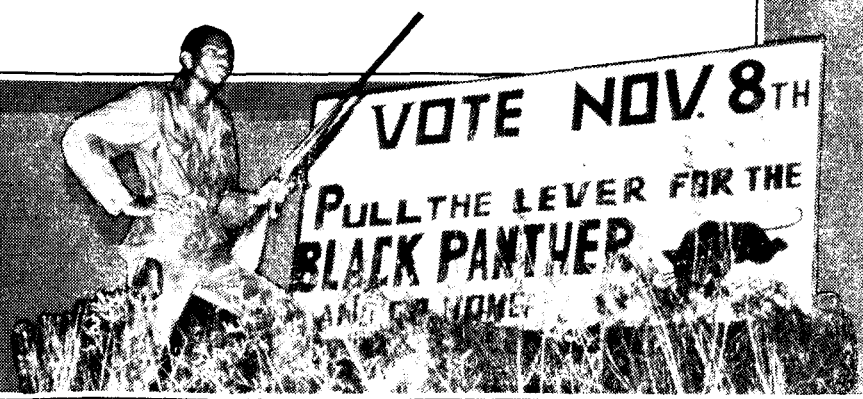
A Spartacist Pamphlet 75¢

Black History and the Class Struggle No. 2

On the Civil Rights Movement



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Introduction

When on 1 December 1955 Rosa Parks of Montgomery, Alabama refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white man, she sparked a new and convulsive period in modern American history. For over a decade black struggle for equality and democratic rights dominated political life in this country. From the lunch counter sit-ins and "freedom rides" in the Jim Crow South to the ghetto explosions in the North, black anger shook white racist America.

Amid the present anti-Soviet war hysteria of the Reagan years, it is important to recall an aspect of the civil rights movement which is now easily forgotten. It was the eruption of black struggle against Jim Crow which shattered the Cold War/McCarthyite climate of the early 1950s. America's posture as leader of the "free world" was brutally exposed as peaceful demonstrators were set upon with police dogs, tear gas and cattle prods for demanding the right to vote and use public facilities. And many of the young veterans of the civil rights struggle came to identify with the fighters against racist American imperialism abroad, from Castro's Cuba to Ho Chi Minh's Vietnam.

While the civil rights movement challenged white racist America and gave rise to a generation of young radicals, it did not open up a new period of black equality and advancement. For a decaying capitalism cannot meet the promise of black freedom. The civil rights movement came up against this fact harshly, especially when the movement came north in the mid-1960s. The hellish conditions of ghetto life, the mass chronic unemployment, the racist police brutality—these cannot be solved by a new civil rights act, only through thoroughgoing social revolution.

The Spartacist tendency originated in the period of the civil rights movement, and was shaped in that struggle. In opposition to both the liberal pacifism of Martin Luther King and the growing tendencies toward nationalist separatism, we stood for *revolutionary integrationism*—the fight for assimilation of black people into an egalitarian *socialist* society. There can be no social revolution in this country without united struggle of black and white workers led by a multiracial vanguard party, and there is nothing other than a workers revolution which can at last open the road to freedom for black people. With this understanding the early Spartacist tendency fought to break the civil rights militants from the Democratic/Dixiecratic Party and to forge a Freedom/Labor Party, linking the mass movement for black equality with the working-class struggle against capital.

The reformist "left" groups, particularly the Communist Party and Socialist Party, sought actively to keep the explosive civil rights activism "respectable" and firmly in the death-grip of the white liberals and black preachers. For example the SP was hand in glove with the establishment black leaders in viciously redbaiting the militant protests in the North against the Woolworth's chain, notorious for segregationist practices in the South. A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, CORE and others worked to scuttle the campaign of lunch counter sit-ins and militant picket lines at Woolworth's, pushing instead impotent legalism, pacifism and JFK's 1960 presidential campaign.

The black liberal misleaders, like King, kept the civil rights movement bound to the capitalist order, centrally through support to the Democratic Party of liberal liars and racist Dixiecrats. Today under Reagan reaction the partial and even the token gains of the civil rights movement are being dismantled and attacked. And while the black Democrats pay homage to the sit-ins and mass protests of 20 years ago, they *oppose* struggle to defend black rights in the present. Thus Jesse Jackson told black students, "You cannot serve the age of those who sat in, you cannot serve the age of those who rode the flaming buses," as he urged them to campaign for that all-time loser, Walter Mondale.

* * * * *

This pamphlet tells the story of the civil rights movement, in opposition to self-serving liberal mythologizing and falsification. Each of the three articles reprinted focuses on one of the main political poles during this stormy period of black history: Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, better known as SNCC.

"Bourgeoisie Celebrates King's Liberal Pacifism" traces King's career from the 1955-56 Montgomery bus boycott, where he emerged as the leading

national spokesman for "nonviolent direct action," through his growing rift with the young militants of SNCC. It details King's efforts to bring the civil rights movement north, culminating in the abortive open-housing march into the murderous lily-white suburb of Cicero, Illinois in 1966. The defeat in Cicero signalled the coming white backlash and the death of the civil rights movement. A few years later King himself became a victim of that backlash when he was assassinated by a white racist while supporting a black sanitation workers strike in Memphis.

For some time the black liberal establishment and its reformist hangers-on have sought to associate Malcolm X with Martin Luther King as if they had been close comrades-in-arms. In reality, Malcolm X was an implacable political enemy of King's liberal pacifism with its degrading appeals to the "conscience" of America's racist rulers. At a critical moment in contemporary American history Malcolm X became the personification of black militancy, the voice of the angry black ghetto. Despite misconceptions and false ideas inherited from his past as a ghetto hustler and later a Muslim minister, Malcolm was a man of exceptional moral integrity, courage and intellectual honesty. "Malcolm X: Courageous Fighter for Black Liberation" is a tribute to this remarkable and admirable man.

The story of SNCC is the story of that generation of young black militants forged in the heat of the civil rights battles. Through their own bitter experiences they became disillusioned with King's turn-the-other-cheek pacifism and with Democratic Party electoralism. Finally, under the slogan of "Black Power" the SNCC militants broke with liberalism as they knew it, but soon came to embrace the illusory alternative of despairing nationalist separatism. Nationalism was to be a dead end road for a generation of black militants. "SNCC: 'Black Power' and the Democrats" points, above all, to the road not taken—the struggle for revolutionary integrationism through a multiracial communist party with a strong black leadership component. We dedicate this pamphlet to the young black workers and student radicals of today, so that they can better find that road, the only road to black liberation.

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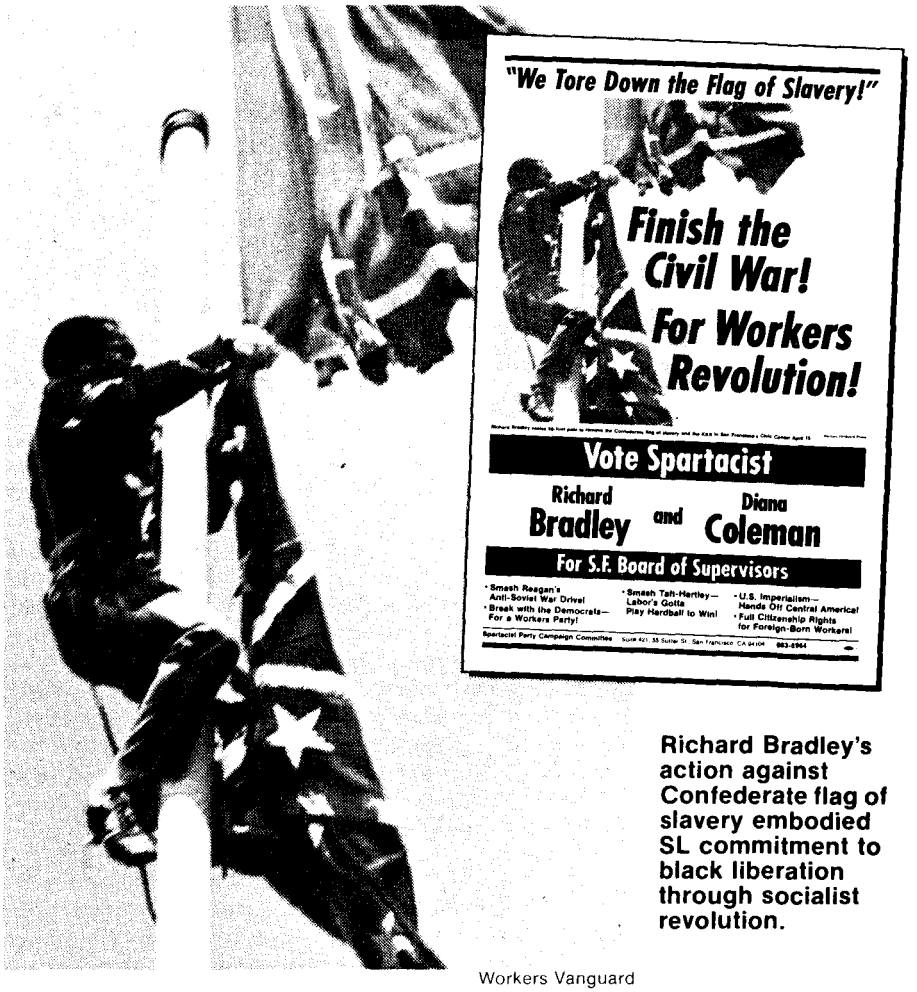
The Spartacist League is pleased to publish this pamphlet for Black History month (February) 1985. Our first "Black History and the Class Struggle" pamphlet, issued in 1983, is now in its fourth printing.



Richard Bradley's action against Confederate flag of slavery embodied SL commitment to black liberation through socialist revolution.

Workers Vanguard

That pamphlet took as its theme the Spartacist League's slogan, "Finish the Civil War!" The slogan was prominently raised at the November 1982 Labor/Black Mobilization, when 5,000 militants, mainly black trade unionists and youth, mobilized by the Spartacist League, stopped the racist-terrorist KKK in the streets of Washington, D.C. The slogan expresses our Marxist understanding that the promise of black emancipation raised by the American Civil War was betrayed by the capitalist ruling class; to fulfill that promise requires a proletarian revolution in America against the racist capitalist system.

This theme was taken up again last year when Richard Bradley, a leader of the Spartacist League and a founder of the Bay Area Labor Black League for Social Defense, climbed a 50-foot flagpole to rip down the Confederate flag from an official display at San Francisco Civic Center. Bradley was dressed in the uniform of a Union Army sergeant, a reminder of the 200,000 black soldiers who fought for the Union. Bradley's action against the banner of slavery and Klan terror earned him the solidarity of the city's decent people and the wrath of the Democratic mayor, Dianne Feinstein.

During the heyday of the civil rights movement in the late 1960s, the SF administration had in fact been forced to remove a Confederate flag from the display. The reappearance in Civic Center of that hated symbol was a sign of how far the partial and token gains of that mass movement have been reversed. Feinstein was as well sending a message to her cohorts of the Democratic Party whose convention was soon to be held in SF.

That "Dixie Dianne" Feinstein was forced (finally) to accept the removal of the vile banner of slavery, and its replacement with a historic Union flag, is a small, symbolic victory for all enemies of racism. We of the Spartacist League are proud of our comrade Richard Bradley and proud that, as an inseparable part of our struggle for the emancipation of the working class, we are also the vanguard of the fight for black freedom.

—February 1985

reprinted from Workers Vanguard No. 207, 26 May 1978

Ten Years After Assassination

BOURGEOISIE CELEBRATES KING'S LIBERAL PACIFISM

Ten years after he was assassinated in Memphis nearly every black ghetto in the U.S. has its renamed Martin Luther King Avenue, its King school and asphalt playground. The day of his birth is now institutionalized as a national holiday. Young black school children are carefully taught the political gospel of M.L. King, Jr. as the martyred embodiment of the civil rights movement—the prophet of "nonviolence" and "patient moderation" which all black people who yearn for equality ought to follow.

It is no wonder then that the tenth anniversary of his murder has been the occasion for further mythology. It does not seem to matter to the mythmakers that the ghetto school named in his honor is probably less integrated today than it was ten years ago, that the parents of its black schoolchildren are more likely to be unemployed, that their housing is even less habitable and more expensive; and most of all, that the future of these ghetto youth in racist capitalist America appears even more desperate as their jobless rate climbs above 50 percent.

While the anniversary of the King assassination is the perfect occasion for mythologizing, it is indicative that this year the festivities were actually *smaller* than ever. The purpose of the celebrations has always been to dilute the memory of that original "Martin Luther King Day" which sent shivers of fear through America's ruling class: the ghetto explosions which swept the country upon the news of his death. On the night of 4 April 1968 hundreds of thousands of black people took to the streets, leaderless and without political focus, in outrage over the cold-blooded murder of the man who was seen as the leader of blacks in struggle against their oppression. A nervous bourgeoisie once pushed this holiday as a diversion and cheap concession to an enraged minority population. But as the spectre of a political mobilization of the ghetto masses against their oppressors has grown dimmer, even "saints" like Martin Luther King become expendable.

The ten-years-after assessments are not able to completely cover up reality, so they have sounded this refrain: King brought us a long way—we've got a long way to go (presumably along that same "glory road"). The major chord is that King and the liberal civil rights movement won increased democratic rights, and the minor chord is the rendition of the "economic miracle" of a racially harmonious "New South." Thus the *New York Times* (3 and 4 April) published a two-part article entitled, "The Legacy of Martin Luther King," in which the "New South that King made" is presented as a bouquet of fresh liberal magnolias and black elected officials:

> "A street named for Dr. King in Selma, racial harmony in Birmingham, burgeoning black power in Atlanta: These are the triumphs of political change in the South."

The important and real partial gains made for blacks during this period exist largely in the realm of *formal* democratic rights—resulting in desegregation of public facilities, voter registration as well as a degree of school integration. But even the liberals must acknowledge that these real gains have not eliminated the "handicap" of being black in white capitalist America. Down the street from the office of Atlanta's black mayor, Maynard Jackson, the unemployed still hang out in doorways. And as a veteran civil rights activist interviewed for the *New York Times* "Legacy" article bitterly remarked, "What good is a seat in the front of the bus if you don't have the money for the fare?"

The fact is that the "social miracle" of the "New South" is based on the old refrain of the "community of interest"

UPI

November 1983, over 15 years after King's assassination, Reagan signs bill creating holiday in his honor. Among notables present are Coretta King and Edward Kennedy.

Freed/Magnum

Martin Luther King, Jr. with well-wishers in Baltimore, 1963. Civil rights movement's promise of formal legal equality fueled black masses' hopes for a better life.

between oppressor and oppressed, one which harks back to the days when the plantation owners insisted that, unlike cutthroat Northern capitalists, they "took care" of their slaves. More currently the working premise is that what is good for business is good for the poor. If Jimmy Carter is the supreme being of the "New South," and Martin Luther King its messiah, the non-unionized workers remain outcasts in this land of milk and honey. "Racial harmony" is today enforced by "black power" Mayor Jackson who smashed the 1977 strike by Atlanta's largely black sanitation workers with a brutality that rivaled Bull Connor.

Self-serving King mythmaking is by no means restricted to the liberals whose purpose is rather obvious. Reformists on the left have joined this pilgrimage to the King shrine to stay in close touch with the "progressive forces" they tailed then and now. They add left "miracle stories" to the case for liberal canonization. And there is an odd intersection of the liberal and reformist myths with regard to King's assassination. For different reasons they both agree he died just in time.

Certainly the most cynical statement on the subject was made by the purest product of that movement—the King aide who made it to the top as black front man for U.S. imperialism. As Andrew Young said in a 1977 *Playboy* interview about King's assassination:

> "He was very fortunate... really.... It was a blessing.... Martin had done all he could.... He was misunderstood.... God decided Martin had had enough. It was time to go on home and claim his reward."

Of course, Andy Young (whose readiness to sell out was so famous that even King jocularly called him "Tom") claimed his reward in a more temporal realm, at the doorstep of the capitalist class. For the liberals King's murder makes it somewhat easier to blame the failure of the civil rights movement on an assassin's bullet rather than on their own political misleadership. After all, what kind of symbol would King have made had he lived on? His pacifism was utterly discredited by the ghetto explosions, his preaching of reliance on the capitalist state was exposed as the federal troops bloodily suppressed these upheavals. As a preacher of poisonous bourgeois ideology King had lost his credibility and thus outlived his usefulness to the ruling class.

For its part the reformist left has a different reason for feeling it was a blessing King died when he did. The Communist Party (CP), for instance, claims that King was shot down just as he was embarking upon a revolutionary course. His last trip to Memphis to support the sanitation workers strike and his opposition to the Vietnam War are cited as proof positive of his growing partisanship on the side of the working class. King did come out against the war, if only for a negotiated settlement, and that opposition was to cost him his privileged relationship with LBJ. Undoubtedly King was feeling pressure from more militant black SNCC youth who saw Vietnam as a racist war. However, he anticipated the important current of bourgeois defeatism in demanding that the guns for Vietnam be replaced by government butter for the black poor. "The Great Society has been shot down on the battlefields of Vietnam," he said in New York City.

