

***Revolutionary Integration: A Marxist Analysis of African American Liberation,***

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# 1. Dialectics of Black Liberation

*This document originally appeared as a resolution submitted to the 1963 national convention of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) by Richard Fraser, and his co-thinkers in the SWP. The Revolutionary Integration tendency included all the members of the SWP's Seattle branch, who left that party in 1966 and formed the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP). The FSP adopted Revolutionary Integration as one of its founding principles.*

## Preface

The Black revolt in the southern U.S.A. stands objectively on the threshold of a new stage in its development: a stage of political organization for revolution, involving a showdown struggle *against* the southern police state and *for* a new democratic political system.

Southern Black militants, young and old, have sustained a courageous struggle for the past ten years. After the high points of Montgomery<sup>1</sup> (where workingclass leaders pushed the ministers into the foreground) and Little Rock<sup>2</sup> (officially led by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People while an armed community waited), the movement tended to recede.

Restless over the inaction of the clergy and NAACP, Black youth entered the scene, bringing struggles to life all

over the South. Sometimes with small numbers, but with indomitable spirit, they catapulted the morale of the movement and shamed their elders into motion.

The movement as a whole operated generally within the confines of reformism—the attempt to change the racial climate of the South by reform. While the youth in Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)<sup>3</sup> never considered themselves bound to reformism in principle and are politically unprejudiced and open-minded, they have not challenged the *theory* of reformism.

The Robert Williams movement in Monroe did.<sup>4</sup> It synthesized the activism of the youth, the proletarian ranks and behind-the-scenes worker leadership of Montgomery, and the mass aggressiveness later displayed so dramatically in Birmingham.<sup>5</sup> Williams was the first to publicly project a radical ideology, a bold and revolutionary strategy, and a proud internationalism.

The three streams of the civil rights movement—youth, the church, and the working masses—converged in Birmingham, with the ministers fronting. Birmingham was to be the culminating effort, the key battle of the ten-year struggle to break the back of segregation in the South.

The civil rights activists fought heroically. They shook the country and the world. They emerged with honor and with new strength—but with no concessions. All agreements made by the Birmingham petty-bourgeoisie were nullified by the overwhelming pressure of the southern police state.

For the participants, this only confirms what they already know or feel—that there is no possibility of winning Freedom Now through pressure-attempts to reform the totalitarian police state.

The preachers placed ultimate faith in the federal government, which had failed in all of its promises, and here failed again. President Kennedy's man in Birmingham failed

miserably in his “arbitration” operation and the Brothers Kennedy stood glaringly exposed as fakers. The Reverends, in turn, lost much prestige in the process.

And who gained stature? Robert Williams. A figure like Leroi Jones,<sup>6</sup> a *northern* intellectual in Birmingham as a reporter, assured his audiences of street demonstrators that their experiences proved the validity of the concepts of Robert Williams.

Birmingham represented the failure and exposure of reformism in the South, but it simultaneously represented a great leap forward in organization, experience and awareness. The mood, the pace, the tremendous dynamic of the demonstrations are reminiscent of great strikes and insurrections. Observers and participants are tremendously stirred by the complex phenomenon they witnessed: an elated but still disappointed community soberly evaluating its overwhelming experience.

The militant Blacks of the South are now groping for the handle of a new weapon. They know or sense what it is, but they hesitate to articulate it. The essence of it is:

- There must be a new leadership, radical and bold.
- The leaders must be prepared to lead a revolution, because the whole police state system must be destroyed.
- A political struggle, requiring a new political party, is the only vehicle for basic change.

Being a one-to-four minority in the South, however, dims the prospect of Blacks overthrowing the police state alone. Consequently, they will realize that they must so fashion their strategy as to break through the racist wall separating them from the white workers and poor farmers, and assert the identity of political interest and the common class interest which cross the color line. Together, they will forge a merged struggle for democratic rights—for race equality, civil liberties and the rights of labor.

As it develops its revolutionary perspective, the south-

ern civil rights movement will orient toward an alliance with a revived northern labor movement. Only northern labor has the power to paralyze the ability of the government to intervene against the southern revolution. And since the southern Black movement cannot wait until northern labor sheds its passivity and bureaucratic leadership, it must proceed to shake up and spur northern labor into life.

Southern Blacks will thus profoundly stimulate the northern giant into recovering its capacity for struggle.



Geographically separated, facing two complementary but different forms of capitalist rule, and responding with diverse tactics and levels of consciousness, the southern movement and the movement "Up South" and West are still bound together by mutual experiences, solidarity, and exploding racial consciousness born of frustration too long endured.

Militant currents emerging from the seething ghettos of the North and West recognize the blind alley of reformism. Ignored by the labor bureaucracy, and suspicious or uncertain of the ability of socialist organizations to understand and/or adapt to the needs of the Black struggle, these militants long have been grappling with the problem of the *nationwide crisis of leadership in the movement*.

As a consequence of this crisis, they are experimenting with local and regional levers of upsetting the status quo, and are prepared for more massive and radical assaults upon white supremacy as conditions ripen.

The vacuum produced by the long hiatus of the reformist leaders found poignant expression in the rise of the Black Muslims. As a fiery propaganda sect, they spurred the reformist leaders by unmasking their accommodation to white domination and by agitating the entire country with pithy truths about race relations in the United States.

The doctrine of separatism, however, orients this movement away from the physical struggle against racial discrimination into contemptuous abstentionism. The Muslims substitute for combat a classic utopian attempt to build an independent Black economy in the United States.

