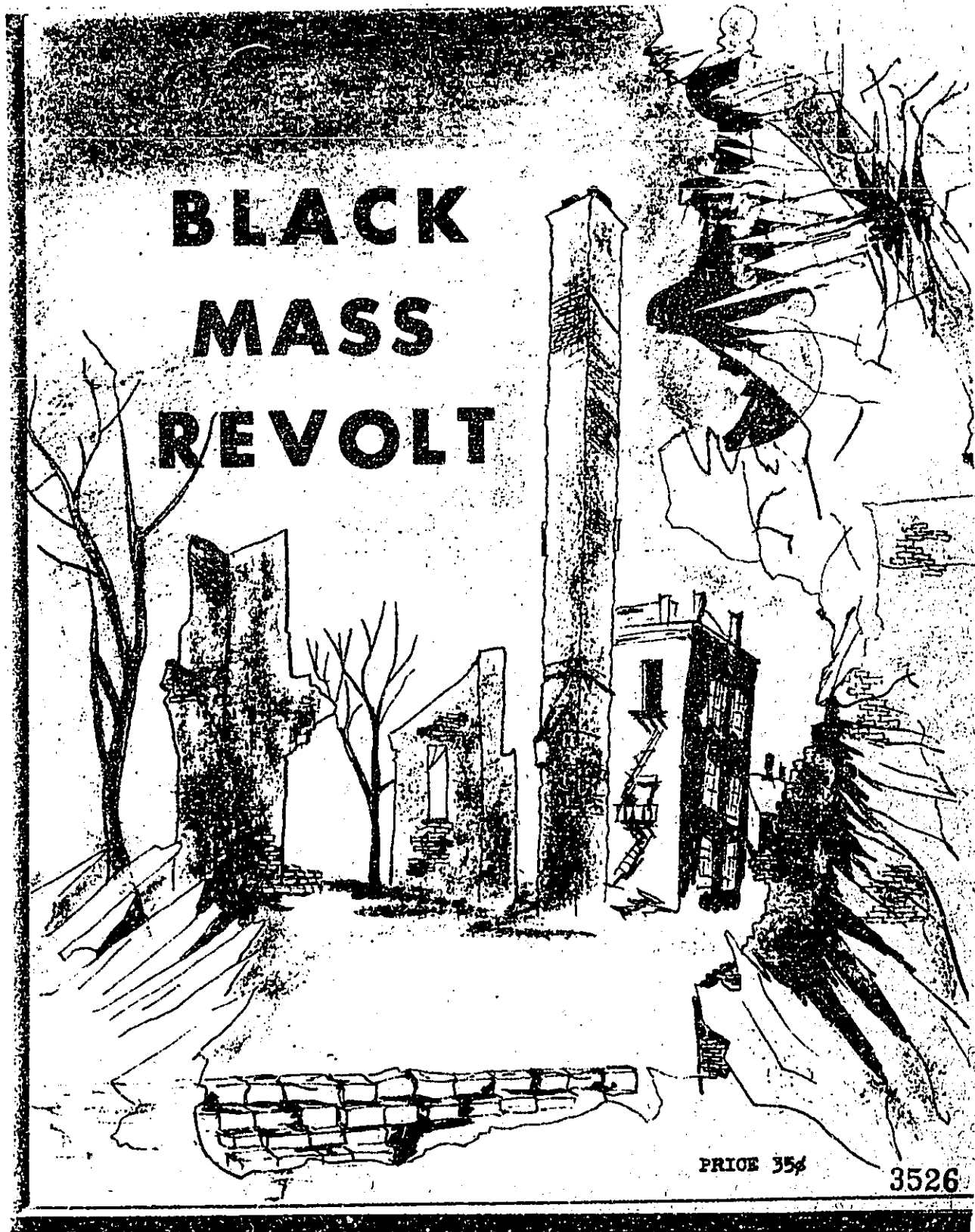


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BLACK MASS REVOLT

A STATEMENT BY THE NEWS & LETTERS COMMITTEES

"Man, the destruction was unbelievable; but considering what it did for us in the shops, in changing the foreman's attitude, it should happen every month." -- Detroit Auto Worker

"By looting, they ain't taking what they ain't paid for. We've been paying for that stuff for over a thousand years, ever since we was born. "

"We want the right that we ought not to be beat on the head all the time just because we're black."

"Whitey ain't about to get up off of anything unless you make him." -- Voices of Revolt

I. Law and Order from the Barrel of a Gun

"Abolish the slums!" was so clearly and loudly the demand of the Negro Revolt in every single part of the country -- North, South, East, West -- that even LBJ couldn't pretend not to have heard it. In words, the President even claimed that that was part of his "war on poverty". Hadn't he asked for rat control, and hadn't Congress denied him even that piddling sum?

"The trouble with that fairy tale is this: where, as President, he must plead with the people and thus is double-tongued, as Commander-in-Chief, he need not plead. He orders, and his orders were clear and unequivocal:

1) Shoot first; the questions can wait for later. It is true that by then some people will have become corpses, but "law and order" will have been restored.

2) Shoot at anything that moves: if that turns out to be only a cigarette light, and the innocent victims are men, women, and children, still "law and order" has been restored.

3) Shoot up a whole building if a sniper is suspected anywhere. It is true that by then not only will fear have been thrown into the beleaguered ghettos, but it will also have encouraged self-styled "patriots" to take the law into their own lawless hands. But thus will terror rule, and "law and order" prevail.

The crackle of a federal tank, under orders; the barrel of a racist's cop's revolver, not under orders and lacking a search warrant; the barrel of a National Guardsman's machine gun, under orders, but gone wild -- all these combined to "restore law and order" in Detroit.

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"Law and order" meant 43 lay dead; some 1500 were wounded; 4000 were jailed with such impossible sums of bail demanded (up to \$100,000!) that constitutional rights were nullified.

Though no "foreign invaders" had landed anywhere in the United States; though no insurrection against the state -- "constituted authority" -- was in progress; though only one side was thrice armed, the city was, to all intents and purposes, under occupation. "Emergency measures" turned out to be a pseudonym for martial law.

