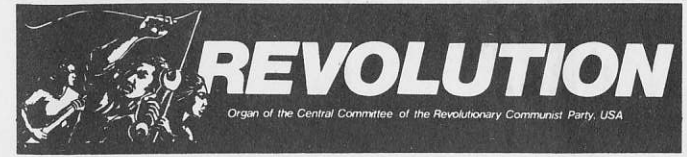


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**King Legacy:
Reformism and Capitulation**

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King Legacy: Reformism And Capitulation

This spring marks the tenth anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King. It is also the tenth anniversary of the mighty rebellions that rocked 131 cities after his death, shaking the rulers of this country as no uprising had ever shaken them before.

Those massive uprisings of Black people symbolized the fact that the development of their struggle and consciousness had long since left King behind. For a number of years before his death King had ceased to play any progressive role at all in that struggle, becoming a reactionary force within it. Developing revolutionary forces such as Malcolm X, SNCC and the Black Panther Party had denounced King's outlook and political line and the harm he was doing to the Black struggle.

King rose to fame at a time when the Black movement was focused on ending Jim Crow segregation. But before King's death, that movement had already grown into the Black liberation movement, a more conscious movement of the oppressed against the oppressor, which aimed not only at unjust laws but increasingly at all the actual (not just legal) inequality and discrimination faced by the masses of Black people who are part of the working class, and at the system that keeps Blacks

oppressed as a people.

As the flames of rebellion spread, Martin Luther King became the system's fireman, trying to throw cold water on the Black liberation movement and stubbornly calling upon Black people to turn back in their struggle.

Despite the fact that King's role had begun to be questioned by growing numbers of the Black masses, still it was not widely and clearly understood. This has meant that after his assassination the ruling class has been able to use the legend around him that they helped create, just as sections of the monopoly capitalist rulers of this country had used him during his lifetime. Today, despite the lull in the Black people's struggle after the 1960s, the ruling class still senses the powderkeg represented by the Black masses and has learned that it cannot count on Black people silently enduring the abuses they continue to suffer.

The bourgeoisie has used the occasion of the tenth anniversary of King's death to try to breathe new life into his legend, to fool many people too young to remember and confuse others who were more familiar with his real role, in an attempt to rob the people of the real lessons of the Black people's struggle in the '60s and prevent future rebellion.

Civil Rights Movement Breaks Out

The upsurge of the civil rights movement in the 1950s was closely linked with important economic changes in the position of Black people who were being pushed off the land by the mechanization of agriculture following World War 2 and drawn into

the factories of the North and South. The plantation system in the South had been the economic basis of segregation, which served the purpose of keeping the sharecropper chained to the land under the thumb of the plantation owner. Now this economic system was falling apart as modern capitalist mechanized agriculture became more profitable in the South as well as elsewhere.

Because so many Blacks had been freed from the tyranny of the landowner only to face continued oppression, in part because of the experiences of many Black people who had served in the armed forces during World War 2 and Korea, and in part because of the influence of the tremendous anti-colonial and liberation movements shaking Africa and the rest of the world at that time, a mood of resistance and defiance was growing strong among Black people. Despite a series of infamous lynchings, protests against segregation were beginning to break out across the South.

The ruling class was determined to maintain the walls of segregation, but it saw itself forced to make a few small concessions, which only made Black people more determined to win fundamental change.

It was during this period, when the U.S. was trying to gobble up the former colonies of Britain, France, etc., and turn them into American neo-colonies, that the U.S. imperialists were forced to operate under the mask of "anti-colonialism" as well as that standard ruse "democracy." In 1954 the Supreme Court ruled "separate but equal" segregation in schools (and by implication all such segregation) unconstitutional. The Constitution had not changed, but the needs of the bourgeoisie had.

This was the stage onto which stepped Martin Luther King. He emerged from a family of Baptist preachers in Atlanta which was closely tied to the Black bourgeoisie and upper petty bourgeoisie there. His father's church, Ebenezer Baptist, was one of the biggest and most fashionable Black churches in town. In fact, M. L. King Senior was a member of the board of directors of the Atlanta Citizens Trust, a leading Black bank. M. L. King Junior's education took place at typically upper-crust Black colleges and at institutions where the bourgeoisie trains its own (like Harvard).