But to hear the CP tell the story, you would think King was some sort of crypto-Marxist by the time he goes to Memphis:

> "He guided the movement for liberation.... He began to see the relationship between the class struggle and the struggle for equal rights. He also saw these struggles as part of the worldwide struggle against imperialism—U.S. imperialism in the first place."
>
> —*Daily World*, 1 April 1978

This sounds more like the M.L. King of J. Edgar Hoover's imagination than the one who actually existed. In fact, King would be no more suitable for such an honored place in the "progressive pantheon" than is Ralph Abernathy had he lived to slosh around in the mud in

AP

Muhammad Speaks

Cop brutalizes black man in Watts, 1965 (left); Muhammad Speaks cartoon lambasts M.L. King's pacifism (right).

AP

Airtel to SAC, Albany
RE: COUNTERINTELLIGENCE PROGRAM
BLACK NATIONALIST-HATE GROUPS

nationalist activity, and interested in counterintelligence, to coordinate this program. This Agent will be responsible for the periodic progress letters being requested, but each Agent working this type of case should participate in the formulation of counterintelligence operations.

GOALS

For maximum effectiveness of the Counterintelligence Program, and to prevent wasted effort, long-range goals are being set.

1. Prevent the coalition of militant black nationalist groups. In unity there is strength; a truism that is no less valid for all its triteness. An effective coalition of black nationalist groups might be the first step toward a real "Mau Mau" in America, the beginning of a true black revolution.

2. Prevent the rise of a "messiah" who could unify, and electrify, the militant black nationalist movement. might have been such a "messiah;" he is the martyr of the movement today. all aspire to this position. is less of a threat because of his age. be a very real contender for this position should he abandon his supposed "obedience" to "white, liberal doctrines" (nonviolence) and embrace black nationalism. has the necessary charisma to be a real threat in this way.

3. Prevent violence on the part of black nationalist groups. This is of primary importance, and is, of course, a goal of our investigative activity; it should also be a goal of the Counterintelligence Program. Through counterintelligence it should be possible to pinpoint potential troublemakers and neutralize them before they exercise their potential for violence.

4. Prevent militant black nati... leaders ...

If King couldn't bury civil rights militancy in impotent pacifism, the racist American bourgeoisie was more than willing to bury it with guns, clubs and hoses. Above: Birmingham, 1963. Hoover's COINTELPRO memo (right) drips with the blood of martyred black leaders (Malcolm X, Fred Hampton, George Jackson) who sought to lead the movement beyond King's politics of liberal prostration.

front of the Capitol in the "Poor People's Tent City." The fact is that the civil rights movement had died *before* King was shot. This is what makes his death so "timely" for Andrew Young, the CP and others who want to cash in on the moral capital of the "good old days" without taking responsibility for the failure of that movement.

The central theme of the bourgeoisie's hosannahs to Martin Luther King is to present him as the symbol of a civil rights movement that went from success to success by the good old American way of pressure politics. The present condition of the ghetto populace is sufficient proof of the emptiness of this fairy tale. In fact King produced defeats every time he directly confronted the economic roots of black oppression. And from early on the preacher of nonviolence and reliance on the liberals was challenged by more militant forces in "the movement." The tragedy was that none of the forces in the emerging left wing of the civil rights movement had grasped a political program which could mobilize a united proletarian army to liberate all the oppressed, by smashing the capitalist system which forges the chains of their oppression.

Docu-lie

By far the most publicized media event was Abby Mann's *King*, broadcast last February over national TV for six hours on three successive nights. Even before it was shown, objections to the program were heard from disciples who feared the King image was not being properly worshipped. Along with Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) president emeritus Ralph Abernathy, Hosea Williams objected to his diminished role and tried unsuccessfully to organize a national boycott of the production. Supporters of Mann's version included Andrew Young, Coretta King and her lawyer, Stanley Levison, all of whom are portrayed as playing key roles in the TV "docudrama." But for all the squabbling there was no disagreement over what ought to be the purpose of the program. As Williams said, "Our preoccupation is that King be presented as the greatest peaceful warrior of the 20th Century. That's all" (*Politiks*, 14 February).

UPI

King with Robert Kennedy, NAACP's Roy Wilkins and Lyndon Johnson at White House, 1963.

That's all? Mann's failure to take into account the left wing of the civil rights movement brought more serious objections from a number of ex-Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) members. Mann said he "understands" the criticisms made by the former SNCC members (who organized some of the projects Mann attributes solely to King). But he added in his defense: "This is the kind of film Martin Luther King wanted" (*New York Times*, 16 February). He's probably right about that.

Certainly the TV "docudrama" is the appropriate genre for slickly packaged contemporary myth making. Its dis-

comfiting mix of fact and fiction, data and impression, history and fantasy all serve to blur rather than clarify an already obscured reality. It captures the cynicism of post-Watergate liberalism with its syndrome of exposure and cover-up and ultimate unanswered questions. *King* focuses on the government's targeting of black leaders, particularly the FBI's criminal COINTELPRO program whose first commandment was: "Prevent the rise of a black messiah."

In Abby Mann's *King* the liberal view of the FBI is given melodramatic import with J. Edgar Hoover portrayed as the arch-paranoid villain sitting stone-stiff in a dark room clenching his teeth and planning to get King. No doubt this is true. As FBI agent Arthur Murtaugh of the Atlanta field office later told Kennedy assassination buff Mark Lane (in an interview for his book, *Code Name "Zorro"*): "The concentration of effort against King was greater than any single investigation that I saw take place at the bureau and I saw a lot of them in twenty years."

But it is not the whole truth. Relying on Lane's research and theories, Mann paints a dark picture of the FBI to whitewash the role of the liberal government. In an early segment when then-president John Kennedy is asked what the government will do about attacks on civil rights activists, he says: "We'll do what we always do. Nothing." Fair enough. But by the end of the program John and his attorney general brother, Bobby, have been cast as warriors against Hoover, the FBI and the Ku Klux Klan. This post-Watergate convention of the mortal combat between Hoover and Camelot is phony in *King* and in history.

Far from being reluctant "good guys" the liberals differed with Hoover over *tactical* assessments on how to best contain the struggle for black equality. The government's attack on the black movement, particularly against its most militant sectors such as the Black Panther Party, was so intensive and widespread that to suggest it was done without the knowledge of Kennedy or Johnson is ludicrous. Indeed, liberal columnist Carl Rowan wrote that Hoover had leaked word to the press that Bobby Kennedy had authorized wiretaps on King's phone, a charge he repeated in a 19 June 1968 interview in the *Washington Star*. But while for Hoover the "black messiah" had to be stopped by any means necessary, the liberals increasingly saw King as the man most capable of containing the civil rights movement within the bounds of liberal pacifism. The more the masses threatened to break out of these bonds, the more the liberals supported King against spokesmen for more militant strategies.

Yet by the late 1960's the mood of the black population had become so explosive that a fearful bourgeoisie tended to allow Hoover a freer hand. After Harlem, Watts, Newark and Detroit went up in flames, *any* black leadership began to seem a threat. And so they were systematically put out of action or simply "eliminated." Malcom X had already been assassinated; SNCC leader Rap Brown was in jail; within a year Chicago Black Panthers Mark Clark and Fred Hampton would be murdered in their beds, while Newton, Cleaver and Seale were hounded with arrests.

We may never know how much of the post-Watergate liberal speculation about FBI involvement in the King assassination is fact and how much conspiratorial paranoia. But it is certainly proper to make the sinister connection with the government's search-and-destroy missions against the black movement. We demand to know the whole truth about the King assassination, the murder of Malcom X and the all-out secret police war against the Black Panther Party! Instead we are dished up post-Watergate apologia for pacifist liberalism.

CORE

Bus carrying Freedom Riders was firebombed when it entered Alabama.

From Montgomery to Washington

The Mann docudrama presents its hero as the leader of a long march of stunning victories for the black masses. But the truth is that Martin Luther King did not begin the civil rights struggle in the U.S. And he certainly did not make possible the partial gains that characterize its early years. After World War II, the government found formal Jim Crow segregation increasingly embarrassing. It stood in stark contradiction to the integration of masses of black workers into the industrial proletariat of the cities; and it exposed U.S. pretensions as champion of a "Free World" both in the Cold War with Russia and in the jockeying for influence in decolonizing Africa. By 1947 the U.S. military and all departments of the federal government were desegregated, and when black soldiers came back from integrated units in Korea they swore they would no longer submit to Jim Crow. Even before the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education decision, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had won a number of legal victories for school desegregation in the South.

It was with the arrest of Rosa Parks in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955 that the movement that became known as the civil rights movement dramatically overtook NAACP legalism and led to the year-long bus boycott. It was also the event that thrust Martin Luther King to center stage as a national spokesman of pacifist "direct action" for black equality. Contrary to popular myth it was not King, but Ralph Abernathy, a less polished Montgomery preacher at a less esteemed church, who

was the driving force behind the boycott. Abernathy, E.D. Nixon (of the local NAACP and Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters) and others pushed King, the "new boy" preacher of the prestigious Dexter Avenue Church into the leadership of the boycott for reasons of security. As he himself confirmed in his book, *Stride Toward Freedom*, "I neither started the protest nor suggested it," adding in messianic terms, "I simply responded to the call of the people for a spokesman."

Rather than a spokesman for the people, in Montgomery King became the spokesman for the policy of reliance on the federal government with a new cover of Gandhian passive resistance. As religious philosophy it is claptrap, but in the mouth of a Gandhi or King it was the bleating of the Judas goat. King wrote in the mid-1950's:

> "The Negro all over the South must come to the point that he can say to his white brother: 'We will match your capacity to inflict suffering with our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. We will not hate you, but we will not obey your evil laws. We will soon wear you down by pure capacity to suffer'."
>
> —quoted in David L. Lewis, *King, A Critical Biography* (1970)

While King preached that the nonviolent resister had "cosmic companionship" in his struggle for justice, it was clear that he saw as temporal political companions the liberal capitalist government and its courts. After a year of unyielding struggle by Montgomery's blacks, it must have seemed to King part of the cosmic order of justice when the Supreme Court declared the local laws requiring segregated seating on buses unconstitutional. A voice from the back of the adjournment proceedings is reported to have cried out, "God Almighty has spoken from Washington, D.C."

In Abby Mann's *King* the Montgomery bus boycott ends victoriously with the hero stepping aboard the newly-integrated bus and the "New South" takes off. Coretta King's voice is heard as the bus pulls away:

> "When Martin boarded that bus—the first integrated bus—he felt as though he were Columbus discovering America. It seemed to him then, anything was possible."

King was riding high with his sermons on "soul force" and the "capacity to suffer," but Montgomery blacks were left to face the racist flak—courageously, but tactically, politically and morally disarmed. Following the Supreme Court decision the racist terrorists crawled from their ratholes, put on their sheets and picked their black targets. The KKK staged a provocative nighttime torchlit procession into the black neighborhoods. Black churches were burned to the ground. Buses were attacked and burned in a campaign of terror. Even King's house was dynamited; but angry blacks who rose to his defense (and their own) calling for protest action were told by King to love their enemies.

It was in Birmingham in 1963 that the pacifism of King and the SCLC was exposed in blood and death. Mann's *King* recreates the indelible images of that time—Bull Connor and his stormtroopers; the police dogs set loose upon the crowd; the firehoses set at pressures sufficient to strip off tree bark, hurling children up against the walls. But these dramatic scenes are only part of the story. Mann glosses over the black population's fighting response to Connor and the racist thugs. In Birmingham King's nonviolent philosophy was junked by the black masses who with sticks, rocks, knives and bottles fought back against the racists in the streets. It was at that moment—and not before—that Kennedy sent troops to bases outside the city and announced that he had taken steps to federalize the Alabama National Guard.

AP

Selma to Montgomery: Alabama state troopers attack march on Pettus Bridge. King turned the next march around with a prayer.

In Birmingham, pacifist persuasion was put away, but not before that tragic Sunday morning, 15 September 1963, when a bomb exploded in the Sixth Avenue Baptist Church that would put four little black girls into their graves. For his part, King remained loyal to his god and his saviors in the government. And the government recognized it had a loyal representative in the field. Even when his brother's home was bombed, King continued to "marvel" at how blacks could express "hope and faith" in moments of such tragedy.

Just how loyal King was to the Democratic Party was proved that summer in the fabled March on Washington. In Mann's *King* and all King mythology the March on Washington is taken as the victorious high point of "the movement." In fact it was here that King helped engineer a "mass" political defeat for the cause of black liberation, treacherously tying it to the Democratic Party. The numbers were certainly impressive, and so was the participation of every important civil rights organization along with the liberal wing of the union bureaucracy, most notably Walter Reuther's United Auto Workers. Marxists call for mobilizing the power of the organized working class as key to winning democratic rights for the oppressed. But this was not what the March on Washington was about. Rather it was an attempt to channel the movement into pressure politics for the passing of the civil rights bill and to cement ties with the Democratic Party.

Even the most conservative civil rights leaders initially saw the march as a means to put the heat on the Kennedy administration, which was dragging its heels on the bill and other anti-discrimination legislation. But when Kennedy called in the "representative leaders" for a conference, they quickly changed their minds. They changed their destination from the White House to the Lincoln Memorial, issued a new march handbook deleting a "statement to the president" and the call to confront the Congressmen. They specifically

reprinted from Spartacist No. 4, May-June 1965

The "Protection" of the FBI: A Prediction Come True

...the civil rights movement must realize that *it cannot look to the federal government for "protection" of any sort.* If the past history of Federal interaction and collaboration with the segregationist apparatus is not enough proof, the Selma case should make it clear that Johnson will mobilize Federal forces and pass voting-rights bills only when he feels that the interests of the American racist *status quo* will benefit. Once the Negro people begin to assert their *real* power and independence, and attempt to use these laws for their own political action, these same troops will be turned against them in the interests of racist oppression. The civil-rights movement will then find itself witch-hunted, its meetings raided and supporters arrested by the same F.B.I. it is presently beseeching to protect it. The illusion of "nonviolence" spread by King and others is a criminal *disarming* of black people, and is consistent with the role of these "leaders" as agents of the power structure. The movement must scrap these illusions once and for all and begin to organize the Negro people to defend themselves from violence. The movement must look to itself, not to the Federal government, for protection.

By developing now a party commanding respect and winning gains through the organization of black power, yet a party without racial exclusivism, Negro militants will lay the basis for eventual working-class fusion. This fusion will come about when the exploited section of the white South is driven into opposition and in desperation is compelled to forego color prejudice in order to struggle along class lines against its real enemies—the owners of land and industry and their state.

denied participation to "subversive" groups and censored all speeches. Although John Lewis of SNCC was invited to speak, he was pressured into deleting from his prepared text the following sentence: "We cannot depend on any political party for both Democrats and Republicans have betrayed the basic principles of the Declaration of Independence."

Although the 1964 Civil Rights Act was a supportable declaration of minimal democratic rights, the march was meant to build support for precisely that party whose purpose was to sabotage any attempt by blacks to gain those rights. Characterizing the march as the "Farce on Washington," Malcolm X wrote of the period which King came to see as the high point of his career:

> "In '63 it was the march on Washington. In '64, what was it? The civil-rights bill. Right after they passed the civil-rights bill they murdered a Negro in Georgia and did nothing about it; murdered two whites and a Negro in Mississippi and did nothing about it. So that the civil-rights bill has produced nothing where we're concerned. It was only a valve, a vent, that was designed to enable us to let off our frustrations. But the bill itself was not designed to solve our problems."
>
> —George Breitman, ed., *Malcolm X Speaks* (1965)

It was the felt need for a program to "solve our problems" which led to the emergence of a left wing in the civil rights movement which challenged King.

Civil Rights Movement Divided

One of the more pernicious aspects of the King myth is the treatment of the civil rights movement as a continuous parade of victories with little or no challenge to King's leadership and philosophy of nonviolence. Here Abby Mann makes a most worshipful offering to that idol of liberalism at the expense of truth. For Mann the entire political struggle against liberal pacifism is reduced to an anachronistic dialogue between King and Malcolm X in which the latter is portrayed as a charming demon of defeat while King is the inch-by-inch realist. Basically, the liberals put into the mouth of Malcolm a strategy for race war and allow King to point out that such a strategy would amount to race suicide. In fact it was not race war, but collective self-defense that was the issue for Malcolm X, for Robert Williams, the Deacons for Defense and many others.

Through "creative editing," *King* fails to show that not only was its hero opposed by more militant, courageous activists, but that he was also pushed by the left wing of the civil rights movement into many actions for which he is now given credit. Mann gives SNCC the most cursory mention, buried under a mountain of King rhetoric, as the militant wing of the civil rights movement. And the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), which organized the first freedom rides, is not mentioned at all.

But history is different from "docu-drama" and the developing split was to become all important to the fate of the civil rights movement. The fight was only partly generational, and at root ideological. Certainly at the beginning SNCC was a creature of the SCLC and (as its name clearly indicates) accepted its nonviolent strategy. But unlike King many of the SNCC, CORE and NAACP youth council members were not committed to nonviolence as an inviolable religious principle. They tended to accept King's strategy as good coin, and while they had illusions in the federal government, their real commmitment was to the struggle for democratic rights for black people. Thus from the same events they learned different lessons from the preachers! When the social explosions of the mid-1960s occurred they identified with the aspirations of the black masses while King feared for the bourgeois order.