To try to deny the new stage that the black revolt had reached in Detroit -- to make the revolt appear purely racist -- the power structure, from Democratic Vice-President Humphrey to Republican Governor Romney, plus the liberal Establishment -- have had to quote Stokely Carmichael. He, however, was in Havana; the action was in Detroit. He was talking, not acting. Those who were the actual participants in the revolt made their actions stark and clear: Down with the black plums. Let's not have two nations, one filthy rich and the other miserably poor. Let's have one nation with totally different, truly human relationships.

To the extent to which, as against the Negro masses, the elitist black nationalists did operate in the ghettos, whether that was in Cambridge (Md.) or in Detroit, in Wichita or Elgin (Ill.), in Newark or Milwaukee, they were just trying to get credit for that which the masses themselves did, did spontaneously. They revolted against the class system wearing a white face, rather than against "whitey" where he was not part of the exploitative system.

The simple truth is that it is the Government -- national, state, city and farm; the police, the prisons, and the courts -- and not the "outside agitators" which breed racism and evoke the wrath of the people. Outside of this reality, and the unvarying tale of police brutality, the greatest breeder of racism is Congress, rushing headlong into multiple investigations, not of the criminal system which produces racism, but of its victims.

Even before the outbursts from the black urban ghettos reached their climax in Detroit, the Senate tried to rush through the anti-riot bill, already approved by the House. It may still do so, and write finis to the most elementary democratic right of travel by making it illegal to cross state lines (state lines within these allegedly united 50 states) "to incite to riot". The people who "rioted," however, were not brought in across state lines. The rebellions were not only indigenous to the state, the city, but to the very limited slum area to which they had been restricted all their lives. This is precisely what they rebelled against, the ghettoization.

The Negro has always been the touchstone of American civilization precisely because he could both expose its Achilles heel -- its racism -- and because he was always in the vanguard of its forward movement. It was so in the struggle against slavery when he fought together with the white Abolitionists. It was so during the birth of imperialism when the Negro stood

alone in his opposition, sensing the racist repercussions of its brilliant white conquest of Latin America, the Philippines and forcing open the gates of trade with the Orient. It was so, when with white labor, he reshaped the industrial face of America through the creation of the CIO. And it is so now when the Negro Revolution has reached the crossroads between nationalism and proletarian internationalism.

Today the vitality of the Negro people, full of purpose, has attacked only the symptoms of oppression — the white landlord in the slums, the white merchant, the white middleman.

This is not because they do not know who Mr. Big is.

Rather it is because they do not see white labor ready to join them in their determination to undermine the whole system. They know better than the elitist leaders that, without white labor, the system cannot be torn up by its roots.

The urgency of the times demands that white labor, not as a sometime thing, not as the exception, solidarize itself with black labor. In that way, and in that way alone can blind revolt become social revolution.

The black masses have already laid the groundwork for this, and shown themselves in the vanguard in these crucial ways:

In 1956, with the Montgomery Bus Boycott, their self-organization showed itself in every phase of their activities -- from the daily mass meetings to the organization of their own transportation.

By 1960, when the sit-downs at lunch counters initiated the Negro Revolution in a way recognized by white youth as well, a new force was born: a whole new generation of revolutionaries, white as well as black.

The following year, with the Freedom Rides, we witnessed a third force for revolution, "Womanpower, Unlimited."

These three forces — workers, youth, women — coalesced in the urban revolts which reached their climax in Detroit because here, for the first time in years, outside and inside the shop, there was the first appearance of white and black solidarity. It is but the faintest of beginnings, but it did appear.

The dialectics of liberation will assure, with no matter what false relapses and deflection by racism, its forward movement toward ending black slums and brilliantly white imperialism, black poverty and white profiteering, exploitation of black and white. Only then will the social revolution unfold itself and not just against the middleman, but against the system itself, and its moral decay.

II. WHO SPEAKS FOR THE MASSES?

A DIALOGUE AMONG BLACK MILITANTS

"There are hundreds of groups springing up around the country, not just SICC and CORE and the Malcolm X Society, and the OAAU and the Black Student Unions and groups like that. There are also defense groups everywhere. You may not know their names, but you walk into a neighborhood and you know they're there. 90% of them have sprung up in the last year or two. There are the Soul Brothers in Newark, and the Five Percenters of Bedford-Stuyvesant.

"The people I know," continued the young black militant, "divide everything into two groups: the rappers and the producers. The producers are the people like the Five Percenters or the Soul Brothers. The rappers are the people like SICC. They get people stirred up and then leave. They don't even leave anybody behind to organize. They don't seem to want a real organization. I guess it would discipline them too much."

* *

"Maybe so. But would it help if they were disciplined by an organization that lacked the vision of self-liberation of the masses?" said a black working mother. "Some months ago I attended a Black Arts Convention. The speakers got a lot of hooahs from the audience because there were many there who thought this was the time to do something. But I left the meeting feeling, Where do I fit in?"

"Nothing was presented in a way in which the common worker or ordinary Negro there had anything to do with the thinking that was going on, or what was going to be done. They, the leaders, were going to tell us what we should do when they get good and ready.

"There was no theory or philosophy. Each speech had some of the same things, but they were just things. There were so many groups going in different directions that, although the meeting was supposed to be a unification meeting, we found even more factions came out of it than what they had before.

"I left feeling hungry. I hadn't been fed with what I wanted to be fed with. I'm sure many others wondered, as I did, whether this was really the way to freedom.

"In the end I felt that what they advocated and what they were going to do would end up with me in greater bondage than in the freedom they talk about."

* *

An older Negro worker expressed it in a different way: "You won't find a Negro in this country that doesn't have some nationalism in him, but it is being twisted by the so-called 'black nationalist leaders.' Negroes have always had this nationalist feeling, but we didn't have anybody to expound this feeling before. That's what draws people to Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael.

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"Marcus Garvey did it, and drew six million to him. He advocated we would be free and have control over our own lives when we got back to Africa. Nobody was thinking about going back to Africa. They were thinking about their freedom, and about getting together, and this was the way out."