During his college years he was influenced by the ferment then brewing among Black people, as well as by the philosophy of nonviolence which had been developed by Mahatma Gandhi, a representative of the bourgeoisie in India, who had used it as a way to mobilize the masses of Indian people against British colonialism to win independence without "going too far" and bringing about a social upheaval that would threaten the Indian bourgeoisie or imperialism.

Shortly after King moved to his first ministry in Montgomery, Alabama, a wave of Black struggle broke out there whose tide quickly carried him to national prominence. A Black woman, tired after a hard day's work, refused to give up her bus seat as required by segregationist law and was arrested. Half a dozen women like her had already done the same in the previous months, as the Black community in Montgomery strained against segregation's chains. Black businessmen and social leaders in Montgomery saw this incident as the signal for them to take action. They organized the Montgomery Improvement Association and chose the eloquent Dr. King as their chief spokesman.

For a year, Montgomery's Black working people, who'd made up the overwhelming majority of bus riders, refused to take the bus. Sometimes they rode in car pools with cars provided by Black businessmen and churches, sometimes their desperate employers were forced to pick them up, and often they walked mile after mile, day after day, standing up to threats and attacks. For this reason the boycott could not be broken.

On the contrary, it was inspiring and igniting the Black people throughout the South. After a year of this constant battle, the Supreme Court stepped in to declare Alabama's segregated buses illegal. The news media catapulted King into national prominence. He was invited to preach at one of the most prestigious wealthy white churches in New York and he appeared in Madison Square Garden at the side of Eleanor Roosevelt, widow of former president FDR and patron saint of the liberals.

Freedom Rides

1960 and 1961 were the years of sit-ins and Freedom Rides. Beginning in Greensboro, N.C. and spreading with the speed of a burning fuse, Black college students began sitting in at all-white lunch counters, demanding service and getting arrested. Blacks and some white supporters from all over would board buses for major cities in the South, and walk into all-white waiting rooms to be arrested. In several cities these Freedom Riders were met by mobs which burned the buses and beat them mercilessly.

Many demanded that the federal government intervene to protect the Freedom Riders and uphold the federal law against segregation in interstate

transit. But no action came. More recently, it has been revealed that the FBI was in at least some cases responsible for informing local Klansmen of when the Freedom Riders were going to arrive and was even involved in organizing the beatings, which at any rate were widely and openly supported by the local business bigwigs and public officials. In Montgomery, for instance, local radio stations broadcast invitations to these lynch parties over the air.

King was never directly involved in the sit-ins and Freedom Rides. But in a sense they were associated with him. The Montgomery boycott had a big effect in inspiring these actions, and many of the first sit-inners and Freedom Riders were very influenced by King's idea that the way to protest unjust laws was to organize people to break them and then submit to arrest. In fact, this technique was very effective in exposing segregation and the bloody repression of Black people on which it rested. The civil rights movement was inflaming people across the U.S.

But a series of events in Albany, Ga. showed how King's outlook, political line and methods were already coming into sharp conflict with the development of the struggle.

After the Montgomery bus boycott, King formed a South-wide organization of ministers, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which set up headquarters in Atlanta and began to lead some actions there. Under the sponsorship of King and SCLC, in 1960 a group of students and youth who had been involved in the sit-ins and Freedom Rides formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). At first SNCC was very much under the influence of King's phil-

osophy of nonviolence and certainly its stated goals and demands were no different. Yet it was to develop in a direction completely opposite to the direction King was developing in.

In Albany, when Freedom Riders were arrested SNCC members went out into the Black community and began to organize a series of mass demonstrations to protest. These mass marches and rallies didn't exactly follow the pattern set by King in Montgomery and Atlanta. They represented wider efforts than before to draw the Black masses into struggle widely and deeply, not just to be "the troops" as in Montgomery or just to support those few in a position to invite arrest.

