slave revolts, but by a deeply-rooted and widespread movement of the emerging Black Nation, fighting for its democratic rights and national liberation. The clear aim of this movement was to gain basic bourgeois democratic rights, such as the right to vote, to own land, to education and self-government. The key to gaining and consolidating these fundamental democratic rights was the agrarian revolution—ownership of the land, control of the territory of

the plantation area, the breaking up of the large white land-holdings, dispossessing the former slaveowners and dividing the land among the freed slaves. Defeat of this struggle, the failure to force the break-up and distribution of the land, cemented the denial of other democratic rights. Without control of the land and the territory, there could be no other genuine democratic guarantees.

This demand for land and political self-determination has been a continual demand in the Black Belt for the last 100 years, reaching its high point in the 1920's and 1930's. During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's many of the more blatant forms of national oppression were overthrown through the militant, mass action of millions of people throughout the country and the South. Many of the most obnoxious left-overs from Jim Crow, post-Reconstruction days — separate drinking fountains, segregated buses, restaurants and public facilities — were eliminated. Through countless bloody and difficult struggles, the right to vote and to integrate schools was demanded and at least partially won. However, the fundamental questions of control of the land and resources of the Black Nation, the right to determine the destiny of the Nation, and the right to political power were still not resolved.

The Myth of the "New South"

In the South today, the myths of a "New South", though promoted heavily by the ruling powers, are badly discredited. Conditions in many ways are **worse** now than ten years ago. There is a growing, rising tide of rebellion and resistance in the Black Belt as demonstrated by the movements around cases such as Joann Little, Gary Tyler, the Dawson Five and Buddy Cochran and the militant struggle in Tupelo, Mississippi and surrounding areas. There has been an intensification of efforts to shore up bourgeois rule by a variety of methods: the bribery of Black bourgeois politicians, the rapid extension of prison facilities, the re-establishment of the death penalty, the spread of KKK and police terror, and the promotion of white chauvinist ideology through such examples as Billy Carter's "nigger in the woodpile" jokes and Merle Haggard's song "Proud to Be White".

In the midst of this struggle and turmoil Gary Tyler was arrested, framed and sentenced to death by electrocution. This

case ties together hundreds of years of national oppression and resistance. The all-white jury, false testimony, local white do-nothing lawyer, KKK terror, police beatings and torture, death penalty, white mob surrounding busloads of Black schoolchildren: all of these are characteristic of many struggles in the Black Belt over the course of many years. The very existence of the case is proof of the continued oppression and exploitation which the "New South" is not supposed to have.

The case of Gary Tyler and the struggle to free him, then, becomes significant given the increasingly tenuous hold that the ruling class has upon the masses of people in the Black Belt. The case reveals that, though there have certainly been some quantitative changes in the Black Belt in the last 20-30 years, qualitatively things remain the same.

When we demand the freedom of Gary Tyler, then, we are not talking about just one young Black man who in a particular case was done an injustice. We are talking about the thousands and millions of Black people who have been lynched, raped, railroaded, beaten, harassed and deprived of their property. The call to free Gary Tyler is a call to free the entire Black Nation from enslavement. The call to free Gary Tyler is a call to overthrow the entire imperialist system. This is the significance of the struggle to free Gary Tyler, and the importance of this fight.

During the past three years there have been numerous petition campaigns, rallies, mass meetings, picket lines, etc. as part of the campaign to free Gary Tyler. As reported in the pages of **UNITE!** newspaper, a conference was held in April, 1978 in New Orleans to lay down the principles of unity for the campaign and a plan of work. At every step along the way, opportunists have sought to wreck and destroy the Gary Tyler struggle. It is clear that in order to free Gary Tyler it is necessary at the same time to isolate and expose those opportunists who seek to undermine and derail the movement.