* *

The young black militant resumed his analysis:

"When you look at all the big marches, you wonder what came out of them. All the people who got beat on the head and put in jail -- I've been in jail 15 times -- but what has it got? It's gotten a lot of bourgeois Negroes jobs. A very few public places integrated. And even then you'd have a hard time proving they're integrated. A couple of civil rights bills that are like water under the bridge.

"While the people in the so-called civil rights movement saw these as great successes, they were really abstract and middle class successes, not ones that the poor black man on the streets could see. It didn't put any more money in his pocket, didn't stop the gas and electric companies from cutting off his service, sure didn't put better clothes on the backs of his kids to go to school. The kids weren't getting a better education when they did go to school. And when you look at it from their eyes, the movement didn't do much.

"The years of frustration finally showed in violence. The first explosion showed in 1964 in Harlem right when the movement was at its height. It knocked down all the dreams we had of accomplishment, and the following year Watts went off. Carmichael saw something when he uttered the two words: Black Power. It caught on.

"But it's not really a Black Power movement, it's a movement toward some kind of really fighting-freedom. It's been taken over by the middle-class leadership, who all have fine office jobs. But there is an undercurrent of the masses themselves who are also moving. Look at Detroit. "

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III. A New Stage of Race Consciousness: Class Awareness

1) A MODEL CITY REVOLTS

Nothing tells better how total the opposition of the Negro community is to the power structure as a whole, and to all the hangers-on within the Negro community itself, as that the explosion in the "model city" was the greatest of any city in the United States.

The explosion was sudden. The build-up was years in the making.

As against Newark, where over 50 per cent of the population are Negroes who live in one of the worst ghettos in the entire country, Detroit's over-50 per cent Negro population has no single ghetto. Negroes live scattered all over the city and almost 40 per cent of the city's Negro family heads own their own homes. But in areas like 12th Street, 150,000 were jammed into an area that should accommodate 30,000 to 40,000, according even to city housing officials.

As against Newark, which has everything from the highest number of mothers who die in childbirth, to one of the highest rates of unemployment -- almost all of it among Negroes -- Detroit had special programs for training the unskilled, medical programs, Head Start programs, and recreation programs. But in areas like 12th Street, there was no less than 11 percent unemployment, and even the skilled could not get a job anywhere in the building trades.

Michigan is the state where the existence of a Civil Rights Commission is "guaranteed" by the state constitution -- a fact constantly boasted by liberal Republican Governor Romney. And Detroit was the city where this CRC, as well as the mayor's own Human Relations Committee were all -- right up to the day of the outburst -- busily taking the pulse of the black ghettos, and all agreeing that nothing like Newark could happen here. But no one, including the labor bureaucracy, had bothered to be anywhere near where the people were.

Detroit opened a new stage of black revolt. In common with the outbursts occurring throughout the land -- from Boston to Spanish Harlem, from Tucson to Newark, from Cleveland to Sacramento, and some 80 other cities -- the voice of anger, frustration with, and rejection of, their conditions of life was loud and clear. Unlike the other rebellions, Detroit revolted, not against "whitey", as such, but against class society.

Every outburst, from Harlem in 1964 and Watts in 1965, through Omaha, Atlanta, and Dayton in 1966, to Newark and Detroit in 1967, has been sparked by a police action. And every single outburst has been met with even more brutality.

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The summer began with the wanton shooting and beating of students at Negro colleges in Nashville and Texas.

In Newark, police fired indiscriminately into homes and apartments, killing and wounding many. Heavily-armed state police and National Guardsmen, with fixed bayonettes, overran Negro homes in Plainsville in a "search for stolen weapons" and ended their storm-trooper-like raids only when authorities feared the wrath of the residents would burst again.

Here is how a young Negro in Newark described what happened there:

What made the people really mad was that the state troopers caught a man about 20 to 29 (he drinks a lot, you know, a wine-head) walking through this restaurant. These state troopers drove by at full speed, at 50 miles per hour, and shot him in the back of the head and just kept going straight up the street. After that some of these man gangs, not boy gangs, raided Sears and Roebucks.

The main thing is that nobody was looting stores at first. But when the cops started banging people on the head, they started throwing bottles and stuff and some went and busted out store windows. At first nobody did anything.

It started with the younger crowd, ten year olds, going to their favorite stores. They went in, and then everybody else got the idea to go. But looting was not what started the whole thing.

We got bed springs and as the cop cars came around the street the bedsprings were thrown out in the street and the cop cars could not ride over them. When they tried to back up, we threw springs behind them.

Then we started throwing rocks because we had no ammunition to shoot back. The cops were shooting people down as fast as they could.

In Detroit, despite the much-ballyhooed initial delay in a "use of force", there were hundreds of beatings reported, prisoners were herded into compounds and kept for days without toilet facilities or food, homes were invaded without search warrants, and eye-witnesses accused police of looting and fire-bombing several Negro stores that had been left untouched by the Negroes.

The cold-blooded murder of three unarmed Negro youths by police and National Guardsmen under cover of the outburst was finally forced into the headlines a week later. And the out and out murder of still another teenager a few days after that. No less than 37 Negroes were killed during that one week, including a four-year-old child who lay on the floor of an apartment being riddled with bullets.

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In this "model city" of race relations, the liberal Democratic mayor and his liberal police chief, Girardin, had consistently refused even to listen to the years-old plea of the Negro community for a city civilian review board.

When the wrath of the Negroes exploded in Detroit it was vented not only against the police in their own neighborhoods, or even the police in general, who were the prime targets of the snipers. In Detroit, Negroes made a direct attack on police stations.

Many other things were new in the Detroit revolt.

Unlike other cities, here the rebellion spread from the ghettos into almost every direction. Before it was over, property damage was estimated at no less than half a billion dollars.

Unlike other cities, here the repossession, as well as the sniping later, were integrated. As one reporter on the scene put it: "It was just like Negroes and whites were shopping together, only they weren't paying for anything."

Unlike Watts, where "whitey" had been pulled from cars and beaten, in Detroit, Negroes stopped in the midst of their activities to warn whites away from certain areas where they might run into trouble.

Unlike almost all other outbursts, Detroit's was not so much against "whitey" as such, as against the white landlords, white merchants, and, of course, the white police.

