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MALCOLM X - MARTYR IN THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM

By Joseph Hansen

The assassination of Malcolm X February 21 was a heavy blow to the freedom struggle in the United States and with it the struggle for socialism throughout the world.

The political identity of those who plotted the assassination has not been established. On February 16, however, Malcolm X charged at a public meeting, reported in the February 22 issue of the American socialist weekly, The Militant, that the bombing of his home two days earlier had been ordered by the Black Muslim leader Elijah Muhammad. He said that Raymond Sharrieff, supreme captain of the Fruit of Islam, the Black Muslim defense guard, had threatened him in a public telegram. He accused the Black Muslims of having friendly relations with the terrorist Ku Klux Klan and Lincoln Rockwell's Nazi organization. He cited several attempts on his life and he charged that although the police knew about the plans to attack him they had done nothing. Plain clothes men were in the audience when he was shot down.

The most reactionary forces in the United States had reason to seek the death of Malcolm X. He was rapidly moving to the forefront as the most authentic voice of the freedom-seeking Negro masses in the United States. What he represented was the rise of a new militant consciousness that is now beginning to challenge the old, conservative, pacifist-minded leadership. His views were evolving and while it remained to be seen how far he would go, he was clearly attracted by revolutionary socialism. Coming across the American Trotskyist movement, he paid it high respect, developed friendly relations with some of its members and leaders, and was beginning to study its tenets. Recently he became a subscriber to World Outlook.

Malcolm X belonged to the generation that was shaped ideologically under the twin circumstances of World War II and the monstrous betrayals and defaults of the Stalinized Communist parties. These circumstances operated with special force on him as a member of an oppressed people.

His rebellion, as can often be the case, at first took the wild form of an inquiry. However, after bitter experiences, including a long term in prison, he began to seek the causes for his miserable position in society. His first steps in this process, again, were not unusual. The religion given him was bad, he decided. Yet he did not proceed directly toward a scientific outlook. There was no powerful Socialist or Communist movement in the United States to help him in this step. He went through a transitional stage of seeking a more humane and positive religion. For a time he thought he had found this in the Black Muslim faith. But this, too, proved inadequate to his inquiring and developing mind. Breaking from Elijah Muhammad, he turned to the orthodox Muslim sources. He had not completed this phase when he was

The rise of the Negro movement in the United States, which was fostered by the consequences of World War II and the great postwar revolutionary upsurge in the colonial world, began to draw Malcolm X out of the shell of religion and into the active world of political struggle. Talents of a high order cast him for the role of a leader in this mighty movement, and television helped convert him into a national figure of great prominence in a remarkably short time. There was little doubt that he was marked for a consequential role in the freedom struggle in the United States.

His turn in this direction, representative of the trend of the most promising sector of the black nationalist movement, was high-lighted by his forming a political grouping, the Organization of Afro-American Unity.

The principal issue on which he stood, and which gave him his extraordinary appeal to the Negro masses, was the right of self-defense and advocacy of practicing it. In this he foreshadowed the next great turn in the civil-rights movement in the United States.

With infallible instinct, his foes singled this out for special treatment in commenting on his assassination. Misrepresenting his position as advocacy of "violence", they claim that his death reveals the operation of a kind of natural justice. Thus the New York Times, in a lead editorial (February 22 international edition), said that "his ruthless and fanatical belief in violence not only set him apart from the responsible leaders of the civil rights movement It also marked him for fame, and for a violent end." The editors even went so far as to say that he "spawned" the forces that ended in his death.

According to this logic, the "prince of peace" spawned the forces that nailed him to a cross. The modern prophet of non-violence, Mahatma Ghandi, did likewise, for he died at the hand of an assassin. The Rev. Martin Luther King, an American disciple of Ghandi, is not without a similar propensity, for he came close to death at the hands of a knife-wielding fanatic.

The remarkable blindness of the editors of the Times is shown even more glaringly by their overlooking the continual assassinations in the South of advocates of non-violence. What does their victimization prove?

Malcolm X's position on this question must be examined on its own merits. Do victims of violent assaults have the right to defend themselves? Does an oppressed group have the right to organize an effective defense against the violence of its oppressors? The entire history of mankind, particularly the history of revolutions, says yes. The truth is that there is no other road to an eventual end to all class violence and the murderous currents it spawns. What the editors of the Times and those who think like them really object to is that an oppressed people, especially the Negro people in the United States, should defend themselves against violence occurring on an endemic nation-wide scale. If Malcolm X is to be criticised at all it should be because the defenses at his meeting, after repeated threats to his life, were not effective enough.