Only the People Can Free Gary Tyler

Throughout the entire campaign, it has been clear that the main danger, the major opportunist line put forward, has been that it is the lawyers and judges who will free Gary Tyler, instead of the people. This view has been represented by such groups as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), a Trotskyite organization, which at one point in November 1976 tried to sabotage a demon-

stration before the Louisiana Supreme Court on the grounds that it was "illegal" and would make the judges mad. The SWP argued that people should sit quietly in the courtroom and be polite to the judges so they will be nice in return and set Gary Tyler free.

The SWP has consistently put forward that the support of rich and famous people is the most essential element required to free Gary. They have actively opposed linking Gary's case with other political prisoners, on the basis that this would "drive away" the trade union bureaucrats and politicians who they maintain are the key to Gary's freedom. "Legal and peaceful" could well be the motto of the SWP, as they often assert that they will do **anything** to free Gary Tyler (as long as it's "legal and peaceful").

Periodically the SWP has been booted out of the local Gary Tyler defense committees, and just as sure as the tides, they return again through the back door. The failure to deal decisively with the SWP is the result of the failure to put the Gary Tyler struggle on a firm proletarian footing. The reformists who have been in leadership of the struggle have always accepted the shallow self-criticism of the SWP and allowed them to return. As long as reformism remains the dominant ideology in the Gary Tyler struggle, the SWP will not be completely eliminated or exposed.

The role of Walter Collins, former leader of the Gary Tyler Defense Committee, was particularly bankrupt and badly damaged the fight for Gary's freedom. Collins was opposed to militant, mass demonstrations on the grounds that the state and the KKK would be upset, repression would come down, people might get hurt or arrested, and it would generally hurt Gary Tyler's case. At the motion for a new trial in Hahnville, Louisiana in 1976, Collins even opposed (and was successful in winning majority support to his view) the carrying of picket signs or chanting outside the courtroom. Amidst accusations of stolen money and sellout leadership, Collins was ultimately forced to withdraw from the Committee and any involvement in the case.

A more recent interloper in the campaign is the Communist Party, USA (CPUSA). Their line, similar to that of the SWP, is that the "rich and famous" make history. Their methods of organizing are to get lists of names of so-called "important and influential" people, to endorse various events, which most of these VIPs never attend. The main focus is to get money and names in order to build their own prestige and careers, not to educate the masses of people, whom they view as backward and unimpor-

tant. Although both the CPUSA and the SWP pretend to support mass demonstrations, in fact they have actively opposed building a broad, militant movement and often work to sabotage mass rallies.

In response to the reformism and treachery of Walter Collins and the SWP, in 1976 the Peoples Defense Committee to Free Gary Tyler and Fight Injustice (PDC) was formed. The PDC sought to distinguish itself from the Gary Tyler Defense Committee by upholding the principles of relying on the people and not the court to free Gary Tyler and to build militant mass activity around the case. The PDC decided in January 1978 to attempt to merge forces with Mrs. Tyler and the Gary Tyler Defense Fund in sponsoring a Gary Tyler Defense Conference and forming a national committee. During the year and a half of its active work, the PDC sponsored and participated in a number of events, such as discos, picket lines and demonstrations at Angola. But the PDC was never able to build a broad, mass-based committee for two reasons:

- 1) The program of the PDC was narrow and in essence, reformist, as it failed to clearly take up the struggle to free Gary as a component part of the worldwide struggle against imperialism. Instead, the PDC would more often focus on white supremacy, the oppressive state machinery, liquidating the Black national question and denigrating the role of the working class in freeing Gary.

- 2) The membership of the PDC became a "left" bloc, composed of a small number of students, community activists and professional "lefts". The few workers who would come to PDC meetings would often not return, seeing that the PDC was not able to offer solutions to the problems that existed. The PDC had a sectarian stand towards Mrs. Tyler, Gary's mother, and the bourgeoisie and groups such as the SWP were able to use this split to attack and discredit the PDC and the entire struggle to free Gary Tyler.

