# *Towards a Theory of Revolutionizing Street Nations*

*Richard M. Flood*

The purpose here is to present a critique of the current political trends of the different factions of the Almighty Latin Kings y Queens Nations, hereinafter the "ALKQN," which is a Chicago-based so-called "street gang." All one has to do is consider the radical political potential of this type of formation to be able to determine that it should be in the continued interest of the New Left movement to help the ALKQN develop a theory of transformation from illegitimate capitalism (criminal mentality and activity) into an approach that revisits and expands upon their Marxist roots. I am writing this essay from a jail cell, with no access to reference materials. Therefore, I will have to rely upon my own experience and recollection of the movement and pertinent literature for the factual basis.

Upon even a cursory inspection it should be recognized that the ALKQN is actually a "street nation," in that it has developed its own highly organized legislative, judicial and executive branches (via its Constitution), its own social and political theory (via its Manifesto), as well as an economic agenda and practice. The ALKQN is presently active in at least 25 U.S. states, as well as Puerto Rico, Mexico and Panama, with an estimated membership of 100,000 people.

Historically, the ALKQN began in Chicago in the late 1940s as an informal social club that functioned as a sort of cultural shock absorber, helping to ease the integration of Puerto Rican immigrants into the U.S. and Chicago (which still today is the most segregated major U.S. city). The members assisted each other and all newcomers with housing, employment, educational and language barrier needs, while also offering an umbrella of protection against racial violence and police repression through solidarity and informal social activities. The ALKQN movement soon spread into the Mexican barrios of Chicago along similar lines.

Although today there exists little documentation of these earliest days of the ALKQN, it appears that once the members "got on their feet" as far as their housing, employment and other essential needs were concerned, they simply moved on and had no further contact with the ALKQN. This informality, and more importantly, the lack of an organizational structure that emphasized a continuous development of socio-political consciousness for the ALKQN during its first phase of existence (which lasted into the early 1960s), combined with increased levels of police repression and aggression from White, Black, and Latino non-political fighting formations, were primary factors in the socio-political degradation of the ALKQN from its natural (perhaps unbeknownst to them at the time) Marxist root of striving towards a better way of life for its oppressed membership, to an unnatural "displaced native" mentality of street gang activity. The steadily increasing influx of illicit drugs into their community during this period further exacerbated these degenerative conditions to the extent that by the early 1960s the ALKQN took on the appearance of being little more than the largest and most violence-prone Latino street gang in Chicago.

The civil rights movement and the ensuing pre-revolutionary situation around the world, and particularly in Chicago (from 1968 to 1970), began to re-energize the ALKQN into its second (albeit shortest) phase where it attempted to revisit its Marxist roots. The ALKQN entered into an alliance (which exists to this day) with the Blackstone Rangers (later, the Black P. Stone Nation, and later, the El Rukns), who at that time were the largest and most violence-prone Black fighting

formation in Chicago, whether political, quasi-political, or non-political. When the leadership of the Rangers were invited to the White House by President Nixon and subsequently allocated over $600,000 in federal funds to implement social programs, Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley (the father), not to be outdone in his own town, immediately followed suit by allocating over $165,000 in local funds to the ALKQN for social programs, while lobbying them for a cease-fire in their bloody war against a confederacy of White street gangs on the near Northwest side of the city.

Both the ALKQN and the Blackstone Rangers utilized major portions of the above-mentioned funds to establish autonomous community organizations (the Humboldt Park Community Center, the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, the Mexican American Liberties Organization [MALO], the Woodlawn Community Outreach Center, and their progeny), some of which are still in existence today. Thus, it is inaccurate for the so-called "gang experts" to hold that organizations such as the ALKQN and El Rukn are non-political, while the government simultaneously labels both as "terrorist-threat groups." As a matter of law, membership in the ALKQN, in and of itself, is now a federal crime.

Aside from the FBI's COINTELPRO initiatives undertaken to prevent the establishment of a Black Panther Party (BPP)/Blackstone coalition, one factor not yet considered is that the Stones were not interested in becoming swallowed up by any vanguard-led movement. The Stones had their own dynamic leader in Jeff Fort, who before being sent to federal prison for alleged misappropriation of the aforementioned federal funds, had his eyes set on a future Chicago mayoral bid.

