

Malcolm X and Black Nationalism

EDITORIAL COMMENT

Since his break with the Black Muslim movement, Malcolm X has continued to focus his fiery speeches on the need for more militancy in the black liberation struggle. The change in his remarks, if any, has been to emphasize still more the anti-government--the revolutionary-- aspect of his position, and to begin to talk in terms of a political, more than religious, drive for black power.

One of the key ingredients in Malcolm's call for an upsurge of black nationalism is the inevitable triumph of the Negro masses. He effectively derides the eternal-rule attitude of the white ruling class and the fatalism of many Negro leaders who accept the white man's notion of the white man's majority forever overwhelming the black minority.

Malcolm links the U.S. Negro to the growing world movement of colored peoples against U.S. colonialism. He says, "In fact, in most of the thinking and planning of whites in the West today, it's easy to see the fear in their conscious minds and subconscious minds, that the mas-

ses of dark people in the East, who already outnumber them, will continue to increase and multiply and grow until they eventually over-run the people of the West like a human sea, a human tide, a human flood.... You think you outnumber the racial minority in this country; you don't outnumber us all over the earth."

The commercial white press singled out Malcolm's remarks on armed self-defense for special coverage. When Malcolm calls for black rifle clubs, the press howls with hysterical headlines designed to fan the flames of hatred of "rednecks," north and south, and to terrify southern "moderates" and northern liberals.

In an effort to frighten Negroes away from Malcolm's call for a Black Nationalist Party, the press warns demagogically that "only violence will result" from Malcolm's militancy (as if everything has been nice and peaceful for the past hundred years!). The white ruling circles have let their press run wild with plea after plea from "established" Negro leaders for "non-violence" and "responsi-

bility."

Despite all the sensationalism and one-sided reporting, Malcolm's call for self-defense is only a part of his program, and it is not so new. Robert Williams established a rifle club and self-defense techniques in Monroe, N.C., quietly and successfully defending the Negro community there against Ku Klux Klan attacks (until the combined assault from southern racists and the FBI succeeded in driving Williams to exile in Cuba).

Birmingham Negroes, too, fed up with the slow pace and no-pace of progress and beginning to recognize the collusion of the federal government with the Dixiecrats, resorted to armed defense to protect their lives and homes. Recent demonstrations in Maryland and Nashville, Tenn. have also seen Negroes fight back--although in a limited way--against police terror.

The press is obviously trying to create an hysterical reaction to Malcolm's words in an effort to frighten the black masses and stop the growth of the self-defense trend. But the headlines may boomerang as more black men and women learn about Malcolm's call to stand up and fight

Especially significant in Malcolm's arsenal is his often clear estimate of the federal government and its alliance with the Dixiecrats. Referring to the control that the Dixiecrats hold over Congress and the White House, he says, "In fact, when you see how many of the committeemen are from the south, you can see that we have nothing but a cracker government in Washington, D. C. And their head is a cracker President."

On nationalism, he says: "My philosophy is black nationalism, my economic philosophy is black national-

ism, my social philosophy is black nationalism... to me this means that the political philosophy of black nationalism is that which is designed to encourage our people, the black people, to gain complete control over the politics and politicians of our own community.... We should gain complete economic control over the economy of our community, the businesses and other things that create employment, so that we can provide employment for our own people, instead of having to picket and boycott and beg other people for a job."

These words, while militant, nonetheless raise as many questions as they answer: Who does Malcolm mean when he says "We should gain complete economic control?" And what kind of economic system does Malcolm propose to control? Would he simply substitute black bosses for white--or does he propose that power be put in the hands of black workers? Or doesn't he distinguish between black workers and black bosses? In his criticisms of those who "picket and boycott and beg... for a job," does Malcolm reject pickets and boycotts as tactics? In the months ahead, he will have to answer these questions, among others, if he is to win active mass support.

But Malcolm's grasp of the role of the federal government stands in sharp contrast to other Negro leaders who still preach reliance on the "cracker" in Washington, and the hope that somehow the federal government will be pushed into making important concessions. Malcolm's call for black political power, although vague, is in contrast to those integrationists who see ending oppression within the confines of the white man's capitalist economy.

However, Malcolm is not the only black leader to put forward this new attitude in recent months. Many Negro

leaders are coming to grips with the failure of the integration movement to win anything from the federal government except platitudes and jail sentences. Many are coming to see that the so-called civil rights bill, bogged down in a filibuster, is actually a giant fraud, both in what it says (or doesn't say) and in the way it's being used as a political football.

This new approach is reflected by the forces around Gloria Richardson in Cambridge, Md., Stanley Branche and the Freedom Now Committee in Chester, Pa., Lawrence Landry in Chicago, the "ad hockers" in San Francisco (see last month's PL), and the Brooklyn CORE rebels and Rev. Milton Galamison in New York. While these forces are not all the same and the leaders are not all of equal ability or consistency, they share many of the above-mentioned attitudes, as does Malcolm X.

The unification of all such forces around a clear program would be a big blow against the ruling class, and an uplift to the entire black freedom movement. The recent formation in Washington of an organization called ACT, under the chairmanship of Landry and with the participation of most of the above-mentioned forces as well as some SNCC leaders, could be a big step in the direction of that unity.

In this regard, Malcolm X's position is not clear. How, for example, will he reconcile the desire and ability of the Negro masses to act now with his perspectives for self-determination? Can he reconcile his opposition to integration with his verbal support for militant integrationists and his participation in ACT?

Malcolm's statement that he will be the black man's Billy Graham seems to put him at odds with some form of mass action to secure the black revolution of which he speaks. Surely Malcolm himself doesn't believe independent black power, political or economic, can be preached into being.

At this point, Malcolm's main pitch is towards the ballot. He says the only way to avoid a violent revolution is by the ballot: "Why is America in a position to bring about a bloodless revolution? Because the Negro in this country holds the balance of power and if the Negro... were given what the Constitution says he's supposed to have, the added power of the Negro in this country would sweep all the racists and segregationists out of office.... It would wipe out the southern segregationists that now control America's foreign policy as well as America's domestic policy.... The black man has to be given full use of the ballot in every one of the 50 states. But if the black man doesn't

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get the ballot, then you are going to be faced with another man who forgets the ballot and starts using the bullet."

(Perhaps it is the smell of the ballot that has brought Adam Clayton Powell to the edges of Malcolm's activities. Or perhaps it is Powell's assignment from the power structure to use his demagogy to guarantee that the nationalist movement becomes nothing more than an appendage to the electoral system.)

In the final analysis, Malcolm's policies will be tested by deeds and by the ability of black nationalism to attract large numbers of Negro workers, a feat so far unachieved by the integration movement, or by existing nationalist groups.

To accomplish this, Malcolm will have to develop and explain his identification with the world-wide anti-imperialist front, a large part of which has transcended nationalism and adopted internationalism and the class outlook that goes with it. Moreover, he, together with others, will have to demonstrate the concrete advantages of black nationalism at home and organize masses of black workers to fight the white rulers (this implies a certain amount of differentiation between white rulers and white masses)--the only kind of fight which will lead to freedom.

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