During this period, many honest forces who had worked to free Gary refused to work in any of the committees, stating that the whole campaign was "messed up", unorganized, and plagued with disunity. Attendance at rallies and meetings plummeted to a handful of people. Repeated discussions about this problem were not able to solve them. While workers all over the city and throughout the country consistently expressed their desire to join the fight to free Gary Tyler, there was no firm leadership or

correct program to guide that work. This situation brings us now to the question of the role of the Communist Party/ Marxist-Leninist (CP/ML) in the Gary Tyler campaign.

History of CP/ML Work in the Gary Tyler Struggle

The history of the CP/ML in the Gary Tyler struggle has been one characterized by a variety of different shades of opportunism. Although the forms changed from time to time, the fundamental characteristic has been that the CP/ML has refused to act on the basis of principle and has objectively acted to sabotage and undermine the fight to free Gary at every step of the way. The work of the CP/ML has two distinct periods. The first period from 1974 to 1977 was characterized by a "left" form, splitting and wrecking the committees.

A few examples of the CP/ML's activity may help to explain their line. At a decisive point in the mobilization of the campaign, before the hearing for a new trial in 1976, the CP/ML, then known as the October League (OL) marched out of the Gary Tyler Defense Committee and proclaimed that they would set up their own committees. They had lost a vote on the character of the demonstration to be held and stalked out. This is characteristic of their secretarian style of work whereby they sought to split mass organizations they could not control, labeling the leadership and masses opportunists rather than attempting to win people over by struggling within the united front.

This walkout had wide-spread and long-term effects, far beyond the length of time they stayed out. It was viewed by Mrs. Tyler and many honest forces as a splitting and wrecking move, designed to undermine and destroy the organized efforts to free Gary. It was also seen as an attempt by the OL to raise money for their own campaign and committees, rather than help raise money to meet the legal cost of the defense. In addition, it played right into the hands of the anti-communist forces, who were able to use this infantile action to discredit communism, or the "white left" as the OL was called.

After several weeks of operating their own committees around the country, the OL came back and asked to be able to work with other forces who were already planning a mass demonstration on July 24, 1976. There was considerable struggle and opposition to even letting them return, although it was finally

agreed upon. The CP/ML now says that it was a mistake for them to split. However, they say this in private conversations, never in the pages of their newspaper, *The Call*, or as public self-criticism of errors from which lessons can be learned.

The film "Gary Tyler Must Be Set Free" is another example of the opportunism of the CP/ML. The film devotes only a very small portion of its running time to Gary's case. The bulk of the film is an advertisement for the OL, along with the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF) and the Fightback, two CP/ML front organizations. There is very little mention of the efforts of thousands of students at Southern University in New Orleans to build the campaign, a major event in the entire struggle. The impression given about the July 24 demonstration is that the OL and SCEF built the whole thing alone, which is false.

During this period the OL's attitude toward the Tyler family was one of disdain and contempt. For months open representatives of the OL and SCEF carried on a sneering, ridiculing campaign against Mrs. Tyler. They denounced her, opposed efforts to work with her, and insulted her.

In any campaign to free political prisoners, it is obvious that the movement cannot be limited to the political views or understanding of the families of the prisoners. Oftentimes the families have no prior experience with communist or militant mass activity, and are thrust into an unfamiliar and previously unknown world of various organizations and political lines colliding and merging in the zigs and zags of the struggle. However, it is essential to remember that, in the main, the families are fighting a desperate and very personal battle to save the lives of someone they love, and that, although they may have some incorrect ideas, they are not the enemy. The cooperation, or at least neutrality, of the family is essential to the building of a movement around a political case. This can only be done if there is a correct understanding of the difference between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions and between tactics and principle. This the CP/ML has consistently refused to understand or practice.