As early as the April 1960 Raleigh, North Carolina youth conference—out of which SNCC would emerge—King was already warning that "the tactics of nonviolence without the spirit of nonviolence may become a new kind of violence." And by the following year during the confrontation in Albany, Georgia ("one of the meanest little towns" in Carter country) King had even more reason to be suspicious of the students—and they of him.

It was here that the students saw that despite King's capacity to land thousands of activists in the jails, he was unable to dent the stone wall of racist reaction. In midsummer 1961, after sustained and repeated racist attacks, with 3,000 Klansmen massed outside town, the protesters began to fight back. As he did so often in the future, King called for a "moratorium" on action. And the militant black youth began to refer to him derisively as "De Lawd."

But it was at Selma, Alabama in 1965 that the tensions came to a head on the Pettus Bridge. In the face of King's betrayal the song, "Ain't Gonna Let

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Wide World

Chicago, 1966: Civil rights demonstrators under King's leadership sang hymns as thousands of stone-throwing racists stopped march in its tracks.

Nobody Turn Me 'Round," rang with painful irony for the returning marchers. Responding to Justice Department pressure, King stopped the Selma-to-Montgomery march, knelt in prayer and turned it around. With Selma there was open talk of King as sellout and coward. To the song "We Shall Overcome," the young militants began to counterpose, "We Shall Overrun."

King Goes North

It was in Chicago in 1966 that the premises of the liberal civil rights movement came most clearly into explosive collision with economic and social reality. Northern ghetto blacks had lived with "equality under the law" for years and it was abundantly clear that King had no program to fight the causes of racial discrimination rooted deep in the economic and social structure of capitalist society. And despite the reformists' claim that King was moving left when death overtook him, what grew out of the Northern experience was not a turn toward the working class, but Jesse Jackson's "Operation Breadbasket," the quintessence of black capitalism.

By the time King arrived in Chicago the civil rights movement was already irreversibly divided, not the least over the ghetto upheavals which had burst upon the political scene. The emerging black nationalists were enraged by the support King and the preachers gave to the vicious police repression. As King said of Watts, "It was necessary that as powerful a police force as possible be brought in to check them" (*New York Times*, 16 August 1965).

While talking in vague terms about attacking *economic* problems, King simultaneously launched an attack against his left flank, striking out against "violence" in the black movement. He had already directed his fire at CORE's stall-in at the 1964 New York World's Fair and a trip to Harlem that year had resulted in his car being pelted with rotten eggs while the crowd chanted, "We Want Malcolm." He knew he would not get much besides suspicion from CORE and SNCC in his Palmer House negotiations with Mayor Daley.

The most subtle apology for King's liberalism comes from those who agree that the civil rights movement was finished in the North, but attribute the failure to the unbreachable divide between the ethnic white neighborhood and the black ghetto. Nationalism politically tied blacks into the ghetto, despairing of a successful struggle against the segregation of minorities at the bottom of the economic ladder. Yet in the North was also the integrated workplace, the integrated union, the possibility of an alliance with other exploited sectors against the common enemy. But this fighting alliance did not mean the empty "unity" of black liberals with liberal labor bureaucrats. In Chicago the struggle for racial equality meant directly confronting the Daley machine, and the Reuthers, Rustins and Randolphs were not about to mount a campaign against this Democratic Party kingpin. What was needed was a pro-program of class struggle; what King offered was a program of class collaboration.

Chicago blacks were presented with the choice of two dead ends: the liberal pacifism of King or the no less defeatist ideology of Carmichael and the black nationalists. Both failed to see the need to mobilize the power of the unions, through challenging the racist, pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy: King and the SCLC because they were committed to the Democratic Party; Carmichael and the black nationalists because with the defeats and sellouts of liberal pacifism, they had taken the road of black separatist militancy which ignored the "white working class."

The situation came to a head with the projected march into the lily-white suburb of Cicero. King was under pressure to make a show of militancy; SNCC was anxious to show its mettle; the racists got ready. Nazi leader George Rockwell came to town amidst considerable fanfare to recruit among the Cicero residents. The white working-class communities had already made clear that they would not allow blacks to march through their streets when King was stoned to the ground earlier in Marquette Park. No one doubted the racist terror that would meet the planned King-SNCC march. But two days before it was to occur King signed the Palmer House "Summit Agreement" and backed off in exchange for a formal agreement on housing.

For the militant wing of the civil rights movement it was Selma all over again. SNCC on its own led a march of 200 people into Cicero on September 4. There were triple that number of Chicago police and thousands of National Guardsmen. The marchers were courageous and sustained many injuries and arrests, but they had lost. It was all over long before it began. The racists had out-mobilized them in the streets.

Nearly a decade later busing was defeated in Boston for much the same reason: the labor movement was not brought into the struggle on the side of integration. Responsible for these defeats were the labor bureaucrats, the black liberal leadership and the pseudo-socialists who tail after them.

Class Power and Civil Rights

King and the coalition of black ministers of the SCLC had never intended to unleash a movement of the black masses. Their civil rights movement was meant as a gesture by the "talented tenth" to pressure the capitalist government for legal reform. They saw the Democratic Party as the natural political vehicle for legislative pressure and black political expression. They saw the courts as their main ally and ultimate battleground. But when the black masses moved onto the stage of U.S. history, the SCLC's role became one of fearful containment.

It was different for SNCC whose young activists identified with and encouraged the organization of black social power. An orientation toward different class forces began to show early, if only sociologically, as SNCC turned toward "grass roots" local organizing and King continued his reliance on the federal government. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP)—which grew out of the SNCC voter registration campaigns—revealed all of the contradictions of a militant civil rights organization lacking revolutionary programmatic alternatives. The MFDP shared King's illusions in the party of Kennedy and Humphrey, illusions it paid for at the 1964 Atlantic City convention when the Johnson/Humphrey machine crushed its attempt to unseat the Jim Crow Mississippi delegation. Out of this experience the Lowndes County (Alabama) Freedom Organization was formed with a political thrust independent of the capitalist parties.

In the end no sector of the civil rights movement was able to decisively break out of the confines of liberal politics. Yet throughout this period literally thousands of its left-wing militants were in rapid political motion. That this motion was not intersected by communists with a program to broaden the fight for democratic rights of blacks into a struggle for black equality through united class struggle was a major setback for the U.S. proletariat.

In the early 1960s the predecessor of the Spartacist League, the Revolutionary Tendency (RT) within the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), fought for just such an active intervention into SNCC and other components of the left wing of the civil rights movement. The RT saw the crucial opportunity for the crystallization of a black Trotskyist cadre. Its 1963 opposition document, "The Negro Struggle and the Crisis of Leadership," read in part:

> "The rising upsurge and militancy of the black revolt and the contradictory and confused, groping nature of what is now the left wing in the movement provide the revolutionary vanguard with fertile soil and many opportunities to plant the seeds of revolutionary socialism.... We must consider non-intervention in the crisis of leadership a crime of the worst sort."

In part it was for this fight that the RT was expelled from the SWP while that already degenerated party continued its criminal abstentionism. Within a few years the opportunity would be lost—with the hardening of the black nationalist mood, the terrain would be sealed off to communists for several years, with many thousands of black radicals lost to the revolutionary movement.

Far from being a transcendental leader of a united movement, King was one of the political poles against which the left wing of the civil rights movement was defined. Yet there are those on the left who still yearn for the "good old days" of a "united" civil rights movement, and toward that end they falsify the movement and the man who symbolized its liberal, religious wing.

It is ironic that the rehabilitation of King within the left was begun by the black nationalists on the basis that "no whites ought to criticize" any black. But the present reformist stance toward King is dictated by desires to once again get close to the liberals. Thus the SWP, for instance, in the most cynical fashion not only talks about a "New Civil Rights Movement" as it tails after the moribund hyper-legalist NAACP, but at the same time it continues to support the residues of the black nationalist wave. In fact, *both* movements are dead, but these shameless reformists continue to support all of their most treacherous aspects—calls for federal troops to "protect" black schoolchildren, reliance on "peaceful, legal" means to pressure the capitalist state, support for government union-busting "Affirmative Action" schemes in the name of civil rights.

Marxists must not disguise King's liberal pacifism and the dead end it represented in the struggle against racial oppression. We must break through the myths of "passive resistance," crack the mask of "King the Peaceful Warrior," and present a revolutionary analysis of the *failure* of the civil rights movement to provide a program for fighting the social and economic oppression of blacks under American capitalism. It is not through liberal "docudrama" that the new generation of youth will discover the true story of that period. While the reformists cover for King to camouflage their own treacherous tracks, the task of creating a black communist cadre requires destroying politically the exalted symbols of passive defeatism and reliance on the bourgeois state which led to the death of the civil rights movement. ■

Workers Vanguard

Norfolk, Virginia unionists march for school busing, May 1983.

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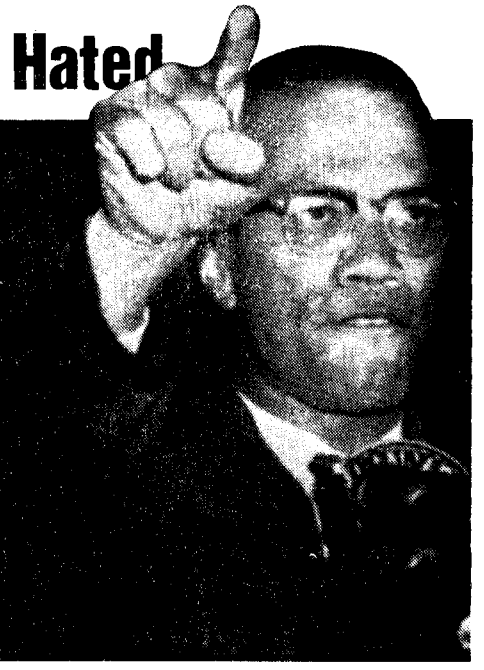
The Man That Liberals Feared and Hated

Malcolm X:

Courageous Fighter For Black Liberation



> "Malcolm was our manhood, our living black manhood! This was his meaning to his people. And, in honoring him, we honor the best in ourselves...."
>
> —Ossie Davis,
> 27 February 1965

Nineteen years ago the most admired and respected, the most hated and feared black man of his generation was assassinated while speaking at Harlem's Audubon Ballroom. Lenin once observed that while a revolutionist is alive and fighting, the oppressor class persecutes him, hounds him, vilifies him, circulates the most vile slanders about him. But after he's dead sometimes an effort is made to co-opt his memory, to portray him as a well-meaning, if misguided, do-gooder. The same people who savagely attacked him when alive now mourn him as a "great loss to the movement." Something like this has happened to Malcolm X.

Time

"Detroit Red"—Malcolm X at age 19.

The white rulers of this country hated Malcolm X and responded with undisguised malicious glee to his violent death. The director of the official United States Information Agency, Carl Rowan (who is black) dismissed Malcolm X contemptuously as "an ex-convict, ex-dope peddler who became a racial fanatic." The obituary editorial in the liberal *New York Times* (22 February 1965) vilified him as "an extraordinary and twisted man, turning many true gifts to evil purpose":

> "...his ruthless and fanatical belief in violence not only set him apart from the responsible leaders of the civil rights movement and the overwhelming majority of Negroes. It also marked him for notoriety, and for a violent end."

In other words, they think he got what he deserved.

The "responsible" civil rights leaders, needless to say, fed into the ruling class hysteria against Malcolm and the Black Muslims. Martin Luther King declared their views "bordered on a new kind of race hatred and an unconscious advocacy of violence." Malcolm returned the compliment, denouncing King as a "twentieth-century Uncle Tom" whose "primary concern is defending the white man."

Now and for some time past, however, an effort has been made to identify Malcolm with the "respectable" black leaders whom he despised. One of the most despicable of the whole lot is Bayard Rustin, the kind of "socialist" who's apt to be funded by the CIA. In 1963 Rustin was chief organizer for the March on Washington, which Malcolm dubbed "the farce on Washington." Yet not long after Malcolm was killed Rustin claimed, "Malcolm was moving toward the mainstream of the civil rights movement when his life was cut short" (*Down the Line* [1970]). Corpses can't protest. Rustin's line has been taken up by other reformist fakers. At the rally last August 27 (actually a pray-in for the Democratic Party) to commemorate the 1963 March on Washington, Sam Marcy's Workers World Party carried a banner depicting King and Malcolm together. And Jack Barnes' Socialist Workers Party ran speeches by Malcolm and MLK in the *Militant*, but *not* Malcolm's scathing attack on the '63 March and King's rose-colored "dreams." Today the *name* of Malcolm X is being prostituted in the service of Democratic Party liberalism, which the *real* Malcolm X fought to the end with all the force of his extraordinary personality.

At a critical moment in contemporary American history Malcolm X was *the* voice of black militancy. His importance and appeal lay, in particular, in his intransigent opposition to the "white man's puppet Negro 'leaders'," as he called them. Martin Luther King told the world that black people loved the white oppressor and would answer the racists' bombings and beatings with Christian forgiveness. He hoped in this

way to shame the Northern white liberal establishment into moving against Southern Jim Crow by demonstrating the moral superiority of black people to the KKK killers and their confederates like George Wallace and Bull Connor. The idea that blacks had to prove to the "good white massa" that they were peaceable folk and god-fearing Christians enraged Malcolm to the depths of his being. It was degrading. Like the sheep reminding the wolf when it's time for dinner. Malcolm X cut through the sanctimonious claptrap and foot-shuffling hypocrisy of the "respectable" black leaders like a sharp knife going through a tub of butter:

> "Just as Uncle Tom, back during slavery, used to keep Negroes from resisting the bloodhound or resisting the Ku Klux Klan by teaching them to love their enemies or pray for those who use them spitefully, today Martin Luther King is just a twentieth-century or modern Uncle Tom, or religious Uncle Tom, who is doing the same thing today to keep Negroes defenseless....
> "...but the masses of black people today don't go for what Martin Luther King is putting down."
> —Interview in Louis E. Lomax, *When the Word Is Given...* (1963)

Within months after Malcolm spoke these words, Harlem erupted in the first of a series of ghetto explosions which shook white racist America.

Malcolm X was the voice of that angry black ghetto. He spoke for the desperate and angry ghetto masses because he had been one of them. When he spoke of the hell the white oppressor had made for black people in America, of the torments—psychological as well as material—they suffered every day, he had been there.

Detroit Red Becomes Malcolm X

Malcolm Little was born in Omaha, Nebraska in 1925. His father was a Baptist minister and an organizer for Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa" movement. His mother was a West Indian. Her mother had been raped by a white colonialist. This accounted for Malcolm's reddish hair and relatively light complexion. Reverend Earl Little was targeted by the local Klansmen as a "bad nigger," and shortly after Malcolm was born the family moved to Lansing, Michigan. When Malcolm was six his father was killed by the Black Legion, the local version of the Klan. The family soon disintegrated as his mother broke down and was institutionalized. Malcolm then experienced the typical pattern of foster homes and reform schools.

As a teenager he worked at the usual dead-end menial jobs (shoeshine boy in a dance hall, sandwich man on the railroads), then drifted into Harlem where he became an all-purpose hustler nicknamed Detroit Red. At one point during World War II he was a steerer for a Harlem madam specializing in kinky sex. Her clientele came almost entirely from the upper echelons of white society:

> "...these weren't college boys, these were their Ivy League fathers. Even grandfathers, I guess. Society leaders. Big politicians. Tycoons. Important friends from out of town."
> —*The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965)

Twenty years later Detroit Red, now Malcolm X, would flay the white ruling class when its spokesmen talked about the "loose morals" of ghetto blacks.

Detroit Red was finally busted in 1946 for running a burglary ring in the Boston area. He might have gotten off lightly except that he had involved a couple of white, upper-class Cambridge women, who got their kicks hanging around the black lumpen milieu:

> "Nobody wanted to know anything at all about the robberies. All they could see was that we had taken the white man's women....
> "Later, when I learned the full truth about the white man, I reflected many times that the average burglary sentence for a first offender, as we all were, was about two years. But we weren't going to get the average—not for *our* crime." [emphasis in original]
> —*Ibid.*

Malcolm was sentenced to ten years in prison and served seven. He was so generally hostile his fellow inmates called him Satan. Then suddenly Satan converted to the Nation of Islam. A brother and a sister of his had introduced Malcolm to "the natural religion for the black man." Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam originated in Detroit in the early 1930s out of the same social soil which produced Garveyism: the uprooted black Southern peasantry thrown into the Northern ghettos under conditions of economic desperation. It was a typical religious sect of the oppressed, promising apocalyptic redemption: "The last shall become first." It taught that American Negroes were originally members of the lost tribe of Shabazz stolen by slave traders from the holy city of Mecca. The original race of mankind was black. Then 6,000 years ago the big-headed scientist Yacub, rebelling against Allah, grafted the white man ("the blue-eyed devil") through a series of fiendish experiments. The white man was fated to subjugate and oppress the black man for 6,000 years. Now the white man's reign was about to end, his fall being signaled by World War I.