And while the everywhere present signs of "Soul Brother" saved many Negro stores from the torch, Negro merchants who had also gouged the community were not spared. In fact, one Negro-owned drug store that had been picketed by CORE the week earlier was among the very first to go.

While none could say there was an actual camaraderie in the factories, white and black workers got along on the production line better than they had in years. Here is what a Negro auto worker reported about his shop:

A skeleton crew of workers appeared at the Chrysler Mack plant gate for the morning shift the second day of the revolt in Detroit. No production was running and we could look out of the windows and see billows of black smoke shooting skywards, and then suddenly the red flames following the smoke. Every four or five minutes this would be repeated in different areas of the city.

We didn't know where the foremen were until an hour later, when a Negro foreman came up and said they were in conference with the plant superintendent, and that some of the white foremen were frightened stiff.

The two he mentioned were the worst in the plant, and hated by most of the workers. He said those two had been in there begging to go home.

The superintendent told them to go out and see what the Negroes and young workers felt toward them. My foreman walked up and said, "You and I have always gotten along OK. I know we have had minor arguments, but when it was over I always forgot it, and I feel sure you did too. Now I know this riot is not because all colored people are bad; the young whites are just as bad, just as guilty of crimes."

He wanted to know exactly what everyone that worked for him felt about him, especially the younger Negroes. While he was saying this to me, practically every foreman had one or two Negroes cornered off asking them the same thing.

The following day those two foremen did not come in. In fact, they stayed away the entire week.

It has been a week since the revolt's been over. Not one foreman in our plant has raised his voice at a worker, and they seem to be leaning over backwards to some of the Negro workers.

One guy said, "Man, the destruction was unbelievable; but considering what it did for us about changing the foremen's attitude, it should happen every month."

Where what emerges from the actual struggles of the Negro is a search for a total philosophy to change society from the bottom, the leaders, self-styled and otherwise who presume to speak "for the Negro", small-change it into a slogan. And a tactic imposed from above.

When a Negro says "Hell no, we won't go" what he is saying is: we should be fighting the enemies at home — poor jobs, poor homes, "the whole system", not the Vietnamese people. What he is not saying is: as against my home here, I choose to live in China or Cuba, or Russia, or even Vietnam.

Where Detroit has shown a class awareness within the race struggle, the leaders proclaim "black consciousness".

Where what marks history for a Garmichael is Castro's revolution in the late 1950's and Castro's visit to Harlem in the 1960's, what marks history for the Negro worker is his wildcatting against Automation in the 1950's and the new stage of Negro revolt in the 1960's.

In moving the question posed by the struggles with Automation — what kind of labor should man do? — to the question posed by the Negro Revolution — what kind of life should man lead? — the rebels were, indeed, taking

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in the whole human condition. The type of questioning was itself a philosophy, a total view, thereby bringing the very division between theory and practice to the vanishing point.

Carmichael notwithstanding, their inspiration was not Castro, but their own aspirations for a different kind of life.

2) MILWAUKEE MARCHES

The inability of the elitist leaders to explain away a manifestation of black and white unity has led to almost total silence about Milwaukee on the part of the black nationalists. Yet it is there -- where the whites have been impelled once more to join the black masses in their incredible marches against bigotry -- that you can see that there are two, not one, kinds of whites, just as there are two, not one, Americas.

"The Milwaukee situation is full of the most unbelievable ironies and contradictions," admitted one determined marcher. "First, the issue itself, or the ostensible issue, open housing, seems about ten years outdated. It is not a black power kind of issue, because it is an integrationist demand, in complete contradiction to the black power strategy of maintaining and improving the ghetto to use as a power base. And yet 'Black Power' is the most popularly shouted slogan at the rallies and demonstrations."

Here is what the marches mean, in words excerpted from the diary of one young white marcher:

Monday, Sept. 4 -- When I arrived at St. Boniface church there were crowds of people milling about outside, surrounded by police and reporters. The basement of the church was jammed with marchers who had returned to refresh themselves. They had been marching for the better part of that day.

Then the march began again. A Negro woman asked me to walk with her. She grabbed my hand and held it tightly for the next thirty miles of marching, held it as if she never wanted to turn it loose again... Up front there rose a cry of "Freedom!" and ran the length of our column, passed over us in a mighty wave, resounded in the distance at our backs, came whipping back and roused the sleepers in their beds. They came to their windows and stood on their porches by the thousands... It was beautiful! And it was awesome:

We shouted that we wanted to go south into the white quarter but the cops thoroughly blocked our path... We marched until 2 in the morning. The woman at my side, who had worn inadequate shoes,

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had walked most of the way barefoot, across the pavements, pebbles, gravel, pieces of broken glass, etc. She had been marching since morning.

Wed., Sept. 6 -- At this date the Negroes of this city have marched for ten consecutive days. We are going to keep on marching until they give us what we want, or until the very walls of this city topple over!

Sat., Sept. 9 -- I got to St. Boniface at 1 PM. We had a rally and started marching at 3 ... This time the cops did not form a line across the street as they had done Monday night. We walked across the bridge, and many people roved it must be the longest bridge in the world. It is also the Mason-Dixon line of Milwaukee.

We had to keep our lines very tight. We marched all the way to Kosciuszko Park and rested. We sat down in the grass, a gigantic circle of two thousand; then there was a ring of Commandos (the guardians of all our marches) facing outward and watching for trouble. Then came a ring of policemen, and then there was the white mob all around us. We sang a few songs and chanted and clapped our hands.

Someone told me he saw a white girl separate herself from a group of jeering, screaming, white kids, her friends and school-mates, and run over to join the line. That's courage, sister!

Saturday night -- We started marching again. Our group numbered around 300. We marched through soul-neighborhoods, ignoring our sore feet. This time it was the cops. Whenever we tried to cross an intersection to the other side of the street, they would cut into our line and hold us standing, to wave by their vehicles ... Suddenly we were running, bodies literally flying through the air, the cops swinging their clubs and making contact with a lot of heads. One cop drove straight into the melee with his motorcycle and came to a crunching halt because of sheer bodies jammed together...