By June of 1977, the date of the formation of the CP/ML, the OL was isolated from the Tyler family and on probation in the PDC for its splitting and wrecking. National representatives were sent to New Orleans to try to avoid exposure of the miserable and opportunist work which had been carried on by the

OL. The OL was in an awkward situation. They had been traveling throughout the U.S. and Europe upholding their work around Gary Tyler as "exemplary", "excellent" and as "proof" that they alone could form a new communist party. During the entire two years of the campaign, the OL had not done a single public self-criticism about their work. They were not about to do it now, and were desperate to avoid publicity about the opportunist work they had done. It was at this point that the second period of the CP/ML's work began. This period is most appropriately called the "third world theory of uniting with everybody on everything" or more clearly "don't rock the boat."

In exchange for "peace", the CP/ML liquidated Marxist-Leninist principles in carrying out the Gary Tyler work. They have consistently refused to do agitation in the committees or at the Gary Tyler Defense Conference held in April 1978, around the question of self-determination for the Black Nation. While maintaining the label of communism, they are attempting to show that communists are "just like everybody else" in the committee. They have actively opposed the raising of self-determination, claiming that it is "sectarian" to link the struggle to free Gary to this demand. As "communists" they say they will raise this basic, democratic demand for themselves....it is not necessary or desirable that this demand be raised by the broad masses. They present the question as simultaneously controversial, complex, complicated and communist and, therefore, as not appropriate for mass committees.

If the CP/ML would study history they would find that in the sugar strike of 1880, the Black cane workers in St. John the Baptist Parish, near Gary Tyler's hometown, had no trouble with this "complex" demand. Along with demands for wages, the workers proclaimed that "colored people are a nation" and set up their own government and constitution. (Hair, *Bourbanism and the Agrarian Revolution*)

In the re-organization of the Gary Tyler Defense Committee at the Conference, principles of unity were drafted, amended and adopted. In the initial proposal before the Conference, the CP/ML failed even to target the imperialist system as the source of Gary Tyler's imprisonment. They spoke of racism, economic crisis and not to rely on the courts to free Gary....a program very similar to that put forward by the CPUSA and the National Alliance Against Racism and Political Repression in the Wilmington Ten case and other similar cases. Later, the CP/ML modified

their position to include the imperialist system and "all national oppression" as the main target, but opposed uniting around the end to national oppression of the Black Nation. Lenin spoke very clearly about those opportunists and scoundrels who speak very righteously about freeing oppressed nations everywhere except those oppressed by their own bourgeoisie. He said these are the **worst** kind of opportunists, the worst betrayers of proletarian internationalism.

And what conclusions can possibly be drawn from the CP/ML's consistent position on this question? It is obvious the CP/ML does not really support the right of self-determination and believes that Gary Tyler can be freed without waging war against the oppression of the entire Black Nation. This position isolates Gary Tyler's case from the broad, mass revolutionary movement of the Black Nation for its liberation. This view objectively keeps the lock on Gary Tyler's cell door just as surely as does the warden of Angola.

This treachery has been seen before in the U.S., although then it was perpetrated by the CPUSA, 30 years ago. The result of both organizations' opportunism on the Black National Question is obvious: an essential demand, fundamentally necessary to the overthrow of U.S. capital and the liberation of the Black masses inside and outside of the Black Nation, is liquidated and in its place is nothing more than militant-sounding phrases, self-righteous denials of betrayal and the permeating stench of great nation chauvinism, decay and treachery.

The Theory of "Three Worlds"

The fundamental political philosophy which underlies the recent treachery of the CP/ML is the theory of the "three worlds" and resultant social-chauvinism. The "three worlds" theory holds that U.S. imperialism is no longer the main enemy of the U.S. working class and oppressed nations. This theory asserts that the focus of the struggle of the international proletariat must be against only one of the superpowers — the U.S.S.R. Under the guise of building a united front against imperialism, and "aiming the main blow at Soviet social-imperialism", the CP/ML scolds those who want to press the fight against the U.S. bourgeoisie and applauds the main enemies of the working class and the Black Nation. Objectively, no matter how they swear to the contrary,

the CP/ML refuses to fight U.S. imperialism and opposes all movements, such as the movement of the Black Nation, that would weaken U.S. imperialism against "the main enemy"— the U.S.S.R.