Although the Nation of Islam considered the white man to be the personification of all evil, the sect opposed in principle any struggle against racist oppression. Elijah Muhammad instructed his followers to respect existing authority and not get in trouble with the white man's law. Some prison officials welcomed black convicts converting to the Nation of Islam for the Muslims demanded an absolute eschewal of heroin, a break with the lumpen/hustler milieu of petty criminal ghetto existence and stressed literacy and self-education.

Malcolm's conversion was associated with a total intellectual transformation. He became a voracious reader, so much so that he damaged his eyesight. He read everything but concentrated on world history. What he learned about the European colonization of Africa, Asia and the Americas reaffirmed, in his mind, Elijah Muhammad's teaching that the

Arnold/Magnum

Malcolm X with then-mentor Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Black Muslims.

reprinted from Spartacist No. 4, May-June 1965

MALCOLM X

Of all the national Negro leaders in this country, the one who was known uniquely for his militancy, intransigence, and refusal to be the liberals' frontman has been shot down. This new political assassination is another indicator of the rising current of irrationality and individual terrorism which the decay of our society begets. Liberal reaction is predictable, and predictably disgusting. They are, of course, opposed to assassination, and some may even contribute to the fund for the education of Malcolm's children, but their mourning at the death of the head of world imperialism had a considerably greater ring of sincerity than their regret at the murder of a black militant who wouldn't play their game.

Black Muslims?

The official story is that Black Muslims killed Malcolm. But we should not hasten to accept this to date unproved hypothesis. The New York Police, for example, had good cause to be afraid of Malcolm, and with the vast resources of blackmail and coercion which are at their disposal, they also had ample opportunity, and of course would have little reason to fear exposure were they involved. At the same time, the Muslim theory cannot be discounted out of hand because the Muslims are not a political group, and in substituting religion for science, and color mysticism for rational analysis, they have a world view which could encompass the efficacy and morality of assassination. A man who has a direct pipeline to God can justify anything.

No Program

The main point, however, is not who killed Malcolm, but why could he be killed? In the literal sense, of course, any man can be killed, but why was Malcolm particularly vulnerable? The answer to this question makes of Malcolm's death tragedy of the sharpest kind, and in the literal Greek sense. Liberals and Elijah have tried to make Malcolm a victim of his own (nonexistent) doctrines of violence. This is totally wrong and totally hypocritical. Malcolm was the most dynamic national leader to have appeared in America in the last decade. Compared with him the famous Kennedy personality was a flimsy cardboard creation of money, publicity, makeup, and the media. Malcolm had none of these, but a righteous cause and iron character forged by white America in the fire of discrimination, addiction, prison, and incredible calumny. He had a difficult to define but almost tangible attribute called charisma. When you heard Malcolm speak, even when you heard him say things that were wrong and confusing, you wanted to believe. Malcolm could move men deeply. He was the stuff of which mass leaders are made. Commencing his public life in the context of the apolitical, irrational religiosity and racial mysticism of the Muslim movement, his break toward politicalness and rationality was slow, painful, and terribly incomplete. It is useless to speculate on how far it would have gone had he lived. He had entered prison a burglar, an addict, and a victim. He emerged a Muslim and a free man forever. Elijah Muhammad and the Lost-Found Nation of Islam were thus inextricably bound up with his personal emancipation. In any event, at the time of his death he had not yet developed a clear, explicit, and rational social program. Nor had he led his followers in the kind of transitional struggle necessary to the creation of a successful mass movement. Lacking such a program, he could not develop cadres based on program. What cadre he had was based on Malcolm X instead. Hated and feared by the power structure, and the focus of the paranoid feelings of his former colleagues, his charisma made him dangerous, and his lack of developed program and cadre made him vulnerable. His death by violence had a high order of probability, as he himself clearly felt.

Heroic and Tragic Figure

The murder of Malcolm, and the disastrous consequences flowing from that murder for Malcolm's organization and black militancy in general, does not mean that the militant black movement can always be decapitated with a shotgun. True, there is an agonizing gap in black leadership today. On the one hand there are the respectable servants of the liberal establishment; men like James Farmer whose contemptible effort to blame Malcolm's murder on "Chinese Communists" will only hasten his eclipse as a leader, and on the other hand the ranks of the militants have yet to produce a man with the leadership potential of Malcolm. But such leadership will eventually be forthcoming. This is a statistical as well as a social certainty. This leadership, building on the experience of others such as Malcolm, and emancipated from his religiosity, will build a movement in which the black masses and their allies can lead the third great American revolution. Then Malcolm X will be remembered by black and white alike as a heroic and tragic figure in a dark period of our common history.

Bay Area Spartacist Committee,
2 March 1965

white man was a devil created to oppress the black people of the world. Years later, however, Malcolm's intense interest in world history and politics would serve as a bridge from separatist religious sectarianism to political radicalism.

On being paroled in 1952 Malcolm went to Detroit where he became an active member of the Nation of Islam. Soon he was made a minister, and in 1954 was appointed minister of Temple No. 7 in Harlem, which he made into one of the sect's most successful and respected congregations.

A man of strong convictions and will power, another aspect of Malcolm's personality impressed almost everyone who encountered him. He was fundamentally open-minded. He considered seriously other people's views and arguments however distant from his own. It was part of his unquenchable thirst for knowledge and understanding.

Malcolm and the Civil Rights Militants

Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam had existed for more than a quarter

century attracting a few thousand followers and no serious interest among politically active blacks. Then in the early 1960s, at the height of the civil rights movement, the Black Muslims suddenly exploded into the consciousness of black and (to a lesser extent) white America. Why? King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) *politicized* religion in the black community. The mainstream black Christian churches became closely identified with the Northern liberal establishment, specifically support to the Kennedy/Johnson administration.

It had always been a basic tenet of the Nation that the black Christian preacher was the white man's main tool for keeping blacks subjugated. By this Elijah Muhammad meant nothing more than that Christianity prevented the black masses from discovering "the natural religion of the black man." But with the rise of the SCLC-led civil rights movement, the Black Muslims' condemnation of Christian submissiveness *appeared* to be something more, namely, a political criticism of King's pacifistic liberalism and ties to the white ruling class. For example, in 1959 Elijah Muhammad declaimed:

> "You fear and love (the white Christians) though you are even disgraced and killed by them—from your ministers of their slavery religion down to the lowly, ignorant man in the mud."
>
> —quoted in C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (1961)

Many black militants, who couldn't care less about the tribe of Shabazz, nonetheless could agree with this sentiment. Many more would do so in the next few years.

Whereas Elijah Muhammad continued to emphasize the sect's religious nature, Malcolm X *did not*. Rather he attacked the "respectable" black leaders with a hitherto unheard-of power and incisiveness:

> "The greatest miracle Christianity has achieved in America is that the black man in white Christian hands has not grown violent. It *is* a miracle that 22 million black people have not *risen up* against their oppressors—in which they would have been justified by all moral criteria, and even by the democratic tradition!... The *miracle* is that the white man's puppet Negro 'leaders,' his preachers and the educated Negroes laden with degrees, and others who have been allowed to wax fat off their black poor brothers, have been able to hold the black masses quiet until now." [emphasis in original]
>
> —*Autobiography of Malcolm X*

A few years later this would be pretty tame stuff among black (and white) radicals. But in the early 1960s King was

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Fight against Jim Crow in the South gripped black America; separatist Muslims abstained from struggles.

a sacred cow and no one else—but no one—was saying these things.

Here one might naturally ask, but what of the left, what about those groups claiming to be Marxist and Leninist? Didn't they also denounce King's pacifistic liberalism and his subordination to the Kennedy White House? No, they did not! The pro-Moscow Communist Party (CP) leapt to King's defense against the Black Muslims' attack:

> "One does not have to agree with Dr. Martin Luther King's theory of 'love thy enemy' to recognize the great contribution he and his followers are making toward the fight for freedom. But rather than join with him in these great struggles, the Muslim-inflamed press has set him up as a whipping boy."
>
> —Claude Lightfoot, "Negro Nationalism and Black Muslims," *Political Affairs*, July 1962

Exhibiting typical Stalinist mentality, black CP spokesman Lightfoot not only condemned the Muslims for opposing the "anti-monopoly coalition" with the Kennedy Democrats, but also insinuated, "there is now evidence that they are working with ultra-Right fascist forces." It was to be expected that the long-reformist CP would join in the liberals' hate campaign against the Black Muslims.

But what of the ostensibly Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP)? By the early 1960s the SWP had become a rapidly rightward-moving centrist party. Its opportunist appetites were especially clear and especially gross when it came to the black movement. Thus the SWP became the most fawning sycophants of Malcolm X (pages and pages of the *Militant* were given over to his speeches) while *simultaneously* tailing the "respectable" black leaders around King! Consider the 1963 March on Washington, which had been co-opted by the Kennedy White House. The night before Malcolm called a press conference to denounce it as nothing but a circus, a picnic. The SWP's line was, to say the least, different. The *Militant* (5 August 1983) ran a front-page banner headline that could have been dictated by King or Rustin: "All Out for Washington March to Win Jobs and Freedom!"

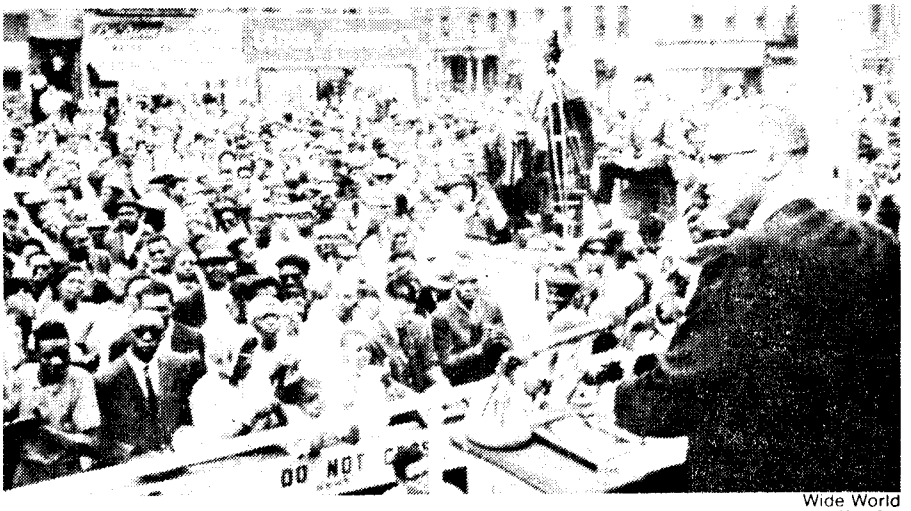
A few months later the difference between Malcolm X as a courageous enemy of the American ruling class and his craven SWP sycophants was exposed in a far more dramatic way. Nothing Malcolm ever said before or after so enraged white liberal America as his response to the Kennedy assassination. He said it was a case of "chickens coming home to roost" and added with a twinkle in his eye: "Being an old farm boy myself, chickens coming home to roost never did make me sad; they've always made me glad" (*New York Times*, 2 December 1963). The media, the liberal establishment, the civil rights leaders all pilloried Malcolm for having—oh, how horrible—"mocked" the death of "our beloved president." Elijah Muhammad used the furor over the "chickens come home to roost" speech to suspend his all-too-famous and controversial lieutenant from

speaking in public.

No one could accuse the SWP of "mocking" the death of imperialist commander-in-chief Kennedy. Party national secretary Farrell Dobbs sent condolences to the widow Kennedy. The SWP not only kissed Jacqueline Kennedy's mourning dress, but also tried to hide behind the black robes of chief justice Earl Warren. Under the superhead, "At the Moment of Crisis There Were Voices of Sanity," the *Militant* (2 December 1963) ran as front-page headline Warren's hand-wringing statement: "If We Really Love This Country We Must Abjure Hatred." No wonder black militants considered the SWP, if they considered it at all, a gutless bunch not worthy to shine Malcolm's shoes.

The rightward degeneration of the SWP, especially its open theoretical revisionism over Cuba and its abstentionism and opportunism toward the black movement on the domestic terrain, gave rise to a left opposition, the Revolutionary Tendency. This was the origin of the present Spartacist League/Spartacus Youth League. Malcolm spoke for black militants when he declared, "we are ready to fight and die in defense of our lives." Like Malcolm, we denounced King's turn-the-other-cheek pacifism and dependence on the federal government and called for *organized, armed self-defense* against racist terror. A resolution presented by the Revolutionary Tendency to the SWP youth group, the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) in 1963 stated:

> "General demands in the south must be:
> "A) For *organized* self-defense movements in southern cities—for the tactics of Robert F. Williams [a former black Marine who organized armed self-defense to protect the civil rights movement in Monroe, North Carolina]; against federal military intervention, which always supports the status quo.
> "B) Against discrimination in unions and industries—especially companies with government contracts or subsidies.
> "C) For drives for unionization.
> "D) For independent political organization—make voter registration meaningful."
>
> —"The Negro Struggle and the Crisis of Leadership," *YSA Discussion Bulletin*, Vol. 7, No. 5, August 1963



Wide World

The great truth teller for black America addressing mass street rally in Harlem.

The SWP, however, refused to confront the black radical currents, covering its gutless abstentionism with a convenient "dual vanguardist" outlook which redefined the SWP implicitly as a "white party" whose only contribution to the black struggle was to enthuse over 'whatever the black people want.' The Revolutionary Tendency, expelled from the SWP in 1963-64 in the first political purge in that party's history, founded the Spartacist League in 1966, with a few dozen members. The fledgling SL was too small to reach and influence more than a very small number of the masses of radicalized black activists, and unable to break down the hardening black/white line of the New Left radical movement which sealed us off from subjectively revolutionary black militants of the period.

As the young civil rights activists became more radical, they found in Malcolm the one man who expressed boldly the thoughts and half-thoughts they were still afraid to voice themselves. By 1963-64 a majority of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) no longer believed in nonviolence as a moral principle Many never had. But they were as yet unwilling to publicly renounce pacifistic liberalism and break with King, whom they privately and derisively dubbed

"De Lawd." It was Malcolm who spoke for them. [On SNCC's evolution see page 23.]

Many, if not most, young black activists sympathized with the Cuban and Vietnamese Revolutions. By the time Kennedy was assassinated in late 1963, few black militants shed tears for world imperialism's chieftain, the man who ordered the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Green Berets into Vietnam. Yet SNCC, James Farmer's CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) and the other civil rights groups were still dependent on the white liberal establishment and joined in mourning its "martyred hero." So when Malcolm made his "chickens come home to roost" speech, thousands of black militants applauded... silently.

Malcolm had become the great truth teller for black America, the one man who told it like it is. Even some members of the black liberal establishment recognized that Malcolm had their number. The actor Ossie Davis, who had emceed the March on Washington, said Malcolm succeeded "in making Uncle Toms, compromisers, and accommodationists—I deliberately include myself—thoroughly ashamed of the urbane and smiling hypocrisy we practice merely to exist in a world whose values we both envy and despise" ("On Malcolm X," appended to *Autobiography*).

If Malcolm had this kind of impact on an Ossie Davis, his effect on the young civil rights militants was electric. It was as if the black activists in SNCC, CORE and the other civil rights groups were doing legal work under a hostile regime, while Malcolm provided their illegal, underground press from exile. He said loud and clear what they hinted at using Aesopian language. The 1963 March on Washington is a good case in point. As it became clear that the protest was being manipulated by the Kennedy White House, the SNCC militants became increasingly critical of the event. The March organizers forced SNCC chairman John Lewis to delete from his prepared speech a passage considered especially offensive to the liberal establishment. The white power structure could still censor the leadership of SNCC; they could *not censor* Malcolm. He lashed out at what the March had become:

> "...it lost its militancy. It ceased to be angry, it ceased to be hot, it ceased to be uncompromising. Why, it even ceased to be a march. It became a picnic, a circus...."
>
> —*Malcolm X Speaks*, edited by George Breitman (1966)

Malcolm's was the uncensored voice of black militancy.

But this was only one side—the positive side—of Malcolm's relation to the civil rights militants. Malcolm was, after all, a *separatist*, a man who declared, "No *sane* black man really wants integration!" Yet masses of blacks were fighting precisely to get into previously all-white schools, all-white public facilities, all-white neighborhoods, all-white jobs. In short, they were fighting for social, political and economic integration into American society. But how could Malcolm in good conscience have participated in the Harlem school boycotts for greater racial balance in the city's schools or in the marches for open housing in lily-white suburbs. Malcolm was a *critic* of the civil rights movement, a critic who expressed powerfully and effectively the feelings of the growing left wing of that movement. But he remained a man looking over the battlefield from a certain distance. However much the young black militants admired Malcolm, they still marched against the racists with King and Farmer, not with the minister of the Nation of Islam's Temple No. 7 in Harlem.

Malcolm personified to an extreme degree the fundamental contradiction of black nationalism. As a doctrine, nationalism can sometimes attract militant blacks deeply alienated from this racist society and who have no illusions that it can be reformed. But American blacks are *not* a nation. They are an *oppressed color-caste* integrated into American capitalist society while forcibly segregated at the bottom of it. Elijah Muhammad's call upon the United States government to grant several states for a separate black nation was more pie-in-the-sky than any of King's dreams. Separatism is *not* a program for social struggle in racist America. This contradiction became clearer once Malcolm split from the Nation of Islam and attempted to build his own secular organization.