King dropped into Albany from Atlanta, taking over the limelight and basically the leadership as well. His first step was to announce he would march, get himself arrested and stay in jail until the local authorities agreed to the demand to end segregation in public places. In other words, the focus shifted immediately from the masses of Black people to Martin Luther King, who was going to win it all for the masses.

He was jailed all right, but left his cell two days later, before the affair could be really embarrassing to local authorities. On the promise of future negotiations—in a month—King called a moratorium on the mass demonstrations. Instead, he tried to organize an economic boycott which proved far less successful than in Montgomery.

When the pregnant wife of a local Black leader was beaten unconscious by police, Blacks rose up against this outrage and taught some cops a lesson. King declared a "day of penance" for this sin of Black violence. The momentum and the spirit of the campaign were broken. King gave up and

retreated back to Atlanta, with Albany's public facilities, movie houses, etc., as segregated as ever.

The Kennedy Connection

King's approach was to mobilize the masses just enough to put the heat on so that he could "negotiate" with the local bigshots, while doing his best to keep the people from "getting out of hand" and blowing the whole game. Increasing this second aspect—holding the Black masses back—was to become more important to King, because in doing this he was increasingly getting powerful support from the ruling class—support that was given on the condition that the masses be kept under restraint and the Black people involved played by "the rules of the game" no matter what.

In jail on a minor charge in connection with demonstrations against segregation in Atlanta, only a few months before the 1960 Presidential election—and just before Albany—King got a phone call from Robert F. Kennedy who voiced his brother John's support. King was released. He kept his part of the bargain by calling a "temporary lull" in the mass protests. With the aid of Black voters who had supported JFK in large part because of his brother's dramatic phone call to King, the Kennedys came to Washington.

From then on a pattern was set. There would be protests against segregation. King would come to town. A federal judge would issue an injunction against mass action. Often this judge would be a Kennedy appointee—JFK's first appointments on taking office were three infamous outright segregationists named to federal judgeships in the South. King would plead for the people to obey the injunc-

tion, on the basis of promised federal support against the local authorities. Once, when people begged him to carry a protest through despite an injunction, he replied that the civil rights movement could never go against the federal government because "we have no other friend in the South." This pattern was repeated over and over again.

Birmingham in 1963 was the opposite of Albany. It was "very successful" in the eyes of many, where Albany had been clearly a failure. Yet King played the same role in both cities, and if the movement hit harder in Birmingham, it was because it went against King.

Birmingham was the most segregated city in the U.S. and its segregation was openly and nakedly proclaimed. King was jailed in a protest march. JFK had him released. To embarrass the sheriff and the city government, SCLC organized a "Children's Crusade"—thousands of Black youth ages six to sixteen who marched against segregation in defiance of police orders. But the authorities had no shame at all when it came to people protesting oppression and threatening their rule.

The infamous pig "Bull" Conner had his men unleash fierce attack dogs on the children and beat them to the ground, while high-pressure water-hoses tore their flesh. After two days of this, the anger of Birmingham's Black people exploded in his face as people fought back and fought back hard. At night the ruling class's cops and other cowardly thugs who were used to getting away with murder in the darkness were given a strong taste of hell. By day thousands of Black people filled the downtown business districts armed with stones, bottles and sticks. "SCLC has lost control of the crowd," one observer noted.

Something had to be done about this. Douglas Dillon, Secretary of the Treasury and a member of one of the biggest capitalist families in his own right, and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, who had been head of Ford Motor Company, flew in to meet with the local kingpins of finance who ran Birmingham. The government took control of the negotiations SCLC was conducting with the "local business leaders" (Bull Conner's masters).

Even after the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional most of the laws under which the demonstrators had been arrested, the Black rebellion grew. People wanted an end to oppression, not federal fireworks. A wave of nighttime firebombings directed against Blacks triggered more fighting against police. The federal authorities, who before had complained that their "hands were tied" and they couldn't do anything to protect the protestors from the police, now moved very quickly to send federal troops to Birmingham and put down the Black movement. The local "business leaders" agreed to drop some segregation in public facilities and some discrimination in hiring.