Sun., Sept. 10 -- We had a tremendous rally in the church-yard. There were at least 800 people from outside states alone, who had come to march with us: from Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, Idaho, etc., and more were coming in all the time. I would say there were at least 3500 people in all...

The white crowds were relatively small, but that did not stop them from cat-calling... Suddenly all hell broke loose. Rocks, bricks, bottles flying through the air, splintering glass, windows smashed. We were jammed together, held at bay by police and commandos, who were standing in front of broken windows to stop anyone from taking the merchandise. Then we were moving again, heaving air into our

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crushed rib-cages. Later we found out that behind us crowds had formed who wanted to come after us into the soul-neighborhoods. When they grew to be a thousand strong, police used tear-gas to disperse them.

Sat., Sept. 16 -- At times we have many whites with us, as we do today. Many things are changing. People realize they are in an honest-to-goodness revolution. Our marches are mellow with black and white; with out-of-towners and Milwaukeans... Today we walked east where the Puerto Ricans live. It was rumored that they would meet us with shot-guns. Instead, some of them joined us.

Sat., Sept. 23 -- Dick Gregory got up and again gave us some of his favorite cracks. Father Groppi reiterated for the hundredth time the definition of Black Power, what it ought to mean to us, who are marching for freedom. It doesn't mean black superiority. It means that we must achieve a condition where every man of every race, religion, creed or color can go wherever he pleases, can live wherever he pleases, and can be a breadwinner in all the dignity that ought to be a matter of course to any human being. So when we chant, "Sock it to me, Black Power!" this is exactly what we mean...

So we started marching. No circling or weaving today. Straight to the Mason-Dixon Line and over into Poland. Numerous tough guys standing on the corners. A few juicy exchanges; we understand each other already. A mild kind of march; no attacks; no missiles...

Sun., Sept. 24 -- We all went to a rally which had to be held in the St. Boniface church yard, since there were too many to get into the church. Many cheers, chants and freedom songs. Several speeches from the many dignitaries who attend our little strolls, which I can't recall... After the march I walked with the rest back to St. Boniface. Then I turned right around and marched all the way back home, by myself. But along the way something happened to me. There were four men on the other side of the street, who suddenly swerved and came at us in a slow sauntering broadside. Their eyes were weary; I sensed they were up to no good. So I turned and faced them. They took a look at my shirt which had on it in big letters: "Milwaukee NAACP Youth Council." That is the only thing that saved me... Anyone who thinks that the black people of Milwaukee can be pacified by a few words without meaning is in for a big surprise. They are angry and disgusted. If we do not achieve our aims, there will be blood-shed.

Oct. 8, Sunday -- Today is our 42nd day of marching. The cops charged us. You should have seen their faces. If I can't change my skin, I can tell you that my heart is becoming blacker and blacker. The commandos locked arms across the street and we stood behind them. The cops pointed their tear-gas guns straight at our faces. It

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takes something to attack unarmed men, women and children... Talk about American battle-fields. Several ten and twelve year old men were beaten unconscious. A pregnant woman was kicked in her stomach. What kind of birth shall our children have if they are already attacked in the very womb? We still don't know how many went to the hospital, but at least 14 went to jail.

We were non-violent today. The commandos had locked their arms, and when you lock your arms you can't swing at anybody... Tomorrow we will march again. If this situation comes up again, there will be no more locked arms.

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IV Once Again: Who Speaks for the Black Masses?

Nothing so tells the isolation of the black nationalist leaders from the Negro worker as their insensitivity to the fact that management has always pitted one worker against another along racial and national lines. Hence their shouting not only for burning down the country, but "honkies and all". It would never have dawned upon a Negro worker to use such derogatory and class divisive terms.

This does not mean that the black worker is not as conscious of his race as of his class. Nor does it mean that the black worker has any illusions about the lack of prejudice among the ordinary white workers. And it certainly doesn't mean that he himself overflows with "love" for his fellow white worker. But it does mean there is sufficient class consciousness to want to fight him in a different way. It is this class awareness that distinguished the Detroit revolt from all others covering the length and breadth of the land.

In announcing that the former Chairman of SNCC, Stokely Carmichael, had gone from Havana to Kanoi, H. Rap Brown declared that August 18, 1965, the day of the Watts Revolt, will be celebrated as the blacks' "Declaration of Independence" because "blacks stopped moaning 'We shall overcome' and started swinging to 'Bun, baby, burn.'" He should have added that SNCC was nowhere in sight then, though today they are trying to get credit for all the action as if the "Black Power" slogan, instead of the spontaneous action of the Negro masses, created the new stage of revolt.

SNCC is wrong also in denigrating the battles for freedom in the first five years of the 1960's. The truth is that without these battles, first initiated by Negro youth in Greensboro, North Carolina, that inspired Northern white youth to take those Freedom Rides to Mississippi, and the Negro masses to reach the high points in 1963-64 in the Birmingham and Selma marches, the confrontations with the Bull Connors, the electric cattle prods and vicious police dogs and water hoses, there would have been no SNCC, but then Brown might have had to admit the unity of white and black in these battles -- and the creation of SNCC itself by others than those who now head it.

What did happen that was new in 1965 was that the real vanguard -- the black masses -- pointed out a truth, that the methods of struggle in the South achieved nothing for the Negro ghettos of the North; that it was time for the leaders to start listening to the voices from below, here and now.

In our last thesis*, when the discussion on black power did not have the cogency it has today, but was of necessity more historical and theoretical, we wrote: "We are not saying that Carmichael or SNCC, individually or collectively, 'took' the thesis of black power from Mao, who is interested only in creating chaos in this country. What we are saying is that if they do not stop

* Perspectives Report to News & Letters Convention, Sept. 1966. Available from News & Letters, 415 Brainard, Detroit, Mich. 48201. 35¢

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and listen to what comes from below; if they do not recognize that it is not the whites from above, but the student youth — the Negro student youth — from below, who raised the question of integration, they will so completely have misread the movement's aspirations as to leave the movement in such chaos and disruption and division as Mao himself would have aimed to create."

