

## CHAPTER V

## HUEY LONG'S ASSASSINATION

THE assassination of Huey Long was an event of far-reaching political significance. It is all the more astonishing, therefore, to see how superficially the American newspapers have dealt with this event. We can by no means be satisfied with their treatment of the case. We must go deeper to see what it means for the political development of the country.

Surely it was an ill omen for the presidential election of 1936 when one of the outstanding candidates, a national political figure, a center of controversy in Congress and the country at large, met his death from a gun in the hands of a political assassin in the very halls of government. If the presidential campaign should develop further along the line indicated by this prelude, our country indeed faces bitter days.

Can the assassination of Long be considered in any other sense? Is it possible to consider it a mere incident disassociated from the main stream of American political life? In my opinion, this is impossible.

What were the forces that contributed to the preparation and carrying through of this political assassination? The assassin undoubtedly came out of the poisoned atmosphere of the decaying landed aristocracy of Louisiana, which was being pressed to the wall and exterminated by the new aggressive bourgeois clique, of which Long had been the principal instrument. It would be, however, very short-sighted to consider this the full explanation. These decaying remnants of the older ruling cliques in Louisiana, smashed and defeated, without serious hope of an effective come-back, were

merely used as tools in the hands of much more important, more sinister forces of a national character.

There is no question that the dominant influences in both the Republican and Democratic Parties had come to an agreement that Huey Long with his "share-the-wealth" demagogy had become a menace to the sanctity of private property and to the stability of the whole capitalist system, and that they had agreed upon the muzzling or removal of Long.

The war between the Long machine and the Washington administration had already become so hot within Louisiana as to create all the pre-conditions for resorting to the assassin's bullets. We do not know the details of the relations between the Washington administration's war against Long and the actual assassination itself. But there is undoubtedly more than a grain of truth in the charges of Huey Long's friends that the administration forces contributed politically to the assassination, having created a mood of despair, of irreconcilable and unscrupulous battle to the death. It is an unquestionable fact that Long had violated democratic rights and established a personal dictatorship. But the administration forces worked with even more undemocratic means and relied even less upon the mass support of the people of Louisiana.

The Republican Party had for some time been playing with the idea of encouraging Huey Long in the hope that he would split the Democratic Party in 1936, thereby enabling a Republican administration to slip back into power. These Republican circles had laughed off the danger of the "share-the-wealth" slogan, because they knew their Huey Long from his record in Louisiana. They knew that Long had no serious intention of redistributing the private wealth of monopoly capital which he had guarded so well in his own state. As the Long demagogy began to reach the masses nationally, and especially the farming and small-town masses,

and as the "share-the-wealth" clubs began to serve as the organizing center for millions of desperate, blind, suffering people, these Republican backers of Long began to hesitate and finally reject their original plans as too dangerous. They began to understand they were not dealing with Huey Long, the demagogue, who could always be relied upon to deliver the goods when decisions were made, but with a rising mass movement of hungry, desperate millions, who had seized upon Long's slogans because they saw no other hope.

At the moment of Long's assassination he had been deserted by the most decisive forces that had built him up as a national figure. He was already faced with a turning point in his career. In what direction he would have gone under these conditions we do not know. Perhaps he would have gambled upon the adventure of a new big "share-the-wealth" campaign as the trading merchandise for a position of power in 1936. Or again, he might have made his peace with those forces demanding an end to his adventure. This is now only a matter of conjecture. What is important for us is that the assassination was prepared by those forces in the ruling class which were determined to bring a halt to the share-the-wealth demagogy. They considered it too dangerous in the present economic and political state of the country.

Such a relation of forces and groupings could appear in other countries, England for example, without having this climax of assassination. It is a characteristic feature of American political life, however, that violence, intimidation, assassination, gangsterism, lynch-law, vigilanteism, are more and more being revived and developed as an organic part of the political methods of the American ruling class. The murders and the general reign of terror carried out against striking sharecroppers, longshoremen, miners, textile workers, are symptomatic of that daily life in the South which would naturally

produce the assassination of a Huey Long in the given circumstances. The vigilante terror in California in 1934, around the marine and general strikes, contributed toward the whole atmosphere of individual assassination as a political weapon.

The close connection between local political machines and the underworld in all of the big cities of America, with their control of election machinery by gunmen, is an organic part of the political set-up. The murder and wounding of hundreds of strike pickets in the last three years are another feature of the same development. The lynching of Negroes, especially in the South, is part of the whole menacing complex of political reaction. The assassination of Huey Long is thus the eruption of this underworld into the upper circles of the ruling class which has long made organized use of it as a daily part of their rule over the masses.

What does it mean when these instruments and methods, which have hitherto been used almost entirely by the ruling class against the exploited masses, are now carried over into the struggle for power among individuals and cliques in the very heart of the ruling class itself? What will it mean for the immediate future of our political life? What will it mean to the presidential election campaign?

The struggle of the working class is never carried on by such means. The proletarian revolution uses mass political weapons, not individual terror. Assassination and individual terror are the characteristic features of bourgeois politics making use of declassed and desperate elements of the population.

*We must sound the alarm against bringing gunman, gangster, vigilante politics into the presidential elections. This is one of the characteristic features of the development of fascism. It is one of the great menaces to American liberties today.*

The Washington administration should not have been so complacent about this removal of a thorn from its side. The

same influences which were prime movers in creating the pre-conditions for Long's assassination are now being directed on a national scale against Roosevelt himself. While Long lived, his "share-the-wealth" demagoguery diverted some of the fire of political reaction away from Roosevelt. Now, with the approach of the presidential election, all the more because Huey Long has been removed from the scene, Roosevelt gets the full barrage from the most reactionary section of monopoly capital. The Hearst press in one column calls for the lynching and suppression of Communists, and right alongside, in the next column, denounces Roosevelt's policies as just as bad as or even worse than those of the Communist Party. The same atmosphere is being created against Roosevelt that enveloped Huey Long.

It is high time that the progressive forces of the United States, and all those who do not want to see the presidential election campaign take on the characteristics that were formerly described as typically "Latin-American", rally together and put a stop to the unbridled reaction of the Hearsts, the American Liberty League, and their ilk.

The assassination of Huey Long was a danger signal for America. It should not be passed over lightly and forgotten soon. The fact that Long was himself a semi-fascist must not blind us to the fact that the forces which removed him from the scene are even more reactionary than Long himself. In Germany it was not necessary to have any illusions about Ernst Roehm or von Schleicher to understand that the "blood purge" of Hitler and Goering on June 30, 1934, was a further blow against the interests and liberties of the masses.

In the same way, in America, we must understand that the murder of the semi-fascist Huey Long marked a further advance toward fascism in America and a new menace to the lives and liberties of all decent citizens.