Both the BPP and the Young Lords Party (YLP) recognized that historically, non-political and quasi-political fighting formations have typically been responsive only to programs focused primarily on fighting for "turf," which is a misguided form of the drive in men to take, hold, and defend a given area. However, it appears that Richard "Cha Cha" Jimenez (the leader of the YLP) and a coalition of ALKQN and other Latino street formations were able to redirect this drive within their respective organizations through some hybrid form of the "eros effect," described by George Katsiaficas as a spontaneous mass movement where various oppressed peoples and groups with various grievances unite and rise up to struggle against their common oppressor. Another unknown dynamic is that the ALKQN, the YLP and the FALN (Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional Puertorriqueña) actually collaborated for the purpose of clandestine foco strikes against various U.S. Government installations, as well as private corporate interests, in the name of anti-imperialism. In sum, the major distinguishing factor between the BPP/Stone-ALKQN relationship and the YLP/FALN/ALKQN relationship, is that the latter, while working together, never challenged the autonomy of one another as a prerequisite to achieving that end.

This relationship is further evidenced by a united front of YLP/FALN members joining forces with the ALKQN and the entire Puerto Rican neighborhood in a direct confrontation with the Chicago Police and National Guard forces during the summer of 1970 on Division St. in the Humboldt Park neighborhood over a public (Rodney King type) beating by Chicago cops of an ALKQN member. This free-for-all escalated into the largest Latino riot in Chicago history as the entire community took to the streets to make a stand against extreme levels of police repression and violence. Thus, for a brief period of time (between 1968 and 1970), the ALKQN was, in and of itself, on the verge of becoming a revolutionary political movement.

However, by 1971, COINTELPRO and similarly nefarious state and local operations had not only effectively neutralized the revolutionary factions of both the BPP and the YLP, but had

also sent a clear message to the ALKQN and Blackstone Rangers. Thus, these street formations and their smaller allied groups opted for survival via illegitimate capitalism (criminalizing themselves completely) rather than face certain suicide, a "revolutionary suicide," by maintaining the revolutionary course.

Meanwhile, by the early 1970s most of the older ALKQN membership had fallen prey to drug addiction and the sordid courses of conduct that accompany that lifestyle. As a result, there was no leadership to train or teach the younger members about the agenda of the movement. The younger generation became prone to gang violence and turf battles as a primary modus operandi. Hence, the same community that once looked to the ALKQN as a source of protection against criminal elements and police repression became increasingly disenchanted by the senseless gang warfare between different groups and by petty crime in the neighborhoods, as, more often that not, innocent people were killed and injured in these skirmishes. Not surprisingly, the police state apparatus capitalized upon the disenchantment of the neighborhood by flooding the media with anti-gang, anti-drug, anti-crime rhetoric to the extent that these street formations were soon alienated from their own communities, the same communities which they once served.

The ALKQN was like a great brush fire, consuming everything in its path and leaving as quickly as it came. A number of new Latino organizations began forming in areas once controlled by the ALKQN. By 1971, the ALKQN was nearly on the verge of extinction. However, during that summer, two 18-year-old youths, one Puerto Rican and the other Mexican—unknown to one another but both LKs (albeit from different parts of the city)—were both arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to prison for killing rival gang members. These two young men, Gustavo Colon, a.k.a. "Lord Gino," and Raul Gonzales, a.k.a. "B.K.," or "Baby King," together with some of the older LKs who were already in the Illinois state prison system, such as Hector "Dino" Pagan and others, masterminded the transformation of the ALKQN into its third and present stage of existence, of syndicated illegitimate capitalism under the guise of a type of quasi-cultural, spiritual and nationalistic movement.