By 1963 the talk in and around the black movement was that Malcolm was not long for the Nation of Islam. It was an open secret that Elijah Muhammad was jealous of his famous and popular lieutenant and upset by his political notoriety. While the bourgeois media couldn't get enough of Malcolm, less and less about him appeared in *Muhammad Speaks*, the sect's official paper. Malcolm had revered Elijah Muhammad as the man who had saved him from a social hell. And Malcolm was a man for whom personal loyalty meant much. However, he became disturbed over the aura of luxury-loving complacency around Elijah Muhammad and his extensive family in the Chicago headquarters. According to his own testimony, he was quite shaken by reports that Elijah Muhammad had sexual relations with his secretaries,

The fight for the right of organized, armed self-defense, especially in the South, was and is key demand of Spartacist program for black liberation.

New York Times

Spartacist

1964: Spartacist editor James Robertson addresses united-front rally called by Harlem Solidarity Committee to defend black masses against police riot.

SPARTACIST

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT MARCH 1965 FREE

Report to Our Readers:

SPARTACIST EDITOR SUBPOENAED

BY "HARLEM RIOT" GRAND JURY

On February 8, the editor of the SPARTACIST, James Robertson, was subpoenaed to appear before the New York State Grand Jury which is seeking a communist conspiracy behind last summer's so-called Harlem Riots. A New York City red squad cop served the subpoena while Robertson was in a picket line protesting this witch-hunting Grand Jury. Comrade Robertson was "commanded to appear before the Grand Jury" on Monday, February 15, but the Jury was unable to get a quorum so he was called back for Wednesday, two days later.

The involvement of the Spartacist group was the first widening of the inquiry beyond the Progressive Labor Movement. We stated in our New York Spartacist Committee leaflet calling for a protest demonstration against the Grand Jury the apparent motives of the authorities in picking out the Spartacist group for legal entanglement along with the PLM:

"The SPARTACIST editor has been dragged into the witch hunt because of our detailed exposure of the police over the riots last summer; our determined defense of Bill Epton and Progressive Labor against legal intimidation and persecution; and our initiation last summer of the militant Harlem Solidarity Committee which rallied working class support in New

(continued next page)

INSIDE: --Spartacist Statement on Viet Nam
--Leaflet to New York Welfare Strikers

SUPPORT THE APRIL 17 MARCH ON WASHINGTON

TO END THE WAR IN VIET NAM!

AP

Right: Black youth flee cops in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. Left: Spartacist group targeted by state for defending black community against cop terror.

even having a couple of out-of-wedlock children. Rank-and-file Muslims were expelled in disgrace for adultery. When Malcolm confronted the Messenger about this, the old con man cited biblical examples: "You read about Lot, who went and laid up with his own daughters. I have to fulfill all of those things" (quoted in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* [1965]).

But even if the Honorable Elijah Muhammad had lived up to Malcolm's high and puritanical standards of honor, it is very likely Malcolm still would have split from the Nation. He was too political, too engaged to stay out of the struggle much longer. However much black militants admired Malcolm, they were not going to join the Nation of Islam. No way. They wanted Malcolm to join them. As the leader of the militant civil rights movement in Cambridge, Maryland, Gloria Richardson, exclaimed in 1963, "you know, this could really be a great man if he could break himself from that sectarian thing" (quoted in Peter Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X* [1973]). Malcolm felt these pressures keenly:

> "It could be heard increasingly in the Negro communities: 'Those Muslims *talk* tough, but they never *do* anything, unless somebody bothers Muslims'." [emphasis in original]
> —*Autobiography*

Internally and discreetly Malcolm began to advocate that the Muslims abandon their policy of abstention from the mass black struggles:

> "... I was convinced that our Nation of Islam could be an even greater force in the American black man's overall struggle—if we engaged in more *action*.... I felt that, wherever black people committed themselves, in the Little Rocks and Birminghams and other places, militantly disciplined Muslims should also be there.... [emphasis in original]
> —*Ibid.*

But for the Muslims to have participated in the civil rights struggles would have violated their very reason for existence. Elijah Muhammad instinctively sensed that the direction his powerful lieutenant was moving, whatever Malcolm's subjective loyalties, would destroy his lucrative sect. So he used the public furor over the Kennedy assassination speech to try to silence Malcolm's voice. Malcolm refused to be silenced and in March 1964 left the organization for which he more than anyone else had gained the respect of the black community. A year later Malcolm's voice was finally silenced by assassins. As we wrote at the time:

> "The official story is that Black Muslims killed Malcolm. But we should not hasten to accept this to date unproved hypothesis. The New York Police, for example, had good cause to be afraid of Malcolm, and with the vast resources of blackmail and coercion which are at

their disposal, they also had ample opportunity, and of course would have little reason to fear exposure were they involved. At the same time, the Muslim theory cannot be discounted out of hand because the Muslims are not a political group, and in substituting religion for science, and color mysticism for rational analysis, they have a world view which could encompass the efficacy and morality of assassination. A man who has a direct pipeline to God can justify anything."

—*Spartacist* No. 4, May-June 1965

The Last Year

Once Malcolm had broken with the Nation of Islam it was expected that he would take his rightful place as leader of the growing legion of young black militants. Yet this did *not* happen. His Organization of Afro-American Unity was small, faction- and clique-ridden and never got off the ground. Why? In part because during this period Malcolm went on two extensive trips to the Arab East and the newly independent states of black Africa. Certainly no one could criticize him for wanting to explore the world outside white racist America. And it was these trips abroad which finally broke him from racially defined black nationalism.

It was during one of his African tours in 1964 that Malcolm met with a SNCC delegation. As Clayborne Carson relates in his *In Struggle*, for the SNCCers:

"Perhaps the most significant episode of their stay in Africa was an unexpected encounter in Nairobi with Malcolm X, the Afro-American leader who had recently broken with the narrowly religious focus of Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam. Even before the meeting, Lewis and Harris had learned of Malcolm's considerable influence on the African continent, for Africans occasionally greeted them with 'skepticism and distrust' because, as one explained, 'if you are to the right of Malcolm, you might as well start packing right now 'cause no one'll listen to you.' Malcolm, however, had resolved to abet the radical tendencies in the civil rights movement.... The Nairobi meeting was followed by a series of attempts by Malcolm to forge links with SNCC."

Still the fact remains that at a decisive turning point for the black movement Malcolm was not there. In July 1964 the police deliberately provoked a violent outburst in Harlem, which had been experiencing a rising tide of militant protest. Hundreds of angry black youth ran through the streets battling the cops and chanting: "Malcolm! We want Malcolm! Wait till Malcolm comes!" But when Malcolm did come back he provided no clear political guidance for the angry black masses.

Flax Hermes

1967: Heroic struggle of Vietnamese against racist U.S. imperialism struck responsive chord among American blacks.

Alex Haley, the writer who helped Malcolm with his *Autobiography*, was objective enough to record that Malcolm's standing among militant blacks, especially in Harlem, declined somewhat in the last year:

"In Harlem at large, in the bars and restaurants, on the street corners and stoops, there could be heard more blunt criticism of Malcolm X than ever before in his career. There were, variously expressed, two primary complaints. One was that actually Malcolm X only talked, but other civil-rights organizations were *doing*. 'All he's *ever* done was talk, CORE and SNCC and some of them people of Dr. King's are out getting beat over the head.' The second major complaint was that Malcolm X was himself too confused to be seriously followed any longer. 'He doesn't know *what* he believes in. No sooner do you hear one thing than he's switched to something else'." [emphasis in original]

—"Epilogue" to *Autobiography*

Malcolm's rapidly changing and seemingly contradictory views in the last year are also the source of the raging controversy which followed his death: w[illegible] was Malcolm going? Every int[illegible]ed party claimed Malcolm for their own. His biographer Peter Goldman described the army of political grave robbers who invaded Malcolm's tomb:

"His special affection has been claimed by Trotskyists, Maoists, Nkrumists, Garveyites, orthodox and unorthodox Muslims, civil-rights organizations from the Urban League to CORE and SNCC, and Adam Clayton Powell."

—*The Death and Life of Malcolm X*

The contention that Malcolm had become almost a liberal was made not only by scumbags like Bayard Rustin (the kind of "socialist" who's apt to be funded by the CIA and chief organizer for the March on Washington) but also by honest liberals like Ossie Davis, who knew and admired Malcolm while he was alive. At the same time, the Socialist Workers Party's George Breitman asserts, "he was a revolutionary—increasingly anti-capitalist and pro-socialist as well as anti-imperialist. These labels fitted, even though he did not apply them to himself" (*The Last Year of Malcolm X* [1967]). In reality, Malcolm X was moving neither toward liberalism nor toward Marxism.

The argument that he was going liberal rests centrally on his dramatic renunciation of racism of any kind following his pilgrimage to Mecca in April 1964. In a letter home (which shocked and upset some of his followers) he wrote:

"There were tens of thousands of pilgrims from all over the world. They were of *all colors*, from blue-eyed blonds to black-skinned Africans, but all were participating in the same ritual, displaying a spirit of unity and brotherhood that my experiences in America had led me to believe could never exist between the white and non-white." [emphasis in original]

—*Malcolm X Speaks*, edited by George Breitman (1965)

A few months later he wrote in an Egyptian newspaper: "In the past I permitted myself...to make sweeping indictments of all white people, the

entire white race, and these generalizations have caused injuries to some whites who perhaps do not deserve to be hurt" (*Malcolm X: The Man and His Times*, edited by John Henrik Clarke [1969]). In keeping with these principles Malcolm publicly repudiated his earlier opposition to interracial marriage.

But Malcolm's humanistic opposition to any form of racism had nothing to do with the alleged reconciliation to the American liberal establishment. Here is what Malcolm said just a few months before he was killed about the 1964 presidential elections between Johnson and Goldwater, which was generally regarded as a clear contest between liberalism and conservatism:

> "I felt that it was for the black man only a question of Johnson, the fox, or Goldwater, the wolf.
>
> "'Conservatism' in American politics means 'Let's keep the niggers in their place.' And 'liberalism' means 'Let's keep the *knee*-grows in their place—but tell them we'll treat them a little better; let's fool them more, with more promises'."
>
> —*Autobiography*

These are not the words of a man about to join King, James Farmer, the NAACP's Roy Wilkins et al. at LBJ's inaugural celebration. Malcolm X remained a heroic and intransigent enemy of *all wings* of the American ruling class until the assassins' bullets cut him down.

In particular, Malcolm never tired of warning against the Democratic Party con game, of lambasting the Democrats as a Dixiecrat party. At a 1964 meeting in Harlem of supporters of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) he spoke eloquently against illusions in the Democrats:

> "Likewise, the Democratic Party, which black people supported recently, I think, something like 97 per cent. All of these crackers—and that's what they are, crackers—they belong to the Democratic Party. That's the party they belong to—the same one you belong to, the same one you support, the same one you say is going to get you this and get you that. Why, the base of the Democratic Party is in the South.... The head of the Democratic Party is sitting in the White House. He could have gotten Mrs. Hamer into Atlantic City. He could have opened up his mouth and had her seated. Hubert Humphrey could have opened his mouth and had her seated. Wagner, the mayor right here, could have opened up his mouth and used his weight and had her seated. Don't be talking about some crackers down in Mississippi and Alabama and

Algiers, 1960: Demonstration for Algerian independence from French colonial rule. Algerian independence struggle, Cuban and Vietnamese Revolutions caused impressionistic New Left radicals to see U.S. imperialism being overthrown from without.

Malcolm X on Racist America

The text of this telegram to Rockwell, head of the American Nazi Party, was read aloud by Malcolm X at a public rally of the Organization of Afro-American Unity in Harlem on 24 January 1965.

Public Notice to George Lincoln Rockwell

"This is to warn you that I am no longer held in check from fighting white supremacists by Elijah Muhammad's separatist Black Muslim movement, and that if your present racist agitation against our people there in Alabama causes physical harm to Reverend King or any other black Americans who are only attempting to enjoy their rights as free human beings, that you and your Ku Klux Klan friends will be met with maximum physical retaliation from those of us who are not hand-cuffed by the disarming philosophy of nonviolence, and who believe in asserting our right of self-defense—by any means necessary."

The following is an excerpt from a reply to a question at a Harlem forum, 12 December 1964.

Discussion with American Ambassador in Africa

"He said, 'As long as I'm in Africa, I deal with people as human beings.... For some strange reason color doesn't enter into it at all.'

"He said, 'But whenever I return to the United States and I'm talking to a non-white person, I'm conscious of it, I'm self-conscious, I'm aware of the color differences.'

"So I told him, 'What you're telling me, whether you realize it or not, is that it is not basic in you to be a racist, but that society there in America, which you all have created, makes you a racist.' This is true, this is the *worst* racist society on this earth. There is no country on earth in which you can live and racism be brought out in you—whether you're white or black—more so than this country that poses as a democracy. This is a country where the social, economic, political atmosphere creates a sort of psychological atmosphere that makes it almost impossible, if you're in your right mind, to walk down the street with a *white* person and not be self-conscious, or he or she not be self-conscious.... But it's the society itself."

Georgia—all of them are playing the same game. Lyndon B. Johnson is the head of the Cracker Party."
—*Malcolm X Speaks*

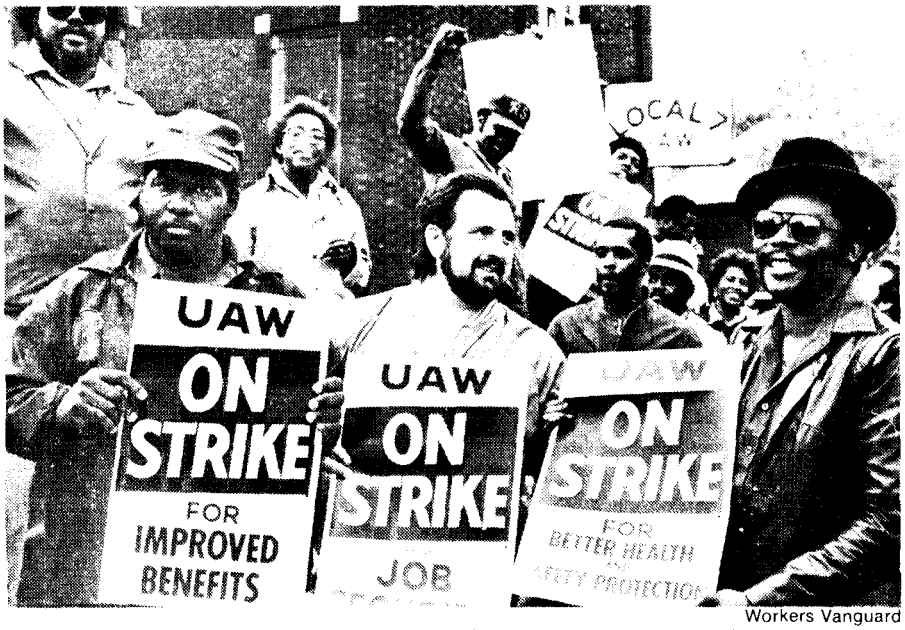
His explicit message to black America delivered at the Audubon: "Either party you align yourself with is suicide. Because both parties are criminal. Both parties are responsible for the criminal condition that exists."

The fundamental change in Malcolm's thinking in the last year did *not* concern American whites (that was secondary) but *world* politics. He believed that the dark-skinned, colonialized peoples of the world had liberated themselves or were about to liberate themselves from Western imperialism: "...the black revolution is world-wide in scope and in nature. The black revolution is sweeping Asia, is sweeping Africa, is rearing its head in Latin America" (*Malcolm X Speaks*). He defined the American black struggle as a colonial liberation struggle within the imperialist heartland: "...the revolt of the American Negro is part of the rebellion against the oppression and colonialism which has characterized this era" (*Ibid.*).

These views were far from unique to Malcolm X. Rather they represented the basic worldview of New Left radicals of the early '60s, both blacks and whites. This New Left vision of world politics

NY Public Library

The Pan-Africanists' hero Kwame Nkrumah dances with the Duchess of Kent on Ghana's Independence Day, 6 March 1957.



Workers Vanguard

Detroit auto workers strike Chrysler, September 1982. Black workers will play strategic role in socialist revolution to smash racist capitalist system.

was an *impressionistic* generalization of certain recent dramatic events. Algeria had just won its independence from France in one of the bloodiest of all wars of national liberation. The Cuban Revolution was only a few years old as Castro boldly defied the U.S. colossus 90 miles from its shore. Despite U.S. military escalation, the Vietnamese revolutionaries were gaining. Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal was still a relatively recent event. Practically every month one of the British or French black African colonies was granted formal independence. And Mao's China had recently split with the Soviet Union and was presenting itself as the leader of the colonial peoples against Western imperialism. To impressionistic radicals of the day, it looked as if U.S. imperialism was about to be overwhelmed by the rising "Third World" (although this misleading term was not yet in vogue).