King was close to the top of his career. He had been in the spotlight the whole time, receiving the adulation of the media. While in jail he'd written his famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail," which put forward his idea that Black people should meet oppression and terror with disobedience of "unjust laws"—although King failed to add that he only considered local laws unjust and never went against federal law—and non-violence and "love" for the cops, courts, segregationist bigshots, etc. "Forgiveness" and "self-discipline" would bring Blacks freedom—and they always had to prove

themselves "better" than those who were tormenting them. He denounced Blacks who fought with the cops, denounced Black violence against the oppressor as equally bad as the oppressor's violence.

But it was the fact that Birmingham gave rise to one of the "worst riots" in Southern history—a great rebellion—that gave the struggle in that city its impact. Earlier that year JFK had told King that he just couldn't sponsor a Civil Rights Act that year, supposedly because Congress would never agree. But in the wake of Birmingham, Kennedy quickly changed his tune. He introduced the Civil Rights Act shortly after, and Congress agreed to it a year later.

March on Washington

Also in 1963, King played a major role in the famous March on Washington. For several years there had been a growing sentiment among Black people for a mass demonstration in Washington, an action which would go beyond hitting at local authorities to hitting at the whole government by picketing the White House, sitting-in in the halls of Congress and so on.

Despite this mass sentiment—and despite the fact that hundreds of thousands of Black and white people came to Washington, not knowing what kind of attacks they might face but determined to fight for justice—the March on Washington that took place had no fight in it at all. It was more of a stroll than a march. Under the leadership of A. Phillip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, the NAACP and Martin Luther King, the whole thing was turned into a lukewarm pep rally for JFK's Civil Rights Act.

When JFK at first opposed the idea of this ac-

tion, Randolph replied, "The Negroes are already in the streets. It is very likely impossible to get them off. If they are bound to be in the streets in any case, is it not better that they be led by organizations dedicated to civil rights and disciplined by struggle rather than to leave them to other leaders who care neither about civil rights nor nonviolence?" In other words, since Black people were determined to fight for their freedom and couldn't be stopped, these "moderate" paid hacks like Randolph and demagogues like King had to pretend to stand with the movement and take part in it in order to hold it back—or else it might run over King, Kennedy and all the rest.

King's speech that day spoke movingly about Black oppression and the dream of equality and an end to divisions between nationalities, a dream shared by uncounted millions of Blacks and whites as well. Without his ability to touch these chords, King would have been nothing. But his speech really had little content beyond dreams. And in the real world, King stood with the others in forbidding the head of SNCC to even mildly criticize Kennedy in his speech. Deleted from the SNCC speech were the words, "In all good conscience, we cannot support the Administration's civil rights bill, for it is too little too late."

In this period King was to hit the top as far as his standing with the bourgeoisie was concerned—and begin to slide sharply among the more aroused and conscious Black masses. After the Harlem "riot" of 1964, one of the first of a growing series, King was called to New York by the Mayor to quiet things down. King was jeered and eggs were thrown at him in the streets, and he quickly left town. A year later, after the historic Watts

rebellion, more or less the same thing happened. King had as good or even better relations with LBJ as he'd had with Kennedy—but large sections of the Black masses were no longer so interested in King's message.

Many bourgeois authorities have had to take note of this, saying that it was because the Black struggle was moving North. But while it's true that the cities of the North began to explode, the cities of the South exploded too. The real problem was that the nature of the Black struggle itself was changing, moving more and more into open confrontation with the government, the ruling class behind it and their system, and this was true in all parts of the country.

SNCC

While King was flying around the country making speeches and raising funds, SNCC was sending organizers into the most backward and Klan-ridden counties to go door to door and farmshack to farmshack, drawing in and relying on the masses themselves instead of gambling everything on making national news with the arrest of a famous, larger-than-life saint.

Part of this involved Black people trying to register to vote—and raising hell in large numbers when the local authorities tried to stop them. Since much of this was in rural areas of Mississippi and Alabama, including many places where the sharecropping system which segregation was based upon was still very much alive, it led to violent confrontations with local exploiters for whom keeping Black people in chains was an immediate matter of economic life and death. In this campaign SNCC

did not preach nonviolence. In fact, although most civil rights workers went unarmed, the houses where they slept were often guarded by a car full of sharecroppers with shotguns. Otherwise, far more would most likely have been killed.