The generation to which Malcolm X belongs has already produced outstanding figures - Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Patrice Lumumba. These men found their way independently to the revolutionary struggle, demonstrating that it is possible to by-pass Stalinism. There are others like them developing in rebel movements throughout the World. They will become the heroes and models of the younger generation

now undergoing ideological formation. These two generations are destined to lead the world into its socialist future.

That world, we may be sure, will never forget its martyrs, its Patrice Lumumbas, its Malcolm X's.

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The Crisis over South Vietnam

HANDS OFF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM!

HANDS OFF THE VIETNAMESE REVOLUTION!

(The following statement on the latest military attacks by American imperialism against the Vietnamese people was issued by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International on February 16).

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Repeating the pattern of military aggression last August, when it bombed North Vietnam sites in "reprisal" for alleged attacks on naval craft in the Gulf of Tonkin, American imperialism, in combination with its puppet South Vietnam forces, launched two air assaults on villages of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on February 7-8.

The United Secretariat of the Fourth International condemns these bombings with the deepest indignation as acts of the most barbarous aggression aimed at intimidating the Vietnamese people in their struggle for freedom and social emancipation. The attempt to intimidate the Vietnamese people has no chance whatever to succeed. But it threatens to take humanity, through "escalation", over the brink into a world nuclear holocaust.

The American imperialist aggression comes at a time when the counterrevolutionary forces in South Vietnam are suffering defeat after defeat and when their regime is in a state of complete disintegration. Already in control of three-fourths of the territory of South Vietnam, moving in bigger and bigger formations, the heroic guerrilla fighters of the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam have for some months been directly attacking the American military bases set up on South Vietnam territory under guise of centers for military "advisers". In reality these centers are bases for 23,000 officers and soldiers of the American armed forces, who are involved in a direct and savage way, with the employment of immense military equipment, against the guerrilla forces of the Vietnamese people.

It is possible that in their blind arrogance, the heads of the Pentagon really think it sufficient to bomb North Vietnam territory to convince Hanoi and Peking to "put a stop" to the South Vietnamese guerrilla operations against the American bases and to leave the Pentagon free to crush the revolutionary struggle at its leisure. Such a belief merely reveals how little the American rulers understand the real feelings of the anti-imperialist forces in Southeast Asia and how abysmally ignorant they are of what has happened in South Vietnam.

It is not a question of a "conspiracy", the strings of which are skillfully "manipulated" by the "aggressive Communists" of Peking and their Hanio "allies". What is involved is a genuine mass revolution. In fact, the uprising of the South Vietnamese peasants after the Geneva conference of 1954 against the bloody Diem regime and against the confiscation of peasant land holdings in favor of the feudalistic landlords, occurred before the formation of the National Liberation Front. A new stage has now opened in the Vietnamese revolution. This is marked by the movement of the urban masses, Buddhist demonstrations, workers' strikes, and student actions. These began spontaneously, before the National Liberation Front launched action slogans in the cities. Even if the Kremlin and Peking wanted to sacrifice South Vietnam for the sake of an over-all deal with Washington, they are powerless to stop the revolution.

It is the popular base of this revolution, which includes the immense majority of the inhabitants of the country, that makes the South Vietnamese revolution invincible. It is the militancy and the revolutionary audacity of the young guerrillas - and not "instructions" from Peking - that is behind the attacks on the American military bases. Against the power of the revolutionary masses, American imperialism, including its military "advisers" and its bomber pilots, is impotent. They can massacre thousands of innocent victims in inhuman "reprisals" that recall the Nazi reprisals against Lidice and Oradour; they cannot destroy the revolution. French imperialism found this out in the case of Algeria. In reprisal for Tunisia's aid to the guerrilla fighters, the French bombed Bizerte and Sakiel, but these bloody acts of vengeance did not stop the Algerian freedom fighters from winning political freedom for their country. In truth, the American bombings of North Vietnam villages are self-defeating. The more barbarous and inhuman the American militarists become, the greater the indignation of the masses grows and along with it their support to the revolution.

The bombing of the North Vietnam villages only expresses the dilemma faced by American imperialism in Southeast Asia.