It is necessary to analyze more thoroughly the role that the theory of the "three worlds" plays in the sabotage of the struggles for socialism and democratic rights in this country. It is obvious that this "theory" does not merely affect international relations, but is an insidious, opportunist line, which, on every front of the fight against imperialism, will emerge to mislead and betray this fight.

Today the Gary Tyler campaign is still not on a revolutionary footing. (see **UNITE!**, May 15, 1978.) There have been efforts by the MLOC, supporters of the MLOC and others to broaden the campaign to speak to the struggles of the Black Nation for liberation, linking the fight with the worldwide fight against imperialism. While some progress has been made, still the program of the Gary Tyler Defense Committee fails in this regard. The MLOC has continued to give material support to Gary and to his family and to support the efforts to free him. However, it is obvious that the movement is still lacking clear leadership and is still not based among the toiling masses of people.

The CP/ML bears special responsibility for the situation that exists today. Their incorrect leadership, the arrogance displayed toward the people who came forward in the campaign, the wrecking and splitting, and the thorough-going opportunism on the national question have all had the objective result of destroying and undermining the Gary Tyler struggle. Through its opportunism, the CP/ML has laid the basis for red-baiting and discrediting communist principles among the masses. This result has been achieved just as surely as if it had been consciously planned, designed and carried out by the state itself.

What Must Be Done?

So what must be done at this point to re-build and to resolve the current situation? One lesson which is clear is that the struggle to free Gary Tyler must be viewed and taken up not as an isolated struggle, but as a part of the overall struggle against the national oppression of the Black Nation. Gary himself continually points this lesson out. He is not alone, he is one of

many victims of national oppression. And it is precisely for this reason that the struggle to free Gary Tyler must be linked to the struggle to free the Black Nation from the chains of imperialist bondage. Every opportunist and revisionist always tries to separate the two and as a result the struggle remains that of a struggle for a particular individual, and therefore a losing battle in the long run. Gary Tyler is not in jail just because he is Gary Tyler, but because of the whole system of national oppression.

How is it that the system which placed Gary in Angola Prison is going to be stopped from placing other Gary Tylers, Dawson Fives and Joann Littles in jail unless their defenses are all built as a struggle against national oppression? The struggle against national oppression is not, as the CP/ML says, some abstract, difficult matter to understand. Most people can readily understand it because they see it all around. It means the struggle for land, an end to the domination of U.S. imperialism, armed resistance to fascist attacks and the seizure of power by the revolutionary masses, with the aim of controlling their own political destiny. This is the road to freedom for Gary Tyler and all victims of national oppression now and in the future. The opportunists, however, would clearly prefer a road of legalism and reformism, flirting with liberals and the "rich and famous".

There are many crucial questions which face the revolutionary masses both in the struggle for the freedom of Gary Tyler and in the struggle for self-determination of the Black Nation. The National Gary Tyler Defense Committee is clearly under opportunist and reformist leadership, does not have the support of the masses and has no program to take up this vital work. Since its formation the Committee has established no real work and is consequently non-functional. The MLOC is now in the process of taking up the questions which face the revolutionary masses in this struggle. The task we have set ourselves is the construction of a mass revolutionary organization to lead the Black liberation movement and fight for self-determination and other democratic rights. This kind of organization will tie together all the various struggles, whether they are against police brutality, for unionization or to free Gary Tyler, with the revolutionary struggle for the right of self-determination for the Black Nation in a consistent and cohesive united front.

Comrades and friends must continue to wage vigilant and untiring struggle against all those who seek to imprison the sons and daughters of the working class, oppressed nations and

national minorities. The chains on political prisoners in the U.S. are forged by the bourgeoisie, but it is the opportunists who protect those chains from being broken.

Free Gary Tyler!
Self-Determination For The Black Nation!