For the bourgeoisie as a whole, denial of the right to vote, like other aspects of segregation, was very useful in terms of preserving the oppression of Black people. Still, since voting is part of the sham which the capitalists use to fool the people and maintain their rule, they could give in on this point without weakening their power—in fact, it seemed that it would weaken them more if they didn't make a few concessions.

But militant, mass struggle against injustice of any kind couldn't be tolerated since there was no telling where it would lead. So the federal government worked quietly and behind the scenes to put a stop to this movement, even while posing as its best friend. As part of the terror campaign against Blacks, three civil rights workers were taken from their car one night in Philadelphia, Mississippi and murdered by the local police and the Klan. Although the FBI had the Klan riddled with agents and informers, as usual it did nothing to prevent the murders.

At the end of summer '64, a delegation of sharecroppers and other Mississippi Blacks and civil rights organizers formed the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) to go to the Democratic Convention and demand that they be seated instead of the avowedly segregationist regular Mississippi Democratic Party (MDP). Since the MDP was widely considered at odds with LBJ and the national Democratic Party anyway, many expected that the MFDP would be seated. But that

would have given too much encouragement to those who were rocking the boat.

On LBJ's initiative, Hubert Humphrey arranged a highly publicized "compromise"—two of the MFDP delegates would be seated alongside the regular Mississippi delegation. King, who'd lent his name to the MFDP and come to the convention as part of the MFDP delegation, tried hard to get them to accept Humphrey's offer. But the MFDP delegates turned their backs and walked out. It was an insult, a slap in the face, when what they'd been demanding wasn't really so much after all.

King had been mockingly called "de Lawd" by many SNCC members ever since Albany because of his empty demagoguery and really backward role. Now more and more it seemed as if the smell of the oppressor had rubbed off on King.

King's Last Years

There were more years left to King. In Selma in 1965, he did his usual act, conveniently absent the day that police attacked the head of the march, conveniently present to use his full weight to get people to accept a federal injunction against mass marching, and finally off in a blaze of glory after leading a parade of movie stars, politicians and bigshots—leaving the people in Selma to figure out how to put back together the pieces and rebuild the long-term struggle there. At one point King's aides had even pulled guns on SNCC members who had argued against King's tactics. Apparently non-violence was for the masses, not for King.

In Chicago he held endless negotiations with Mayor Daley, and bragged about the formation of a city-wide tenants union based among Blacks that

never really got organized. When Black people rioted because, despite Daley's promises, cops still attacked Black kids for turning on fire hydrants in the summer, King was ferried around by the police in a squad car to stop it. He couldn't. Increasingly he devoted himself to speaking engagements and overseas junkets.

When he was assassinated, King was in Memphis, trying to run his routine in a situation where a Black sanitation workers' strike had led to mass protests and a federal injunction. As usual, there was a fire and King was expected to put it out. Many Black people involved in the protests either jeered or ignored King.

His last speeches show a growing despair. If he often seemed preoccupied by death, it may be that the likelihood he faced of a slow political death had a lot to do with it. Or maybe he realized just how expendable he'd become? When he died, *Time* magazine, which had twice named him "man of the year," remarked that "King was dangerously close to slipping from a prophet to a patsy."

Some people say that King was actually changing, becoming more revolutionary, during the last year of his life, taking up Vietnam and "economic issues," and that was why he was killed. This is mistaking changes in what King was tailing after for changes in King. In taking up "economic issues," King was simply trying to adapt himself to changing conditions in the struggle and channel it into the most narrow reformism, LBJ's "War on Poverty" programs and trade unionism. Such things were the system's phony answers to a fact obvious to increasing millions: even with many legal barriers removed, Blacks still face heavy national oppression on top of the exploitation the

overwhelming majority of Blacks face as part of the overall U.S. working class.

As for King's opposition to the war, this came only in the spring of 1967, when many bourgeois politicians representing powerful ruling class interests were also making speeches against it because of what they saw as the overall interests of the bourgeoisie. King's stand of opposing the war on the grounds of pacifism—which makes you wonder why it took him so long—contrasts sharply with Malcolm X's firm anti-war stand in the very early years of Vietnam, which linked the Black people's struggle and the Vietnamese struggle as part of a common struggle worldwide against imperialism.