Malcolm X believed that the states of Asia and Africa were becoming powerful enemies of American imperialism and would use that power on behalf of American blacks: "...as the dark-skinned nations of this earth become independent, as they develop and become stronger, that means that time is on the side of the American Negro" (*By Any Means Necessary*, edited by George Breitman [1970]). Here Malcolm's self-taught conceptions and misconceptions about world politics, his impressionism and impressionability played him false. He had a gut sense of American social and political reality. He saw through American bourgeois politicians—liberal or right-wing, black or white—with almost X-ray vision. He knew that the U.S. Congress was a den of thieves. But Malcolm had enormous illusions in the ruling elites of Asia and especially Africa and in the moral authority of the United Nations (a den of thieves and their victims).

Much of his energy in the last year was devoted to pressuring the independent black African states to condemn the United States government for racism in the UN as they had condemned South Africa. His speech in Cairo appealing to the Organization of African Unity makes sad reading as he implored this collection of bloodthirsty militarists, venal nationalist demagogues and tribal chiefs:

> "...what makes our African brothers hesitate to bring the United States government before the United Nations and charge her with violating the human rights of 22 million African Americans?...
> "We beseech the independent African states to help us bring our problem before the United Nations, on the grounds that the United States government is morally incapable of protecting the lives and property of 22 million African-Americans."
> —*Malcolm X Speaks*

Fat chance that! These neocolonial regimes are *dependent* upon American imperialism. Without the might and potential for military intervention by the U.S., without the millions of dollars of military aid from Washington, the petty despots of black Africa would long since have been torn to pieces by their own people.

Malcolm got the real relationship

between black Africa and black America exactly backwards. It is not the "independent" African neo-colonies—ruled by bloody military cliques, riven by violent tribalist enmities, ravaged by famine and pestilence, devastated economically whenever the world market price of cocoa or oil or copper falls a few percentage points—that will help liberate American blacks. Today the very idea sounds like a bad joke. No, it is the descendants of those black Africans taken into slavery in the New World who, *as a strategic section of the American proletariat*, can destroy the ultimate stronghold of capitalist imperialism *from within*. Then world socialist revolution and international socialist planning will raise the impoverished peoples of black Africa to the level of the most advanced nations.

American Workers Revolution Needs Black Leadership

Here we come to the heart of Malcolm X's political weakness, after as well as before he split from the Muslims: his failure to recognize *class struggle* as the progressive motor force of history. Malcolm is often spoken of as a genuine representative of the black masses. This is only partially true. The social world of the unionized black auto worker, steel worker or docker, who recognized common interests and had engaged in common struggles with their white class brothers, was alien to Malcolm's experience and knowledge. He had been a ghetto hustler, then a convict, and then the minister of a separatist religious sect. For Malcolm, the fundamental and overriding division in American society was black and white, not workers and capitalists. He consistently emphasized that blacks in America were outnumbered ten to one. That's why he sought his main allies outside of American society.

True, in the last period of his life he came to recognize there were genuinely anti-racist whites and he welcomed their efforts. But such whites that he encountered were predominantly liberal or radical student-youth, often motivated by guilt over their privileged social position. Clearly reflecting his experiences with these white students (almost all of his speeches to white audiences were on campuses), he viewed overcoming racism among whites primarily in terms of individual enlightenment, not social struggle. Thus, in one of his last interviews (18 January 1965) he stated:

> "If the entire American population were properly educated—by properly educated, I mean given a true picture of the history and contributions of the black man—I think many whites would be less racist in their feelings."
>
> —*By Any Means Necessary*

Malcolm X's memory is honored by participant at militant anti-Klan mass protest in Washington, 27 November 1982.

The struggle against racism in this society is not basically one of proper education but of class conflict. Or rather the proper education comes through class conflict. The labor movement stands as the one racially integrated and powerful force in this society. It is the strategic weight of black workers in the labor movement which gives them the potential leverage to topple the entire racist, capitalist system. Black workers, armed with a revolutionary socialist program and organized by a communist vanguard party, *can lead* backward, even racist white workers in battles against the ruling class.

No one expressed the anger and the anguish of the oppressed black masses better than Malcolm X. As revolutionary socialists committed to the fight for black freedom, to finishing the Civil War once and for all through a third American revolution, we solidarize with Malcolm's stand against the sick racism and racists permeating this society. He was the man who told it like it is: that this system is maintained by and enforces the brutal oppression of 20 million black people, that its so-called democracy is a lie, that the politicians of both parties are con men and enemies of black freedom. His refusal to play the liberals' game, to beg for a little, hat-in-hand and his demand for freedom *now* inspired a generation of black militants. His call upon black America to stand up to the racist powers-that-be and his scathing denunciation of the strategy of nonviolence earned him the enmity of the rulers and their kept "respectable" black leaders. But for us who see the fight for black liberation as strategic to a workers revolution against the whole hideous and irrational profit system, it is precisely his intransigent penchant for the truth and his uncompromising opposition to racist America that makes Malcolm X a hero. But he did not understand the potential *power* of American blacks as workers to liberate not only themselves but oppressed peoples throughout the world. What is needed to release and direct that power is the construction of a racially integrated communist vanguard. Shortly after Malcolm was killed we wrote:

> "...such a leadership will eventually be forthcoming. This is a statistical as well as a social certainty. This leadership, building on the experience of others such as Malcolm, and emancipated from his religiosity, will build a movement in which the black masses and their allies can lead the third great American revolution. Then Malcolm X will be remembered by black and white alike as a heroic and tragic figure in a dark period of our common history."
>
> —*Spartacist* No. 4, May-June 1965■

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Neither Nationalism Nor Liberalism, But Revolutionary Integrationism!

SNCC: "BLACK POWER" AND THE DEMOCRATS

The 5,000 demonstrators, overwhelmingly black and working-class, who stopped the Ku Klux Klan from marching in the nation's capital last November 27 may have opened a new chapter in the struggle for black liberation in America. Responding to the call of the Labor/Black Mobilization, initiated by the Spartacist League, thousands of anti-racists streamed from the Capitol to the White House, chanting, "1, 2, 3, 4, Time to Finish the Civil War—5, 6, 7, 8, Forward to a Workers State!" Our slogan caught on instantly, expressing the continuity of a century and a half of struggle for black freedom. After a decade of defeats, November 27 pointed the way forward out of the impasse reached in the 1960s when the militant civil rights activists ran headlong into the realities of black oppression in racist, capitalist America.

Doug Harris

Election night, Lowndes County, Alabama, 1966.

The spectre of blacks and reds backed up by the power of labor sent shivers down the spine of the bourgeoisie. So their furor against "outside agitators," the "Tarzan Trotskyists," was predictable. Despicably, a "socialist" cult-sect based in Ann Arbor even echoed this with talk of "carpetbaggers." The bourgeois hysteria came not just from Reagan, whose attorney general had vowed to protect the KKK and even brought in the FBI to back up city police. On November 27 Washington's black mayor, Marion Barry, conveniently departed for a "mayor's conference" in Los Angeles, leaving his cops to tear gas and club black youth. The Walter Fauntroys and their reformist hangers-on had their "free food" diversions, their pop-front gab fests at distant sites to try to channel the anger of the masses into "safe" directions. But they failed...and the Klan was stopped.

On November 27, a spokesman for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) asked from the Labor/Black rally podium why Marion Barry wasn't out there with us. Many demonstrators had the same question, and a National Black Network talk show host later asked rally organizers whether we thought Marion Barry had sold out. After all, Marion Barry was the first chairman of the militant Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the early 1960s. And as was pointed out in a recent TV documentary in the *Frontline* series, "In the Shadow

of the Capitol," ex-SNCC activists dominate the D.C. city administration. Ivanhoe Donaldson, Marion Barry's deputy mayor and chief political adviser, was a SNCC organizer in Mississippi. John Wilson, now a city councilman, used to run SNCC's draft resistance program. Courtland Cox is another top Barry aide. Frank Smith was just elected to the City Council, and so on.

So ex-SNCCers are practically running the Washington city government, such as it is. But what has that meant for the quality of life in the Southeast D.C. black ghettos? As ex-SNCC staffer Charlie Cobb, narrator of the TV documentary, noted, "The guys in Anacostia don't really feel like they know Marion Barry anymore." Barry, who once led lunch counter sit-ins in Nashville, now tells the demonstrators who picket outside his office, "I can get more done in five minutes with my signature on a document" than they can with 1,000 people on the street. And just what are those documents he's signing? How is it that these "Movement people" have now become the protectors of the KKK, the administrators of racist budget cuts, the instigators of mass expulsions of black students at the University of the District of Columbia?

Marion Barry did not "sell out." SNCC was heterogeneous, and its "moderate" wing never saw itself going beyond reforms "within the system." They and their seniors in Martin Luther King's SCLC were always looking to become something like the mayors of Atlanta and Washington, D.C. And they did. But what about the radicals like Stokely Carmichael (now Kwame Toure) who fought *against* the Marion Barrys and whose break from liberal pacifism was expressed by the slogan "black power"? While Carmichael and his "All-African Peoples Revolutionary Party" may not be administering the bourgeois state apparatus, they are totally irrelevant and frequently *obstacles* to today's black struggles. As the white sheets and burning crosses multiply in Reagan's America, Stokely says, "It's a waste of time" to fight the Klan!

So here you have the spectacle of two former chairmen of SNCC: one leaves town ordering his cops to protect the Klan, and the other tells the Howard and UDC students who were part of the thousands of black Washingtonians who stopped the KKK November 27 that their action was "a diversion." A recent book, *In Struggle—SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, by Clayborne Carson sheds considerable light on a subject of great interest to communists: how the left wing of the civil rights movement, located mainly in SNCC, broke from liberalism only to disintegrate and become trapped in the dead end of black nationalism.

Workers Vanguard

Washington, D.C., 27 November 1982: Spartacist-initiated Labor/Black Mobilization stopped the Klan.

In Struggle is a comprehensive, vivid description of the crisis in this crucible of black radicalism. What Carson cannot explain is why it happened. To understand the impasse of the civil rights movement, to open the road to the genuine emancipation of black people in America, requires a materialist analysis and Marxist program of revolutionary integrationism.

From Liberal Pacifism to "Black Power"

The appearance of the Southern civil rights movement with the 1956 Montgomery bus boycott opened a new phase in postwar American history, ending the period of Cold War/McCarthyite hysteria. Increasingly American society was polarized along the lines of for-or-against Jim Crow. The young liberal activists, black and white, who threw themselves into the lunch counter sit-ins and freedom rides were not sympathetic to communism, but they were breaking with the anti-Communist prejudices of their parents which had paralyzed the struggle against racism.

SNCC was formed in 1960 at the initiative and under the auspices of King's SCLC. Its founding statement of principles began: "We affirm the philosophical or religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose...." SNCC at birth was a constituent part of the black liberal establishment in the South, the youth group of what W.E.B. Du Bois earlier termed "the talented tenth." Yet six years later SNCC would infuriate liberal opinion by raising the slogan "black power," and shortly thereafter its new chairman Hubert "Rap" Brown would declare, "the only thing 'the man's' going to respect is that .45 or .38 you got." What caused so radical a transformation during those six years?

Through bitter and repeated experience the SNCC activists learned firsthand that the white liberal leaders—the Bobby Kennedys, the Hubert Humphreys and Walter Reuthers—were a lot closer to Dixiecrat racists George Wallace and James Eastland than they were to the civil rights activists. They saw information given in confidence to Justice Department "observers" passed on to cracker sheriffs who naturally used it to victimize SNCC organizers and supporters. There came a moment when a majority of SNCC had rejected liberalism as they knew it, but had not yet embraced black nationalism. Black oppression could not be overcome within the framework of bourgeois democracy, however radical. The conditions weighing upon the impoverished urban masses, South as well as North—terrorized, last hired/first fired, con-

demned to a life of desperation in the ghettos with their mean streets, lousy schools, rat-infested housing—these could not be solved by a new Civil Rights Act. Genuine equality for blacks is inconceivable without socialist revolution and the massive redistribution of society's wealth, possible only through socialist economic planning.

The SNCC radicals came up against the social revolutionary implications of the struggle against black oppression, but without the intervention of communists they were not able to make the leap to proletarian socialism. When SNCC attempted to go beyond voting rights and access to public facilities (which blacks in the North and a number of Southern cities already had), the organization entered a prolonged crisis of identity. James Forman, SNCC executive secretary in this period, later wrote, "So long as we were working on voter registration and public accommodations, there was a broad consensus under which everyone could move" (*The Making of Black Revolutionaries*). So long, but no longer.

During the critical period of 1963-66 SNCC militants faced three fundamental political alternatives: reintegration into the liberal establishment, the reactionary utopianism of nationalist separatism, or proletarian socialism (Marxism). Some, like Marion Barry, took the first road via LBJ's "Great Society" poverty programs. However, the most militant elements in SNCC went over to black nationalism, initially a small and isolated current in the organization. Why did these young black radicals opt for nationalist separatism rather than Marxism?

One important factor was their revulsion against the existing organized labor movement, whose liberal face was that of United Auto Workers chief Walter Reuther, a man SNCC cadre had good and personal reasons to despise. In general, the Meany/Reuther-led AFL-CIO was, if anything, more committed to the racist status quo than were many liberal Democratic and even Republican politicians. Typically the children of preachers, schoolteachers and funeral parlor owners, the student radicals in SNCC were isolated from the mass of the black working class and socially above them (despite wearing farmers' coveralls, which became almost a uniform). These petty-bourgeois radicals had no conception at all of setting the base of the labor movement against the top.

But who could bring them this conception except Marxists? The fate of SNCC was decided, as much as by any other single factor, by the criminal abstentionism of the ostensibly Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Defining itself in effect as a "white party," the SWP *refused* to involve itself in the Southern civil rights struggles while tailing "the Movement" from the outside. Here a historic but fleeting opportunity was lost to change the course of black struggle in contemporary America. The history of SNCC is the story of the road not taken, the only road leading to black liberation, that of proletarian socialist revolution.

Breaking with the Liberals

SNCC emerged out of the lunch counter sit-in movement which swept the Southern black campuses in the spring of 1960. It began when the North Carolina A&T students sat in at Woolworth's in downtown Greensboro (the city where 20 years later, the KKK/Nazis would massacre five blacks and leftists in cold blood). The SNCC activists came out of the elite black schools like Morehouse College (Julian Bond), Howard University (Stokely Carmichael), Fisk (Marion Barry) or even Harvard (Bob Moses). An extension of black liberalism, the initial goal was formal, legal equality—civil rights, or "Northernizing the South." The political strategy was to seek the support of, and avoid antagonizing, the liberal establishment, bringing to bear the powers of the federal government which was controlled by this establishment.

But if the SNCC activists at first saw themselves as the future Martin Luther Kings, soon their experience was teaching them different lessons from those taught by the preachers. They had illusions in the federal government, but repeatedly received object lessons in the class nature of the bourgeois state. On the freedom rides, the young activists watched how the FBI "observers" stood by taking notes as the sheriffs' goons bashed demonstrators' heads (the FBI of course was in cahoots with, and often part of, the Klan). Carson tells how, after Bob Moses first went into Amite County, Mississippi in 1961, a black sharecropper who helped him was gunned down by a white state legislator, E.H. Hurst. A black witness then told Moses he would testify at Hurst's trial, if promised federal protection. Moses told this to a Justice Department official who not only refused protection ("Justice" was only there to "observe"), but the identity of this witness was passed on to the local racists and he was subsequently murdered.

February 1960 lunch counter sit-in, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

From Albany to the "Farce on Washington"

From Albany, Georgia to Lowndes County, Alabama to the plantation country of Mississippi, SNCC was radicalized by its grassroots organizing of poor black sharecroppers which repeatedly brought it into head-on conflict not just with the Dixiecrats, but the whole racist, capitalist state. Every struggle drove them further away from the liberal premises on which they were founded. The Kennedy White House might be willing to integrate the bus station bathrooms and drinking fountains, but they were not about to make a fundamental change in life in the "Black Belt," where the heirs of slaveowners still lorded over the plantations and the

Dixiecrat politics, while the sons and daughters of slaves, the terrorized black majority, scratched out a precarious existence as sharecroppers, day laborers and maids. And as SNCC's organizing among the black masses repeatedly brought the situation to flash point, the government rushed in their black brokers to cool it, their CIA agents to co-opt it, their courts to indict it, their troops to crush it.

Albany, formerly the slave and cotton capital of southeast Georgia, marked the beginning of the open split between SNCC and the black preachers of the SCLC. In Albany SNCC sang "Ain't Gonna Let Chief Pritchett Turn Me 'Round," but after more than a year of sustained struggle, SNCC found all its tactics—mass arrests, flooding the jails, rallies, boycotts, vigils—failed to break the grip of Jim Crow. "We were naive enough to think we could fill up the jails.... We ran out of people before [Chief Pritchett] ran out of jails," SNCC staffer Bill Hanson said later.