Now that Carmichael has appeared in Cuba and given Castro credit for what the Negroes had achieved by their own self-activity ever since the start of the Negro revolution in 1960, and at the same time has burdened them with a concept of "guerrilla warfare" made not in Newark or Detroit, but in China and Cuba, the words out of his mouth show more clearly than our thesis how deep is the cleavage between those who claim to speak "for" the Negro and the Negro himself.

The rush of every leader to try to divert the black revolt into other channels produces big jokes in the shops. Here is what one worker told News & Letters:

There are a lot of young fellows in our shop that have just returned from Vietnam, and they don't fit in too well with the scheme of things, as we know it in the shop. They're pretty rebellious, and whenever the company tries to fire them, I always put up a strong fight for them. I point out that they can go to die in Vietnam, but if they live they can't come back to work in the shop.

They are so production-mad that if one of these new workers gets mangled in the machine, they say he is accident-prone and kick him out. They seem to be trying to fire everybody.

It makes no difference if a worker is on the Black Power kick or in a motorcycle club, or something else -- all of them are against raising production, all of them. They understand quite well what is going on in the shops, and they merge when the production question comes up.

Now comes the fallout from the revolt here in Detroit this summer. We got a young fellow in the shop from the 12th Street area -- where the revolt began. He had been sent over by one of these agencies that's trying to get jobs for the people in the ghetto.

When they got through digging through the rubble, they found out that the most critical thing, with regards to young people, was work. Jobs came first, then housing, then all the rest. But work was critical, so everybody is now trying to furnish jobs.

They brought this young fellow in, about 23 years old, never had a job in his life. Nowhere. They brought him into the shop and put

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him in the midst of all this machinery. He came in at 7 AM and by 11 AM he was on his way out the door. He said, "This is crazy."

The factory management caught him and asked him, "Where are you going?" "I'm leaving," he said. "Come back," they said, "we want to help you..." And they gave him a big spiel about working 30 days before he made his mind up, and so on.

It was the first time we ever saw them out a worker in one of the little vehicles management rides around in. They took him back to his job, gave him back his time-card, and told the committeeman, "Now you watch him, we want to make sure this man stays."

The workers were all saying, this is madness. Here they're trying to fire everybody in the shop, and here's a fellow they're begging not to quit. They're trying to prove to the world that they're trying to do something for the ghetto people. But they're inhuman the way they treat the workers.

A Negro woman aircraft worker was worried because in her shop white-black unity is hardly ever there. "I'm concerned that the power structure has been able to use the bugaboo of race so long and so skillfully to cheat unaware white workers into selling themselves short to make sure that they (the white workers) are better than black workers -- while management sells all the workers down the drain."

A Negro auto worker disagreed. He called the production line "the equalizer": "It is all of us, black and white, facing the management. The trouble is that the minute the shift ends, the white worker runs home to his 'safe' neighborhood, and forgets it all."

Or contrast how easily, during the Arab-Israeli conflict, SNCC fell into anti-Semitism -- especially when they thought that might go over big in the "black community" -- with the reaction of a young black worker: "The Jews have been kicked around for so many thousands of years that I am for them in any fight for survival."

When a reporter called SNCC-spokesman, Featherstone's, attention to the fact that the June-July issue of the SNCC newsletter on "Israeli atrocities in the Gaza" was not only a piece of Arab propaganda (and the deliberately blurred picture accompanying it was from 1956, not 1967), but sounded exactly like what appeared on the very same subject in the current issue of the Thunderbolt, The Whiteman's View, the white supremacist paper published by the National States Rights Party, Featherstone had a ready answer:

"The positions of the two organizations (i.e. SNCC and NSRP) may look the same, but I think that you have to probe deeper and look at the philosophical content behind the positions." (NYT, 8/16/67)

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There is a philosophy of liberation. There is no "philosophy" to anti-Semitism. Racism, whether it comes from Thunderbolt or SNCC's Newsletter, is the ideological spewing of a decaying class society that, as the SNCC Newsletter shows, has infected even those who fight against it.*

Moreover, this line, begun by Communism for its own purposes, was first tried out by the magazine, Liberator. That series of articles smelled so foully of anti-Semitism that one of its editors, who is proudly a Black Nationalist and even more proudly anti-chauvinist — Ossie Davis — wrote the editors, "here is where I get off", adding that in his last years "Malcolm X specifically renounced racism; can we do less?"

And James Baldwin, in his letter of protest, asked whether they must copy everything the whites do: "I think it is most distinctly immoral to blame Harlem on the Jews. Why, when we should be storming Capitols, do they suggest to the people they hope to serve that we take refuge in the most ancient and barbaric of European myths?"

When SNCC tries to rewrite the Negro's history at this critical juncture of its development in order to detour it, give it a direction alien to its dialectic self-development, it is playing an opportunist Communist game. Moreover, it is a white opportunist game. And the first ones to recognize the black-face routine will be the Negro masses.

It is not, after all, whitey as such that they oppose. That is talk for the U.S. But abroad they bow quite low to the superior white practitioners of guerrilla warfare — Fidel Castro and his latest theoretician, the young French philosopher, Régis Debray. In a word, when the speech is not aimed at the U.S., the black-face routine comes off. These new fast-paced "globe trotters" (to borrow an expression from Debray, who applies it derogatorily to those who talk rather than do) suddenly begin to use "Marxist-Leninist" (or what they think are "Marxist-Leninist") anti-capitalist categories. The trouble here is that they have learned their "Marxist-Leninism" from those who have perverted that philosophy of liberation by the masses themselves, into one of an elite leadership "making it for" the masses.

Their kinship is to the old radicals who, thirsty for leadership, are perfectly willing to betray the Marxist concept of a revolution as a

* Here, where the Arab-Israeli collision concerns us only to the extent to which it discloses SNCC's evolution, is not the place to analyze that conflict. Elsewhere, however, we have made the position of Marxist-Leninism clear: "The class relations in Israel are exactly what they are in any capitalist country — exploitative. And as in any capitalist country, minorities — in this case, the Arabs who live in Israel — are discriminated against both in labor and in politics. But the solution to this situation is by the masses themselves, Jews and Arabs, in class struggle actions, and not through outside attacks by countries ranging from those who experienced some revolutionary change like Egypt, to monarchies and shirkdoms like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Libya. No matter how shrill the voice, or adroit the argument, Communist Russia and China must not be permitted to succeed in their attempts to christen these feudal kingdoms as "freedom-loving, peace-loving nations." (The Arab-Israeli Collision, a News & Letters Committee Publication, 25p)

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mass movement, led by the proletariat, provided only the holy of holies -- "the vanguard party", now christened "the cadre organization" -- with themselves leading it, is intact. Even as some black power adherents find more succor in Havana, Cuba, than in Lowndes County, Alabama, opportunism robs them of a total Marxian philosophy and proletarian principles.