Why Was King Killed?

If King was no danger to the ruling class, if he was in fact their servant, why was he killed? We won't bother here with the theory that James Earl Ray killed King on his own—others have dealt with it in detail and few believe it anyway. Much has been made of the fact that FBI Chief J. Edgar Hoover hated King, that he was apparently blackmailing King by threatening to release tapes of his private life, and so on. The TV series *King* basically admitted by implication that Hoover was up to his neck in King's murder. But this doesn't explain why Hoover was protected in doing this, because he obviously couldn't have gotten away with it unless he had extremely powerful backing.

The fact is that the U.S. ruling class has been torn by internal contradictions—conflicts of economic interest and of policy—that have many times come to blood. The killing of the two Kennedys was part of this, so it is not surprising that

King, who was so much identified with them, should go the same way. Although the exact nature and terms of this conflict are not clear, certainly a lot of it had to do with exactly how to attack the masses and preserve bourgeois rule. Should it be the kind of sneak attack carried out by the Kennedys, who used lots of sugarcoated poison and Martin Luther King types misleading the masses? Or should it be more open attack, naked terror and force?

Lest it be taken that this is a conflict between "democracy" and fascism, let it be remembered that Kennedy and Johnson never hesitated to send in troops. Kennedy, not Hoover, ordered King's phone tapped.

There was a contradiction about how to treat the civil rights movement, especially at first, because the big bourgeoisie as a whole was not dependent on *legal* segregation for its rule or its profits, although this was not true of every rich capitalist and landowner. But the more the movement grew into a Black liberation struggle demanding an end to the oppression of Black people in all its forms—and the more this revolt turned into a call to revolution for all those exploited and oppressed by the capitalists—the more the whole bourgeoisie united to stop this movement cold.

Using King and giving lip service and token reforms to Black demands while opposing and attacking the real struggle for liberation was the line taken by the bourgeoisie as a whole. In killing King other bourgeois forces were taking aim at this line, but at the same time this act revealed how narrow the differences were. For the Black movement was proving increasingly strong in the face of tricks and bait, and Martin Luther King

wasn't doing his masters much good anymore anyway. Alive, he was growing more exposed daily, while dead he has proved extremely useful as a martyr and "nonviolent saint."

King's killing must be distinguished from the murder of Malcolm X and Fred Hampton, who were shot down, like so many lesser-known men, because they represented nothing but danger for the bourgeoisie. No big corporations sponsored any TV programs on the tenth anniversary of their assassinations. They are revolutionary martyrs of the people's struggle and not buzzards who got knocked down when the wind shifted.

King's assassination shows just how vicious and ruthless the ruling class is, even with those who have loyally served it, let alone with those who stand up to it, whom it moves to crush without a thought. There is an interpenetration between these two different types of political murder, because killing King was meant to throw terror into the hearts of all who dared to rebel—after all, if they'd kill *even* the pacifist reformist King. . . . But the massive rebellions that erupted in Black communities from coast to coast showed that the Black masses would not be cowed into submission by the terror of the bourgeoisie.

King's nonviolence was not and cannot be treated simply as a mistaken philosophy, for it was part and parcel of his reformism and reactionary role. It was bad enough and disgusting to preach that people should love their enemies and turn the other cheek when they are being beaten and murdered. But this pacifism was part of a whole political outlook that viewed the rage of the masses against their oppression as "useful" only if it was confined to the safe and harmless channels bourgeois

democracy provides. King opposed revolutionary violence because he opposed revolution. While there were people who admired King's pacifism, few of these actually practiced it themselves, especially after the first few confrontations when the police and other reactionaries like the KKK proved that they would unleash their reactionary violence whether people fought back or not.