In Albany, the SNCC workers who had tirelessly stomped the dirt roads, gone door-to-door on the black side of town to win support for the movement, were less than thrilled with King and Abernathy's highly publicized weekend jaunts into town to cool things out and arrange "truces" on their behalf. "Don't get weary. We will wear them down with our capacity to suffer," King told the black masses in Albany. But SNCC was beginning to question King's whole strategy of nonviolent resistance. In midsummer with 3,000 Klansmen massed outside town, Albany's black youth fought back with bricks and bottles when the cops attacked a rally outside a black church. King declared a "day of penance" for the "violence," but SNCC refused to condemn the action. In Albany, SNCC started referring to King contemptuously as "De Lawd."

At the August 1963 March on Washington, SNCC saw how the whole liberal establishment and particularly the liberal wing of the trade-union bureaucracy was used by the government to put the lid on the exploding black movement. The civil rights leaders had initially called the march to put the heat on Kennedy who was dragging his heels on the passage of the civil rights bill. But when the president called them into conference they quickly changed their tune, agreeing to change the march location from the White House to the Lincoln Memorial, deny participation to all "subversive" groups and censor all speeches. So, orchestrated straight from the White House, the march would be a giant liberal prayer fest to channel the masses safely back into liberal Democratic politics. King's "I Have a Dream" speech celebrated "nonviolence," while the USIA filmed the whole event for foreign consumption to prove how "peaceful change" was still possible in America. Disgusted SNCC staffers took to wearing "I Have a Nightmare" buttons, and Malcolm X dubbed it the "Farce on Washington."

While the popular front stretching from Kennedy to Reuther to King could all comfortably rail against the Southern Dixiecrats, at the march SNCC's bitter fury against the federal government had to be kept in check. There would be no "communist" words like "masses" or "revolution" in Washington that day, the "official" black leaders vowed. They censored SNCC chairman John Lewis' speech, deleting his conclusion that:

> "The party of Kennedy is the party of Eastland.... We cannot depend on any political party for both Democrats and Republicans have betrayed the basic principles of the Declaration of Independence."

The labor bureaucrats Walter Reuther and A. Philip Randolph took the lead in pressuring Lewis (who was far from a radical within SNCC) to tone down his language and criticism of the Kennedy administration.

Earl Grant

"Either party that you align yourself with is suicide. Because both parties are criminal. Both parties are responsible for the criminal condition that exists" (Malcolm X at the Audubon, 1964). Above, SNCC leader John Lewis addresses rent strike rally in Harlem, 1964.

National Guardian

Unseated Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party delegates at 1964 Democratic National Convention.

MFDP vs. Lowndes County Black Panther Party

As the culmination of SNCC's voter registration projects in Mississippi, 80,000 blacks who had been prevented from registering as Democrats signed "protest ballots" as members of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). At the 1964 Democratic Party convention, the MFDP hoped their 68-member alternate delegation would unseat the "regular" Jim Crow slate. With the Dixiecrats already vowing to bolt to Goldwater in '64, the MFDP was making a bid to the liberals for the Democratic Party franchise. As Carson put it, "The hopes of the MFDP delegation were based on the belief that they, rather than the regular, all-white delegation, represented the expressed principles of the national Democratic party." Surprise, they didn't.

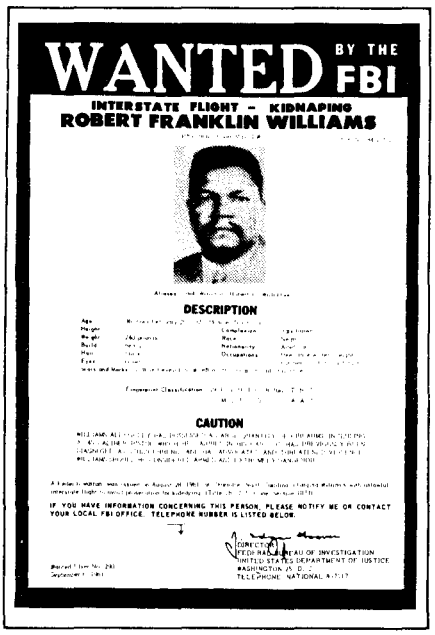
The MFDP was based in Ruleville, Mississippi, where Dixiecrat boss Senator James Eastland had his plantation. Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Eastland launched a personal vendetta against SNCC for registering the blacks off his estate. The story of Fannie Lou Hamer, who became the MFDP's Congressional

candidate, was typical—the youngest of 20 children of black sharecroppers, she was evicted from the plantation where she had worked for 18 years because she registered to vote. When she moved in with a friend in Ruleville, their house was firebombed.

The MFDP was really an outgrowth of the 1964 "Mississippi Summer Project," braintrusted and financed through Allard Lowenstein, the sinister operative of Cold War liberalism. (As the *New York Times* wrote upon his assassination in 1980, "Most of the New Left labeled Mr. Lowenstein as a CIA agent.") Working closely with Bob Moses, Lowenstein brought thousands of Northern white college kids to the South for the summer, hoping to "restore faith in the system" by forcing a confrontation in which the federal government would have to intervene.

Going into Atlantic City, the MFDP had considerable support from Northern state delegations. But Lyndon Johnson, still determined to keep the Southern white vote, offered Hubert Humphrey the vice-presidency on the condition that he get the MFDP to back down. They lined up the whole liberal entourage—from Reuther to King to Lowenstein—to put the squeeze on the MFDP to accept the "compromise" by which they would get two "at large" seats, while the *entire* Dixiecrat delegation would be seated. Despite the pressure, the SNCC leadership rejected the "compromise" and the racists were seated. As Forman wrote, "Atlantic City was a powerful lesson, not only for the black people from Mississippi but for all of SNCC and many other people as well. No longer was there any hope, among those who still had it, that the federal government would change the situation in the Deep South."

In Lowndes County, Alabama Stokely Carmichael and the other SNCC staffers who stayed on to organize after the Selma demonstrations of April 1965 drew their conclusions from the bitter experiences of the MFDP. In George Wallace's Alabama where the words "white supremacy" were part of the Democratic ballot designation, SNCC decided to register blacks for an independent party. As Carmichael said, it was "as ludicrous for Negroes to join [the Democratic Party] as it would have been for Jews to join the Nazi party in the 1930s." The local residents agreed. One recalled, "SNCC mentioned about the third party and we decided we would do it, because it didn't make sense for us to go join the Democratic party when they were the people who had done the killing in the county and had beat our heads." The new organization took a snarling black panther as its symbol, and soon came to be called the Black Panther Party.



Robert F. Williams organized armed self-defense for blacks. FBI wanted him, dead or alive.

Although narrowly based on a single impoverished rural Black Belt county, Lowndes was important because it was organized *in opposition* to the Democrats. The Lowndes Black Panther Party was also important for its open advocacy of armed self-defense. Armed self-defense was a burning necessity for the black movement in the South. In Monroe, North Carolina beginning in 1959 local NAACP chapter head Robert Williams' courageous battle against KKK terror and his book *Negroes With Guns* became a beacon to militant blacks throughout the South. Indeed, James Forman, then a young *Chicago Defender* reporter, visited with Williams just before Williams was forced into exile in Cuba in 1961. In Lowndes the SNCC workers were influenced by and defended the militant black sharecroppers who owned guns and were willing to use them against racist attack. By 1965 the Louisiana-based Deacons for Defense and Justice had spread to Alabama; black rallies in the county were often defended by these armed self-defense squads.

The Ghettos Explode

But it was above all the Northern ghetto explosions which marked the end of the civil rights period and had a profound effect on the SNCC militants. This is something Carson doesn't understand—the main weakness of his account is its SNCC-centricity, barely touching on factors such as the ghetto "riots" or the influence of Malcolm X, except insofar as they directly intersected SNCC. But "non-violence" died in Harlem in the summer of 1964 and Watts a year later. Until then the civil rights leaders could plausibly claim that their policies and outlook were supported by the black masses, actively in the South and at least passively in the North. But after Harlem and Watts, when it was clear that the explosions were no isolated event, but part of a pattern, it was clear that the whole "turn the other cheek" ethos had no relevance to the embittered urban black masses.

There was enormous pressure on the official black leaders to denounce the "riots." So in '64 it was only the reds who defended the Harlem ghetto masses against what was in fact a *police* riot. Bill Epton of the Progressive Labor Party, organizer of the militant Harlem Defense Council, was witchhunted by a bourgeois hysteria campaign which included all the black establishment figures. The Spartacist group vigorously defended Epton and the Harlem youth. On the eve of the "riots" we had noted that the mass character of the black struggle in the North was posing a direct threat to the capitalist system and predicted that the cops would soon crack down hard. *Spartacist* (No. 2, July-August 1964) called for block councils as a "basis for *the organization of self-defense.*" At a mass rally in the New York garment center, called by the Spartacist-initiated Harlem Solidarity Committee, we called for removal of the rioting cops from the ghettos and recognition of the ghetto masses' right to defend themselves against police occupation.

In contrast, in Watts in the summer of 1965 King declared, "It was necessary that as powerful a police force as possible be brought in to check them [the ghetto masses]" (*New York Times*, 16 August 1965). The Black Muslims' famous cartoon captured King's spirit: "If there is any blood spilled on the streets, let it be *our* blood." King's defense of cop terror to smash the ghetto explosions was the ultimate proof of what his one-sided "non-violence" really amounted to. For the SNCC radicals this provoked a sharp break with King and the whole liberal civil rights movement. For up until that point the young militants, although many were never committed pacifists, had accepted "non-violence" as a tactic. They had

fought for "one man, one vote." But how did "non-violence" and voter registration answer the oppression of Northern ghetto blacks? As Forman later wrote:

> "The basic question, 'What is SNCC?' had not yet been answered. Our long-range goals had called for redefinition ever since Atlantic City, and especially since the 1964 and 1965 Civil Rights acts—which made obsolete many aspects of our early organizing work. Watts had exploded in August, 1965; could we still call ourselves 'nonviolent' and remain in the vanguard of black militancy? If we were revolutionaries, what was it that we sought to overthrow?"
>
> —James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (1972)

Crisis of Identity

SNCC radicals had broken with liberalism as they knew it. But where did they go from here? Although he cannot explain it, Carson graphically describes the prolonged crisis which broke out after the MFDP debacle—the malaise, the complaints of "loss of will," the endless conferences, the debates, the therapy sessions. Psychiatrists came in and diagnosed it as "battle fatigue" after the grueling Mississippi summer. Sociologists chalked it up to the problems of elite black students "relating" to ghetto youth. It was not a sociological question. SNCC had run head-on into the black question in capitalist America.

The Waveland Retreat in November 1964 was symptomatic. For this conference *37 papers* were written analyzing SNCC's failure to act decisively after the "freedom summer." The ensuing debates took up everything from Forman's position to turn SNCC into a professional cadre organization to Bob Moses' "anti-leadership" bent for local community work. But around what program? There was massive dissatisfaction with SNCC's penny-ante projects. What good was integrating the lunch counters, if you couldn't afford to buy lunch, they argued. Instead of "stopgap measures which buy off revolution," SNCC should "take all the Negroes from the rural areas into the cities and force the revolution," one member proposed. At Waveland, a women's workshop was held protesting the relegation of SNCC women to office chores and their exclusion from leadership roles. The workshop was generally ridiculed; Carmichael notoriously responded that the proper position of women in SNCC was "prone."

Basically SNCC was, within its own terms, effective so long as it was fighting institutionalized Jim Crow and could

AP

Charles Sims of the Deacons for Defense and Justice.

unite the entire black community around the most elementary democratic demands, such as voter rights or access to public facilities. But in places like Atlanta or Montgomery, they found that the kind of things they were doing had been done, and done better, by the Democratic Party lobby, or the churches, and somewhat later by the poverty programs. They had to develop a social revolutionary program. In the absence of this, those who did not want to be merely co-opted into the liberal Democratic mainstream were drawn to nationalism.

The first nationalist locus in SNCC was a circle around Bill Ware, a Pan-Africanist who only entered the organization in 1964 and set up his own operation, the Atlanta Project. Ware worked briefly building support for the Julian Bond Democratic election campaign in Atlanta's Vine City ghetto. (Bond, who had won election to the Georgia state legislature, was refused seating by die-hard white supremacists.) But the Atlanta Project soon split off to work Vine City on a hard nationalist basis. The Atlanta separatists argued that whites could not "relate to the black experience," that their presence "diluted" SNCC and intimidated blacks from expressing themselves, etc. But to most SNCC cadre, white staffers like Bob Zellner and Jack Minnis were seen as an integral part of the group. The Ware faction's motion at the March 1966 staff meeting to expel all whites was defeated by a majority which then included Carmichael. (Although he's disappeared it now, Stokely, from Bronx High School of Science, was around YPSL and the social-democratic Howard University Non-Violent Action Group and for years had some of the closest ties to white leftists.)

Although the nationalists were initially isolated, they quickly gained ground for *they were the only ones with a coherent anti-liberal ideology*. SNCC hated in their guts the treacherous white liberals, the trade-union bureaucrats, the government agents with their crocodile tears and their money, their connections, all tantalizingly held out to wrap a net around the struggle and draw it back under their control. The black militants rejected integrationism which they identified with the ideological hegemony of the Bobby Kennedys and Allard Lowensteins. They never became aware of the program of *revolutionary integrationism*—integration into egalitarian *socialist* society.

SNCC knew who they hated. But it was a negative program. In the absence of a revolutionary alternative, the nationalists won out in their call to break all ties with the "white Establishment" in which they lumped together the communists with the liberals, the unions with the bureaucrats, thus cutting off the road to socialist revolution for the black working masses in America. It is a historic crime of the Socialist Workers Party that it refused to go in and do battle for people who were quite openly groping for a radical alternative to the liberalism of the Hubert Humphreys and Martin Luther Kings. Inside the SWP the Revolutionary Tendency (RT)—the core of the future Spartacist League—fought for the party to seize this opportunity to win black Trotskyist cadres. An RT motion to the convention of the SWP's youth group, the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA), urgently insisted:

> "The masses of black workers and the SNCC leadership and ranks will not pragmatically come to understand and adopt the science of Marxism simply by virtue of their militancy and readiness to grasp any methods within their reach....
>
> "The rising upsurge and militancy of the black revolt and the contradictory and confused, groping nature of what is now the left wing in the movement provide the revolutionary vanguard with fertile soil and many opportunities to plant the seeds of revolutionary socialism. Our task is to create a Trotskyist tendency in the broad left wing of the movement, while building that left wing...."
>
> —"The Negro Struggle and the Crisis of Leadership," Draft Resolution on Civil Rights, submitted to the YSA, August 1963

The RT's resolutions were voted down and shortly after we were expelled. The majority's position was that *no* SWPer was needed in the South at all, since SNCC would become revolutionary on its own in the course of the struggle. When black RTer Shirley Stoute received a personal written invitation from James Forman to work with SNCC in Atlanta, the SWP had to accede. But they sent down majority agents to spy on her, and within about a month called her back to New York on a pretext, refused to let her return to Atlanta, and would not even let her give them a statement why! Thus as the SWP tailed popular black figures, searching around for a "black Castro," they actually forced militant party cadres *out* of this critical work. For the SWP's centrist degeneration was marked precisely by its rejection of the need for a revolutionary vanguard party from Cuba to the black struggle at home. In 1963, the expulsion of the RT opened the road for the SWP's consolidation around reformism—only a year later after the murders of Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman in Philadelphia, Mississippi, the SWP would come out with its obscene call to withdraw the troops from Vietnam and send them to Mississippi!

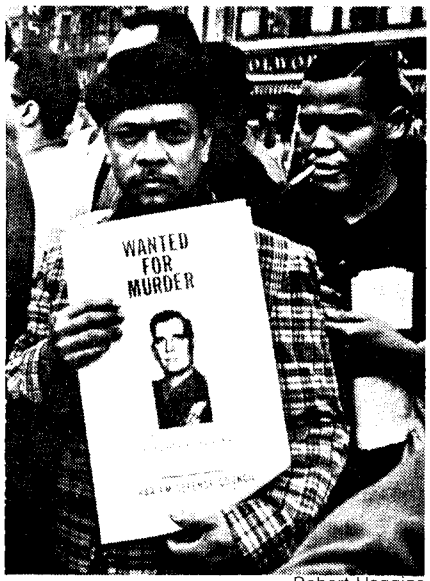
"Black Power"

In Lowndes County SNCC had broken with the Democrats. The black radicals advocated armed self-defense in the South and sided with the ghetto rebellions in the North. As the Vietnam War escalated, they made the link between black oppression at home and the U.S.' dirty imperialist war abroad. SNCC's stand against the war horrified the black establishment. When King, Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young pleaded with SNCC to call off an antiwar protest outside Lucy Baines Johnson's wedding on 5 August 1966, they shot back a bitter reply:

> "You have displayed more backbone in defending [the president's daughter and her fiance] than you have shown for our black brothers engaged in acts of rebellion in our cities. As far as we are concerned you messengers can tell your boss that his day of jubilation is also the day that his country murdered many in Hiroshima."

This trend had culminated in the May 1966 election of Stokely Carmichael as SNCC chairman. A month later in Greenwood, Mississippi Carmichael raised the "black power" call to a cheering crowd.