This is not a question of what is indigenous and what is "foreign". Rather it is that the class aspirations of the masses, the views of "what happens after" are totally different from the elitist concepts of the leaders. It is for this reason that the kinship of these leaders is more akin to the old radicals than to the Negro masses. Like Trotskyists, these leaders are moving in a direction away from that which emerges from the mass upsurge.

Because they refuse to bend their ears to the elemental surge from below, and, instead, look for shortcuts to power, the existing organizations are in disarray at the very moment when the movement itself is at its most intense. At the moment they have also shown fear that some black factions, as CORE leaders expressed it, "would rather shoot a black brother because of some ideological difference than shoot a white man."

There is no doubt that there is danger that the constant talk of violence (as if that by itself solved all problems) can and does generate such serious divisions within the movement as to endanger it. All the more reason to take stock of where we're headed.



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V. WHERE TO NOW?

"Has Whitey got the message?" asked one of the black militants. "Have our own leaders? The system has got to go."

We trust no one will, at this late stage, presume to ask that young militant whether he "really" meant the capitalist system as if, facing the aftermath of a raid on a blind pig on 12th Street, Detroit, the youth was talking about a system to break the bank at Monte Carlo.

Now that a new page in the dialectics of liberation -- its thought as well as its struggles -- has been opened, the question is: where to now? The dynamism of the debates around the question of black nationalism reveals that the new feature of class awareness distinguishes this black nationalism both from that of the "Nation of Islam" and of "Black Christianity".* Here-
tofore the latter two differed from each other by their religious, rather than their class, nature. Now they must relate themselves to the black nationalism that is conscious of its class character which, in turn, has relegated the question of violence vs. non-violence to secondary importance. Instead, the primary question has become one of future direction.

The significance of the Detroit revolt is that here "Burn, baby, burn" meant putting to the torch not only white but also some black establishments. Not only that. The black masses had here raised the question of the middle class nature of their black leaders.

It may satisfy some vain self-styled leaders to think they have but one problem, that of "civilizing whites". But the black masses know that the black "intellectual vanguard" is the same flesh as all elites. Elitism, no matter what color, is blinded by the concept of the alleged backwardness of the masses. Because this has always been so, these masses have no illusions about leaders, no matter what their color, who are glib with words against whitey, but tongue-tied when it comes to passing on leadership tasks to the rank and file.

Here is what one who had attended the Black Power Conference in Newark had to say on the subject:

The Black Power Conference in Newark is another example of how the leadership looks at the masses of black people. It was held in the rich business district of Newark, in the Episcopal Diocese house and two of the richest hotels there. Also, it cost \$25 to attend, which put it out of the reach of the poor working class black man.

At first they didn't even want to let Newark people in without paying. Then it came to light that it was just to let people blow off steam, but to keep the old leadership in the spotlight, that all the

*See Rev. Albert Cleage's "Call for a Black Christian Nationalist Movement" delivered as an Easter Sunday sermon in Detroit, March 1967.

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projects afterward would be decided on by leaders who would then tell these who attended what to do. We changed some of that, but not everything.

Ever since the rebellions in Harlem and Watts in 1964 and 1965 there has been a movement among the black masses of America toward either total freedom or death. Harlem and Watts manifested the fact that the civil rights movement was dead; that the black man in this country wanted more than just civil rights.

The black people want Freedom and Self-Determination which, in itself, means the total overthrow of this society -- in other words, revolution. And that is just what it's called by the youth as well as by the old -- the Revolution.

The name of Black Power caught on. We have pride in being black. We see both young and old (but mainly the youth) taking an interest in black art and culture. The fact that they are now supporting the black artists and writers and studying their own history to find out about themselves points this out. They are calling each other brother and sister and literally meaning it.

But though the Black Power slogan is popular, it is not the name that the masses give to what they are doing. They have another name for it. It is Revolution.

The whole point against whitey is to get rid of the power structure, that is to say, the capitalist class system. Without tearing that out by its roots, no freedom is possible. Tokenism will not do. That must go. Far from creating jobs for the masses, or ridding the slums of rats, much less ridding them of the tenements themselves, or sending the poor black man's children to the universities from which one may reach Congress, the Senate and now even the Supreme Court, tokenism props up the status quo, "the system".

Too many of the leaders who talk about black power mean only electoral power as if that would change the system. They talk about being the majority, or promise they "soon will be", in the cities. But the masses down South, where they are the majority, know that voting doesn't change anything very much. It isn't only that whitey cheats them out of their majority -- that they do expertly even when the blacks do come and vote. But the greater truth still is this: so long as the "boss and black" relationship remains, no vote can change their conditions of life.

So overpowering is that relationship of "boss to black" that when the New Deal first came South, even the federal power had to bow to it. And it is even more true now that "neutral" mechanization -- Automation -- has taken over. Just consider the single fact that even in the state of Mississippi in the 17 counties where most of the cotton is grown, no less than 75 per cent

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of all cotton picking is done, not by human labor, but by machine. It is in the heart of the South, in the places where the Negro is still the majority, where there is actual starvation, actual infant mortality that compares with what it is in the most technologically underdeveloped countries like India — where the actual health conditions of the adult population in any village are comparable to those in Lowndes County, Alabama, or the Mississippi Delta.

It drives the masses from the farms to the cities, in the South as well as the North. But, though there is 65 per cent urbanization among Negroes, this too solves no problems as unemployment follows the Negro wherever he goes. Of course, they have certain power, as the revolts in the cities have shown. But, unless one is strategically placed in industry, one cannot stop its wheels from turning and thus stop capitalism in its tracks.