The Black Bourgeoisie

In this King expressed the outlook and interests of the Black bourgeoisie, a class centered on Black insurance companies, funeral parlors, banks and so on, and the ministers who work for them. Especially in the '50s and early '60s, the Black bourgeoisie saw its own interests very much tied up with the developing mass movement, since many aspects of the oppression of Black people make life hard for them as well, and in this movement they saw a golden opportunity to advance their own economic and political power. But their outlook towards the masses was exactly that of King: they saw the mass movement as something to pressure the white capitalists into giving the Black bourgeoisie a better deal.

Because of the inherently conservative nature of its class interests, on the whole the Black bourgeoisie and many of the Black petty bourgeois forces tied to it wavered at best and increasingly capitulated outright to the imperialists, especially as the Black liberation struggle unfolded. There were other political trends within the Black bourgeoisie as well, such as the NAACP which tried to keep its differences with the ruling class confined exclusively to the bourgeoisie's courts.

Others were more "militant"-thinking for a time. But overall, King's nonviolence, his emphasis on loving your enemies, and his refusal to distinguish exactly who the enemy was—making it white people in general, a disguised form of narrow nationalism, despite his professed concern for brotherhood—all of this suited the interests and outlook of the Black bourgeoisie.

It suited the imperialists as well, who were doing their best to build up and buy the Black upper crust in order to mislead the masses in a situation where the ruling class had few other options.

This policy certainly didn't begin with King and it didn't end with him either. Today, when the bourgeoisie is forced by economic crisis to take back many of the crumbs it was forced to give up by the struggle of the '60s, it continues to build up some Black business interests and certain forces among the Black upper petty bourgeoisie as a stopper for the Black masses, even while the blind workings of capitalism in crisis are steadily weakening and threatening these forces and may cause them to lash out against the imperialists.

King's goals and those of the mass movement were always different, even when he played a positive role in the mass movement, because even the civil rights movement's demands for equality had a fundamentally different meaning for those who want to be equal to the masters with whom they compete than it had for the Black working people. King once declared that the Black people's movement "isn't a movement to overthrow, it's a movement to get in." This idea of "wanting to get in"—of wanting a piece of the "American dream," of "making the system work for Black people" was a common wrong idea among the masses. But such

is really the dream of the Black bourgeoisie, whose interests lie in making room for themselves in the capitalist system.

The ruling class maintains—and must maintain—the oppression of Black people as a people because of the superprofits this allows them to squeeze out of the exploitation of Black workers, who make up the overwhelming bulk of Black people. The more the civil rights movement developed, the more it became clear that formal equality—an end to legal segregation, etc.—could not change the fundamental oppression of Black people, because the imperialist system is incapable of doing away with discrimination and bringing about real equality.

Mao's Statement

Shortly after King's assassination, Mao Tsetung made his famous statement "In Support of the Afro-American Struggle Against Violent Repression." It begins,

Some days ago, Martin Luther King, the Afro-American clergyman, was suddenly assassinated by the U.S. imperialists. Martin Luther King was an exponent of non-violence. Nevertheless, the U.S. imperialists did not on that account show any tolerance towards him, but used counter-revolutionary violence and killed him in cold blood. This has taught the broad masses of the black people in the United States a profound lesson. It has touched off a new storm in their struggle against violent repression sweeping well over a hundred cities in the United States, a storm such as has never taken place before in the history of that country. It shows that an extremely powerful revolutionary

force is latent in the more than twenty million black Americans.

Mao went on to call this "a new clarion call to all the exploited and oppressed people in the United States to fight against the barbarous rule of the monopoly capitalist class."

As the *Programme* of the RCP points out,

Especially as it developed from simply a civil rights movement into a Black liberation movement aimed more squarely at the imperialist system, it became the main force pushing ahead all other struggles against the capitalist rulers at that time. At a time when the working class movement was weakened and without a revolutionary vanguard Party, the Black liberation struggle rekindled revolutionary spirit among people of all nationalities, and raised again the question of the overthrow of imperialism.

But this struggle could not accomplish the overthrow of imperialism and the real liberation of Black people . . . because the source of this oppression is capitalist rule. The Black people's struggle alone cannot resolve the basic contradiction of capitalism—between the working class and the capitalist class—the contradiction from which all of its evils arise.