The effect was electric. "Black power" was picked up by the young radicals



Robert Haggins

Harlem, 1964: "Wanted for Murder—Gilligan the Cop." Protests against police killings of black youth were met by cop riot.

from the burning ghettos to the Jim Crow South as the rallying cry *against* the black preachers' sermonizing, the liberals' begging. After all the hopes and expectations of the black masses raised and betrayed by the civil rights leaders, "black power" was the definitive rejection of their "faith in the system," a vow to take matters into their own hands. For SNCC, the "black power" slogan was their hoped-for route to catch up to the urban ghetto masses who had outstripped them. "If America don't come around, we're going to burn it down," swore "Rap" Brown. As the bourgeois press screeched, virtually the entire black establishment was mobilized to condemn it as the "new racism." King temporized, saying he didn't want to "excommunicate" the black power radicals. And Harlem demagogue Adam Clayton Powell was sharp enough to see which way the wind was blowing—he jumped on the bandwagon declaring "black power" meant voting for him. But white liberals were horrified.

Initially, the "black power" movement was contradictory. As we wrote:

> "SNCC's empirical rejection of the more obvious brands of reformism advocated by white liberals and petty-bourgeois Black 'leaders' has taken the form of a call for 'Black Power,' a militant-sounding phrase which frightens the white liberals and Uncle Toms. The concepts implied in the SNCC slogan of 'Black Power' are radical enough to have caused the bourgeois press and politicians to shower vicious abuse on it, precisely because the slogan is a groping for solutions *outside* the framework of the capitalist society."
>
> —"SNCC and Revolution," *Spartacist* No. 8, November-December 1966

But we warned: "...the slogan 'black power' must be clearly defined in *class*, not racial terms, for otherwise the 'black power' movement may become the black wing of the Democratic Party in the South" ("Black and Red—Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom," *Spartacist* No. 10, May-June 1967). Our prediction seemed almost inconceivable to most people at the time, yet that is precisely what happened.

Even though we were small, the Spartacist tendency, recently expelled from the SWP, fought to intersect the "black power" radicals. Our call for a "Freedom-Labor Party" was the axis to link the exploding black struggle to the power of labor, North and South. With it we posed a series of transitional demands to win militants to this class-struggle perspective: for "A Southern Organizing Drive Backed Up by Organized Labor," for "A Workers United Front Against Federal Intervention,"

for "Organized, Armed Self-Defense." And we sought to translate this into practice, organizing aid ("Every Dime Buys a Bullet") for the Deacons for Defense and Justice. The Deacons were black vets who sprang up in Jonesboro and Bogalusa, Louisiana to protect CORE workers there. As we wrote:

> "The Deacons organization is a tremendous step forward for the Negro struggle, not only because it saves lives, but also because it raises the level of consciousness of the civil rights movement by encouraging independent action and discouraging reliance upon the institutions of the bourgeois state."
>
> —"Toward Arming the Negro Struggle," *Spartacist* No. 5, November-December 1965

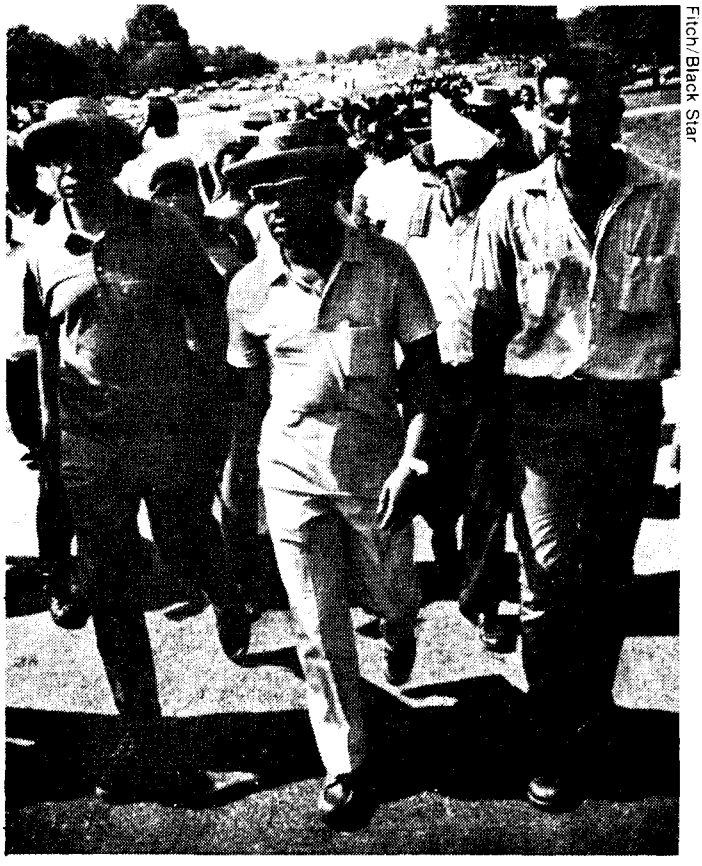
But we lacked the forces. As a result of the criminal abstention of the SWP when SNCC first began to break from liberalism the "black power" radicals never found a bridge to the program of workers power. Increasingly in SNCC "black power" came to mean exclusion of whites and consolidation around a hard separatist program. In December 1966 the remaining whites were finally expelled. Even then the vote was 19-18 with 24 abstentions, indicating how deep the bonds of comradeship had been, how wrenching the destruction process. A few years later, as Carson observes, Carmichael's anti-"honky" separatist diatribes put SNCC far to the right of the Panthers. In Oakland, California, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense had been inspired by and took its name from Lowndes County. But in 1968 the Panthers broke with Carmichael over his anti-communist and anti-white political line. At one point Carmichael refused to speak at a big "Free Huey" rally at the Oakland Courthouse (where Huey Newton was imprisoned on frame-up charges of killing a cop) because he didn't want to sit on the same platform with whites from the Peace and Freedom Party. When he finally did show up, it was only to denounce all "white" doctrines such as "Marxism." "Communism is not an ideology suited for black people, period, period," Carmichael raved. Bobby Seale felt compelled to reject this position from the podium, stating that Carmichael was playing "the Ku Klux Klan's game."

Forman, who had been increasingly uneasy about Carmichael's hard "reactionary nationalism" and seeing himself some kind of Marxist, went with the Panthers in the split. After playing around with his "Black Manifesto" scheme, Forman briefly got involved with the important circle of black radical workers springing up in and around the Detroit auto plants. But the League of Revolutionary Black Workers never broke from nationalism and lumped the UAW into the white "power structure." Thus even though it was located in America's most strategic concentration of black workers, it too could not find the road to revolutionary power, working-class power.

Repression and Co-optation

But if the bourgeoisie uniformly denounced black radicals, they also recognized that some of them could be bought. Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" poverty programs were extremely important in co-opting many. Carson tells how Marion Barry, who was sent to Washington in 1965 as SNCC's representative, wrote back to complain that they were losing good organizers to the federal poverty programs, which were doing the same thing as SNCC but paying the staff a lot better! Shortly after, Barry quit SNCC to become head of PRIDE, Inc. Barry was typical of a whole layer of the organization that went this route into the Democratic Party.

On the other hand, those who were so alienated that they couldn't be bought—the "Rap" Browns and a big layer of the Panthers—were simply wiped out. As the ghettos exploded, the bourgeoisie mounted a campaign to pin the riots on black radicals (while SNCC leader



Fitch/Black Star

CORE's Floyd McKissick (left), Martin Luther King and SNCC's Stokely Carmichael lead march in Mississippi, 1966. When Carmichael raised the slogan of "black power" at this time, incensed liberal establishment went wild.

Militant

Brown played into their hands with his verbal terrorism). Dubbed the "Rap Brown Act," an amendment to LBJ's voting rights act made it a federal crime to cross state lines to start a riot. The feds busted down the doors to SNCC offices, framed up the leaders on the whole gamut of phony charges—arson, conspiracy, criminal syndicalism—and finally just gunned them down in the streets. J. Edgar Hoover's COINTELPRO labeled Carmichael and Brown "vociferous firebrands" and started moving in—Carmichael escaped to Africa (having married South African folk singer Miriam Makeba), but they shot Brown and sent him up for a long stretch in jail. The Panthers, coming slightly later, got the full brunt of the unprecedented campaign to exterminate a whole generation of black radical leaders.

Where Are They Now?

In Carson's "Where Are They Now?" epilogue, you can see three SNCC generations. The first generation, who really were simply younger versions of Martin Luther King, ended up in the Democratic Party—Marion Barry, Julian Bond, John Lewis, Charles Sherrod, Ivanhoe Donaldson. A middle layer, like James Forman and Bob Moses (who, burned by Lowenstein, broke off all relations with whites and dropped out after MFDP) drifted back into academia—they were not hardened nationalists but were too radical to be comfortable in the Democratic Party. And the black nationalists only became more so. Carmichael and his AAPRP are the embodiment of reactionary utopian Pan-Africanism. Rap Brown today is a Black Muslim.

Although at one time Barry and Carmichael represented polar opposites in SNCC, nonetheless, as was seen on November 27, their basic response to today's struggles is to put themselves on the same side—the side opposite the black masses. There is indeed a symbiotic relation between the black liberal establishment and the nationalist-separatist sects. One is the wing of "the talented tenth" who have made it in America; the other is the wing who aspire to their own bourgeois state power. Both of them are instinctively threatened by real struggle for black liberation in America.

A decade ago when black militants were groping toward revolution we did not have the organizational weight to pose an alternative to the no-win choice of liberalism or dead-end black nationalism. A whole generation of dedicated, young black fighters was lost. What would 100 black Trotskyist cadre have meant in Oakland in 1968 or in the volatile conditions of Detroit auto at that time? Surely the whole course and rhythm of the American class struggle would look quite different today.

We didn't have the weight to change the course then. Today, instead of the "choice" between Carmichael and Barry, there is a Marxist answer for class- and race-conscious black youth, for black workers seeking emancipation from racial oppression and wage slavery. November 27 as we marched, 5,000-strong, blacks and workers led by communists triumphantly through the streets of the capital, the resounding slogan, "Finish the Civil War—Forward to a Workers State!" pointed the way forward to Black Liberation through Socialist Revolution.■

Newark Shows Need:

ORGANIZE BLACK POWER!

Big, violent, elemental outbursts against brutal police and cheating merchants show that talk of improved conditions for Black people is a lie. Things are getting worse despite what preachers and politicians say.

A turn must be made. Sure, it feels good to break loose against oppression. And Gov. Hughes shows himself an enemy of Negroes when he says he is most disturbed by the "holiday atmosphere" in the exploding Black Ghetto. But when it's all over, only some piddling junk has been taken nome from crummy stores. And many have been hurt and killed and all the old ways go on.

Meanwhile the cops got their kicks: they like smashing Black heads and gunning down Negroes. Hughes combined a race slur with a lie when he said, "The line between the jungle and the law might as well be drawn /in Newark/." The law of white racist, capitalist America is the law of the jungle; the cops and troops are the predatory enforcers and the workers, especially Negroes, are the victims. A turn must be made.

Where to Start

1. Stop voting in fake "liberals" like Gov. Hughes, Mayor Addonizio and their "Democratic" party of the racist ruling class. No support to Black Republicans or Democrats either.

2. Build Independent Black Political Power--begin revolutionary change; start taking over control in the Ghettoes. Lay the basis for a Freedom Labor Party.

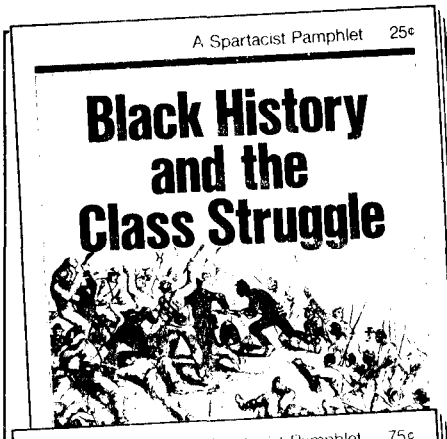
3. Defend the Black Ghettoes--every serious and responsible workingman should exercise his right to own a gun.

This leaflet gives views of the SPARTACIST LEAGUE, a multiracial revolutionary socialist organization named after Spartacus, the leader of the great Roman slave revolt. For more information write: Box 1377 G.P.O., New York, N.Y. 10001 or call 212/WA 5-2426.

Read "BLACK AND RED: Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom", special SPARTACIST supplement, 10¢ (order from above address)

This leaflet was distributed in Newark immediately after the July 1967 ghetto conflagration. It put forward a revolutionary perspective to militant blacks bitterly and violently reacting against the failure of the liberal civil rights movement. In this context we raised the slogan of a Freedom-Labor Party as a *transitional* demand to link the mass black upsurge with the organized workers movement. This demand was first developed by the Spartacist tendency in the early '60s when it was directed at the movement for black democratic rights in the largely non-union South. With the evaporation of a mass black movement in the late 1960s, this particular transitional demand came to be inappropriate.

Black History and the Class Struggle



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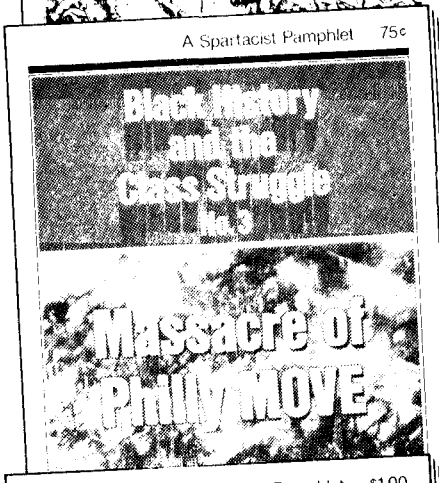

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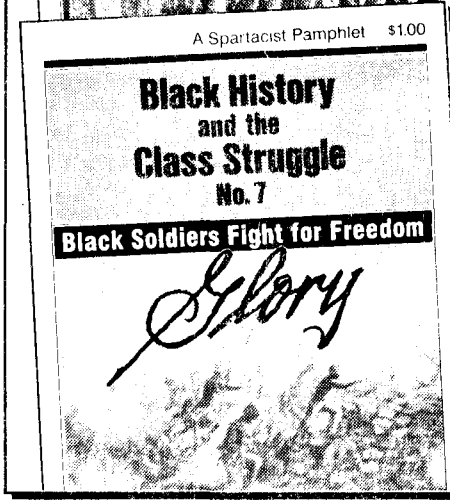

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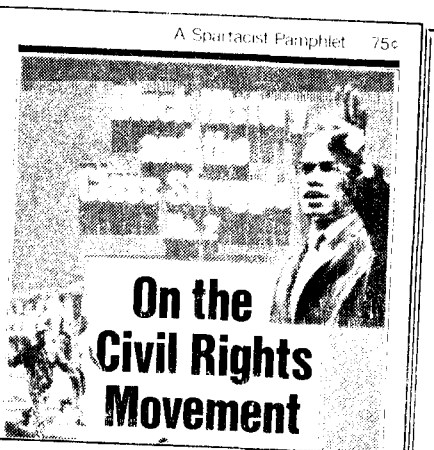

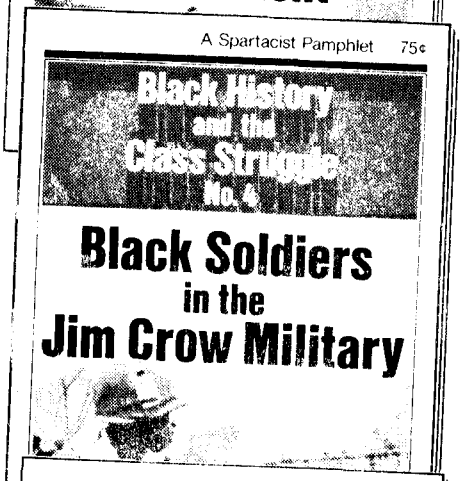

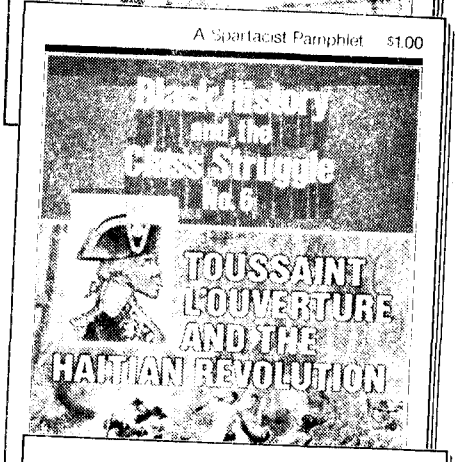

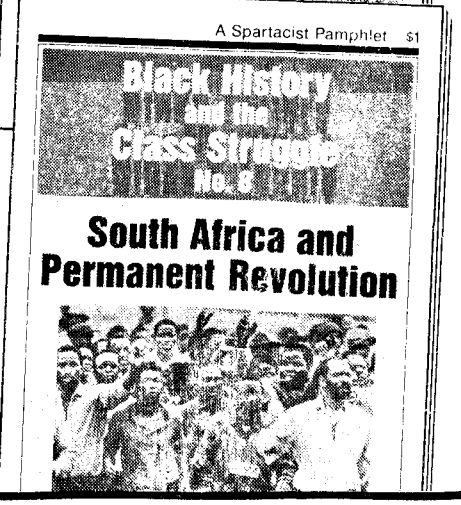

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