To give any other impression by claiming that the organization of the ghettos is equivalent to the organization in the factories is only to sow disastrous illusions. The masses are right to reject these illusions, and, instead, try to find some solidarity with white labor — the white rank and file workers who do oppose management. Not only are they involved throughout the country in big strikes together, but the black workers are right to use this as the reason for not isolating themselves from the white workers by lumping them in the same category as the whitey who is boss.

It may appear to the middle class Negro that it is only a question of working out "new lines of communication" with the masses to bring the "message" to them. But the black masses refuse to blind themselves to the inherent faults of leaders — even the uncorrupted ones — who are under the illusion that they can get something for the masses within the system. The masses know that, by any name, these crumbs called "reforms" are, in fact, an acceptance of the system.

Nor are they about to accept a Sunday sermon as a "philosophy of history". Just as black nationalism didn't change its class nature by moving from Elijah Muhammad's "Nation of Islam" to the Christianity of a Black Jesus and a Black Madonna, so black power, exhilarating as that naturally is, will not mean tearing the system up by its roots unless it means mass power, working class power. This is what a black worker meant when he said, "I like to listen to Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael. I like to hear them lay it on the line to whitey. They talk it up good. But that doesn't mean I'll follow them. I have to see things change right here, first", and he pointed to the production line.

Like the human force itself, theory, too, cannot be created out of thin air, no matter how many sermons some leaders and their publicists christen "a philosophy of history". For a philosophy of liberation one must have a view of the movement of history. Theory has its own history, its own roots, its own dynamic. No greater page has been written in American history, for example, than the one by the Abolitionists. Their philosophy of history — to abolish slavery — was the greatest for its time and place. But once that vision exhausted itself with the abolition of chattel slavery by Civil War, not even a Frederick Douglass, who saw the need for political struggles, nor a Wendell Phillips, who saw the need for a new force — white as well as

black labor — could extend the lifetime of the old philosophy of history.

The time had come, with the end of the Civil War, for a new philosophy of history based on a new, united labor force, and a new vision. This new vision was one of man himself who would be whole, ending once and for all the class division between manual and mental labor. Man himself would be that unity of body, heart and mind which could, by its mass movement, reshape the whole course of human history.

That is precisely the greatness of Karl Marx; he never separated mass movement from the underlying philosophy of freedom that would change, in its entirety, the whole course of human development. The very idea of theory was transformed from an intellectual exercise into a historic narrative, which, precisely because it dealt with actions of masses who were doing their own thinking, became, at one and the same time, self-emancipation and Historic Reason.

It will not do to speak of a "philosophy of history" as if that, to use an expression of Marx's, is nothing more than "the evacuating motion" of the intellectual's own head. Unless the philosophy arises out of a historic movement of masses struggling for total freedom, and the whole world is its stage, it can neither answer the urgency of our life and times, nor bear the seeds of the future forward movement of humanity. Because the Carmichael's understand this (but only in part), they are trying to associate "black power" with the struggles of the "third world". The advantage there is that this means the mellowing of the blackness, since there are many oppressed whites, yellows, and whatever other color the human is.

The trouble is that this "third world" that is being associated with "black power" seems to be only that part of it which follows the "Communist line" — and that only at the moment when it is not revolutionary, but more racist than either nationalist or internationalist. At the same time, Carmichael is so preoccupied with "shortcuts to revolution" (guerrilla warfare) that he doesn't even realize that, instead of a shortcut, he is holding on to a short circuit. But the revolution in America is not about to short circuit itself before it has ever gained sufficient momentum to achieve the goal of total freedom.

The advantage of all the talk of black power is its own dynamism, the fact that it is altogether too late now to turn it back to a talk among "leaders". What some call the civil rights doldrums, and others call the fatal division within the black nationalist movement, we, of News & Letters Committees, see as the organization of mass thought by the masses themselves. There is no substitute for this self-organization of thought, any more than there is a substitute for the self-emancipation of the masses. The task is too large, too vital, to be left to intellectuals, or even to a "cadre organization". It has to be a mass activity.

At the same time, the very need for such mass participation will not tolerate mere waiting for "the day of revolution". The need demands daily practice, daily laboring at the task of working out a new relationship

of theory to practice. It is this which transforms the possibility of achieving a new unity of theory and practice into an actual adventure.

The adventure cannot be embarked upon if one separates thought from action. They go together. Having been born in 1955 — the year of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, on the one hand, and the wildcats against Automation, on the other — and having practiced the unity of theory and action, of worker and intellectual, by electing a Negro production worker as our editor, we of NEWS & LETTERS COMMITTEES have never separated our activity in the black revolt against whitey, from our activity in the mass revolt against automated production which exploits both black and white. The purpose of developing this unity of black and white, of theory and practice, of national and international relations, is to construct the means by which the tearing up of the capitalist system by its roots would assure the reconstruction of society on totally new, truly human foundations — free from wars, racism, economic crises and the mutilation of human beings.

Toward this end, we invite you to join with us. The task that still remains to be done can be achieved only by spontaneous actions of the masses themselves. But no Great Walls separate spontaneity from organization. They, too, are related — as is thought to action. Any separation of one from the other would be fatal. The unifying cement for the two is the type of organization which includes the organization of one's thought. That task, too, cannot be achieved without you. We invite you to join with us on the hard road to total freedom.

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"...Some of these uprisings in the northern cities wasn't just only black folk. In the north, there was some integrated riots. Because, let's face it, man, what's hurting the black folks that's without, is hurting the white folks that's without. You see, I'm 100% in the same way that I felt when I started working in the movement, and I say that if the white folk fight for themselves and the black folk fight for themselves, we're going to crumble apart... You know, there's a whole lot of people. There's whites that suffer, there's Indian people that suffer, there's Mexican-American people that suffer, there's Chinese people that suffer. So as black people, we're not the only ones that suffer, and I'm perfectly willing to make this country what it has to be. We're going to have to fight these battles together."

-- FANNIE LOU HAMER

(as quoted in an interview with The Movement, SNCC publication, San Francisco, Cal., October, 1967)