Thus, the advance of the Black people's struggle, in bringing up the question of revolution, has also brought up the fact that the working class as a whole must lead in making revolution, and that the Black people's struggle must and will be developed as part of the overall working class struggle to overthrow capitalism. (Pp. 23-4.)

The Black movement of the '60s helped rekindle the spirit of revolution among the working class as a whole. It gave birth to organizations such as the

Black Panther Party which went far beyond previous groups like SNCC in putting armed revolution against capitalism on the agenda and helped create the conditions for the later formation of the RCP. Still, this movement could not develop past a certain point in the absence of such a party and in the absence of the further development of the workers' movement. It is the nature of the people's struggle that it advances not in a straight line, but in waves, and the greatest success of the Black struggle of the 1960s is that it made a tremendous contribution to preparing the conditions for a future, successful revolutionary confrontation.

Of course the bourgeoisie has no interest in seeing things that way and certainly needs to convince people that the whole thing was a tragic waste and a failure. On the one hand they try to use the fact that Blacks and other minorities find themselves in a position today as hard as that of a decade ago and growing worse to "prove" that the struggle was useless. On the other hand the bourgeoisie is trying to resurrect everything that was backward and useful to them in that decade in order to limit and sabotage the struggle against oppression that constantly breaks out.

It is true that today things have changed, including the mood of Black and other people for whom the question of how to sum up the '60s is extremely tied into the question of what can and must be done about the conditions of today. That's why the bourgeoisie has done so much to revive the spirit and legend of Martin Luther King, and why his role must be scientifically and ruthlessly analyzed from the revolutionary point of view of Marxism and more widely exposed among Black and other people awakening to political struggle

against the imperialist ruling class.

But in the wake of the bourgeoisie's attempts to revive Martin Luther King, certain so-called "communists" have tried to associate themselves with these efforts in order to revive themselves.

Most nauseating of these attempts is that of the Communist Party Marxist-Leninist (CPML), and the October League before it. They loudly promote King and had even lauded his heirs who are alive today like Jesse Jackson and Hosea Williams for several years before it proved too embarrassing. In the April 10, 1978 issue of the CPML's *the Call*, a headline declares "King Was a Pathbreaker for Black Liberation." In this the CPML "explains" that "While his illusions about the capitalist system and the path of non-violence at times allowed him to be used as a buffer against the revolutionary forces in the liberation struggle, King, especially in his last years, took a stand alongside the oppressed Black and working masses."

As we've pointed out, King did his best to close the path to Black liberation and his "standing with" the Black working people consisted mainly in standing behind them and calling them back. For the CPML, it seems better to stand with the illusions among the masses, including illusions that the bourgeoisie itself is promoting, than to point out that what King represented was in contradiction to the revolutionary development of the mass movement itself. Of course this is consistent with the CPML's general political line of appealing to what is backward among the masses to pull the mass struggles of today under their own reformist leadership. It's typical of the CPML's opportunism that they try to paint themselves as the true inheritors of King's legacy—as sort of "com-

munist'' Martin Luther Kings—but it's really quite fitting. And of course the CPML is not the only one fishing in that particular cesspool right now, as the Workers Viewpoint Organization contends with them for the mantle of King.

The working class is the only force in society that has absolutely no interests in maintaining any forms of oppression, and which must take up and finally end the oppression of Black people and other minorities as well as wipe out all inequality in order to win its own emancipation. For this reason, the alliance of the oppressed nationalities and the working class is the solid core of the united front against imperialism, which is the working class' strategy for revolution in this country. This united front must be broad, including bringing Black petty bourgeois forces as far and as broadly as possible into the revolutionary camp and winning over or neutralizing as much of the Black bourgeoisie as possible.

But in order to build such an alliance, it is necessary to bring forward at all times the line and outlook of the working class and its revolutionary interests, both in building the movement of the multinational working class as a force leading the struggle against all oppression and in mobilizing the broad masses of the oppressed nationalities in the struggle against their oppression as an ally of the working class in the revolutionary struggle for proletarian revolution. Denouncing, exposing and explaining the role of those like King who represent attempts to move things in the opposite direction is an important part of building this revolutionary united front. ■

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