If it "hardens" its positions, "escalating" the policy of intervening in the civil war into a policy of waging war on North Vietnam and even China, the Asian workers states will quite understandably increase their support to the South Vietnamese revolution by more and more radical means, including a massive build up of volunteers. Imperialism will then be confronted with the perspective of an immediate defeat on the scene in South Vietnam unless, in turn, it increases its armed forces there, including infantry. But this would mean a new "Korean-type" war in South Vietnam in which imperialism would become more and more bogged down, draining its forces without the slightest perspective of victory. Under these circumstances, the Soviet bureaucracy, which up to now has maintained an attitude of criminal passivity in face of the imperialist aggression - particularly last August - a passivity which in fact encouraged imperialism to do whatever it felt like and to step up its aggression, would be obliged on its side to furnish diplomatic, economic and military support to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the South Vietnam revolution, still further reducing the chances for an imperialist victory in that part of the world.

This "hard" line, which is advocated by certain influential circles in the United States, fits in with the strategy of seeking a military showdown with China before it can become a nuclear power of major importance. One of the objectives would be to bomb the Chinese nuclear center in the Taklamakan desert.

That this is seriously under consideration in White House circles is shown by the anxiety of the best-informed American newspapers, which, in contrast to the complacent attitude of the European press, particularly in Britain, act as if the Johnson administration is on the verge of irreparable decisions.

If American imperialism does not follow this course, but, on the contrary, recognises the impossibility of consolidating the beachhead it seized in South Vietnam and utilizes the crisis touched off by its bombings in North Vietnam as a shield behind which to reach a "peaceful understanding" on the Vietnamese question, then fateful consequences of a different kind can occur. Through the transitional stage of a "broad national government" and a "neutralist regime", the South Vietnam revolution can continue its march toward the complete destruction of the semifeudal vestiges and the power of imperialism and native capitalism, opening the way for achievement of a socialist Vietnam. In this case, imperialism would "lose" Laos and Cambodia in the immediate future. The announcement that a National Liberation Front has been set up in Thailand to co-ordinate the activities of the guerrillas already widely active there is the handwriting on the wall for imperialism. Just as the revolution in South Vietnam followed the victory of the revolution in North Vietnam and the 1954 Geneva agreement, so the Thailand revolution will be touched off by the victory of the revolution in South Vietnam and this will unsettle Malaysia, the last solid imperialist position in Southeast Asia.

From the point of view of the interests of the revolution and of all humanity, it would be clearly preferable for American imperialism to choose as quickly as possible the road of retreat and withdrawal, even if by stages. But it would be a delusion and self-deception to believe that such a decision is certain, that "reason" will lead American imperialism to back down rather than opt for an immediate catastrophic outcome. The fact is that the latest imperialist aggression against North Vietnam, like that of last August and the imperialist aggression against Cuba in October 1962, shows that the first reaction of American imperialism, above all the heads of the Pentagon, is to strike without the least regard for either national or international law. Only the vigorous reaction of the revolutionary masses in the colonial world, the governments of the workers states, international public opinion and popular reaction in the United States itself can make it hesitate and draw back temporarily.

The latest imperialist aggression against North Vietnam, which could prove to be the opening move toward direct military confrontation between imperialism and the People's Republic of China, and then the USSR, underlines the warning repeatedly made by the Fourth International: The need to overturn the power of imperialism in the United States, of creating a socialist America, has become a problem of life or death for all of humanity. As long as American imperialism holds enormous economic and technical power, capable of destroying mankind in a nuclear holocaust, the threat remains suspended over humanity. The struggle for the world victory of socialism is not only a struggle for a better society today. It has become literally a struggle for the physical survival of mankind.

The United Secretariat of the Fourth International appeals to the workers of all countries to show in an energetic way, through action, their condemnation of the imperialist aggression against North Vietnam and their solidarity with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the heroic masses fighting in the South Vietnamese revolution.

We appeal to the governments of the workers states to set up an unbreakable United Front against imperialism and for the defense of the Vietnamese revolution. Divisions in the anti-imperialist front can only encourage and facilitate the aggressions of the Pentagon.

We appeal to the British workers to protest vigorously against the criminal stand of the Wilson Labour government which has become an accomplice in the imperialist aggression against the Vietnamese people.

We appeal to the workers of the United States to oppose the irresponsible military clique who have deprived even Congress, the traditional body of bourgeois democracy, from deciding the country's foreign policy and who are ready, in brazen violation of the rejection of "Goldwaterism" in last election, to precipitate the United States into a nuclear war. Let the American people themselves decide whether they want war or peace! Let the American people set up a new political and governmental framework capable of carrying out their will!

For international solidarity with the Vietnamese revolution!

For the world victory of socialism!

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