The creation of the ALKQN Constitution and Manifesto was completed at Stateville prison in 1972. They both are impressively eloquent, articulate and efficient documents that appeal to any oppressed person's natural instincts of liberty. For example, in their Constitution, Article II, [Purpose] states: "our intended purpose is to aid and assist all oppressed, and particularly third world people." The use of narcotics was also forbidden, effective immediately, and the old regime still left on the streets was given the ultimatum, terminate their membership or else. . . Gang warfare was encouraged to the younger members on the street, to "get rid of the enemy," but in fact it seems to have been a ploy to keep fresh blood coming through the prison system so that the leadership in prison could retain and increase its power.

Interestingly, while the new literature made manifest its Marxist ideology, besides the Constitution/Manifesto, required reading for all members was "The Art of War" by Sun Tzu, and "The Prince" by Niccolo Machiavelli. The end result was a diabolical combination of Marxism in theory and gangster capitalism in practice. However, the ALKQN flourished like never before. By 1980, the ALKQN controlled the lion's share of the drug trade within the Illinois state prison system and in Chicago as well. By 1990, the ALKQN had established chapters in at least 20 U.S. states as well as Puerto Rico, Mexico and Panama.

The New York faction of the ALKQN took on a similar modus operandi initially, until the mid-1990s, when two of their leaders, King "Blood" and King "Tone," ended up in prison for a

number of conspiracy and racketeering convictions stemming from their overt operation via the prison mail system and telephones—all the while claiming that they were a political organization, much in the spirit of the original ALKQN in Chicago.

With the release of the movie "Black and Gold," the New York faction gives an in-depth and surprisingly honest assessment of their struggle to rid themselves of their criminal elements while legitimizing themselves through political consciousness and involvement. Also, they have emerged quite well in the pop music industry, with such notable Latin King members as the late rapper "Big Pun," "Fat Joe," "Cuban Links," "The Mambo Kings" and others. These developments are a definite stepping-stone to legitimizing themselves completely.

With the Chicago faction of the ALKQN currently involved in a power struggle, as the aforementioned leaders have been sentenced to life in federal prison and entombed at the ADX in Florence, Colorado, it would appear to be the opportune time to approach the new leadership and stress the importance of their position and ability to break the vicious cycle that has been perpetuated for over 30 years. Much more can be accomplished in a struggle for all oppressed people against our real adversary, the power system. Just think of the possibilities, one million so-called street gang members united with Marxists, Anarchists, feminists, environmentalists, labor unions, etc., at events such as the WTO talks in Seattle.

Strangely, there doesn't seem to be much collaboration or even open lines of communication between the New York and Chicago factions of the ALKQN at this juncture, probably because of the difference in practice and ideology. It would seem that the New York faction has surpassed the Chicago faction in their level of consciousness and commitment to their stated beliefs and agenda.

Certainly, today's so-called street gang members have been ostracized and stigmatized as the worst of the worst by the police state apparatus. However, if Frantz Fanon was correct in his assessment that the lumpenproletariat must be involved in any successful mass movement, whether of nationalistic origin or not, we need to begin to understand the dynamics of these street nations' formations and organizational schemes, and their very existence. We also need to embrace their culture and listen to their grievances. I assure you that they are not much different than our own, since we are all involved in class struggle.

Our work at the Mr. Malo Youth Center in Chicago focuses on raising the socio-political consciousness of these so-called gang members while quelling the criminal mentality that is prevalent in them. However, we are merely a needle in a haystack. Nonetheless, I for one will not write off their future as lost. Therefore, we need to develop a definite theory of transformation that includes cultural, social and economic considerations. It also has to have something to offer up front for the short-term agenda. The long-term agenda should be to create a platform for social, political and economical empowerment that is inclusive to these street nations as members of the New Left movement.

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Richard Flood is a former political prisoner who served a long term in the Illinois state system, the last few years of which were in the Tamms "Supermax " prison, to which he had been sent in reprisal for his valuable legal and organizing work on behalf of other prisoners. He was released from Tamms in March 2000, and returned to Chicago were he secured employment as an Ironworker (Local #1, Chicago). Unfortunately, he is now once again incarcerated, for defending his wife from an armed attack by three people under the influence of drugs and alcohol.