The Muslim movement is a contradiction: articulate and defiant, but superstitious and backward. It is a transitional phenomenon which will cease to exert its appeal when a more rational and internally consistent movement develops in the Black community to fulfill the demand for truth, audacity, a goal, and uncorrupted leadership.

From where will this leadership emerge?

The Black movement in the North is extremely complex and its dynamics invariably produce a multitude of leadership sources. A number of militant, race conscious, independent and determined organizations have already appeared in northern cities, headed by new, younger leaders who are developing swiftly and might well become part of the future national leadership.

The impact of the southern struggle is stirring vast new layers, especially the broad church section.

Many older militants and independent radicals are invigorated by events and ready for action.

A new powerful force among artists and intellectuals is heralded by the appearance of individuals like writer James Baldwin, journalist William Worthy, playwright Lorraine Hansberry, and others.

Northern Blacks have been ready for a basic social change for decades, and we should expect to find new leadership from every walk of life, every institution, every city, every class! Above all, as the revolutionary perspective is increasingly projected, the relatively privileged Black trade unionists will again come boldly forward.



The accelerating Black Revolt represents the most significant revolutionary development of our time, the most fertile field for the growth and flowering of socialist ideas, the most dynamic spur to the working class as a whole and the finest source of new radical leadership.

A revolutionary Marxist party must be oriented to take advantage of the opportunities this situation offers. Given solid ideological footing, sensitivity and flexibility, such a party can make giant strides in unison with the Black movement.

## **The coming southern revolution**

### ***The southern police state***

In Birmingham, the reformist program came to the end of the line.

Day and night, wave after wave of children, youth and adults asserted the right to public prayer—a most elementary form of the right of assemblage. Masses of Blacks fought a sustained, largely nonviolent civil war for days, paralyzing the city, filling its jails, destroying its trade and reducing its industrial production.

A few reforms were conceded by local businessmen, but within two days the agreement evaporated. It was revealed to anybody who didn't already know it that the white businessmen had no authority to limit segregation because the true political authority is the White Citizens Council and the Klan. Police, politicians and businessmen belong to and take orders from these bodies.

The whole arsenal of passive resistance was lined up against the police state. It didn't work. The bruised and injured demonstrators returned from battle and jail with a huge moral victory—but no concrete gains.

The totalitarian character of the police state of the South was clearly unmasked—its immovable resistance to change,

and its inability to concede even modest reforms, despite legal action, passive resistance, love, militant mass action and sporadic violence. Most Blacks in the South recognize, in essence, the existence of a police state. But now it has been exposed in a giant struggle, after preliminary skirmishes and testing in Montgomery, Albany, Monroe, and hundreds of other cities and towns.

Modern capitalist rule basically takes form in either bourgeois democracy or fascism; various levels and combinations of police and military dictatorships serve as transitions. When a state cannot both protect capital and win public acceptance, it must smash all official channels of political expression and resort nakedly to its repressive forces. Such a state will immediately use these forces at the first sign of a mere difference with its policies.

Such a state is a *police state*, not just quantitatively but



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*Birmingham youth celebrate a brief victory in May 1963. By challenging white supremacy, African Americans took on the southern police state in a social upheaval that had the potential to ignite a revolution.*

qualitatively different than the democratic form of rule.

The southern state provides no legal channels whatever for the democratic process, however strong the democratic movement may be. Even for southern white workers, there is no meaning in the right to vote and no real freedom of speech, assemblage or press. Elections are plebiscites, as under Hitler and Mussolini. Union organizing is virtually impossible.

The southern regime freezes all social relations in the rigid mold of legal racism, wherein every action and thought must conform to the diseased mores of white supremacy and segregation.

The regime is not only a totalitarian police state, it encompasses definite characteristics of fascism, i.e., support by a mass middleclass base. But this base is so badly deteriorated that the state can be described only as "*fascist-like*," in recognition of its retention of some portion of mass support capable of terrorism.

Writer Truman Nelson's description of the emerging consciousness of this phenomenon is to the point: "There is a recognition (by Blacks) that municipal government there is a military one along the lines of troops occupying and controlling an enemy or colonial people."

The lesson of Birmingham is that even mass actions which bring the businessmen and police to their knees are not enough. *The enemy is an entrenched, fascist-like, police state system.*

### ***The role of the government in the South***

Nelson calls the South a "lunatic society" and despairs of anything short of coercion by the North to effect any change.

Will the United States government initiate or force enough reform to align southern discrimination with the level of legal equality in the North and West?



Hardly. The capitalist class, its political parties, and its machinery of state helped to create the totalitarian racist regime of the South nearly a century ago, in order to crush the democratic alliance of the Freedmen and the white farmers during Reconstruction. United States capital then incorporated this new dictatorship into its national economic, political and social organization.

Today, far from being inclined to release anew the revolutionary energy of the southern working class, capitalism instead prepares to resort to a police state in the North.

Present trends toward fascist development (like the Hargis-Walker duet<sup>7</sup>) indicate that the obvious road for U.S. capitalism, as the general crisis deepens, is the nationwide extension of the southern system, rather than vice-versa.

Short of all-out fascism, the political stability of capitalist rule must rest in large measure upon the continued disenfranchisement of the southern working class, both Black and white. The solid and never changing reactionary southern bloc that dominates Congress has provided the formula for the two-party system since 1876, and the present United States political structure could not survive without its southern pole.

On the one hand, the bloc exercises a chronically retrogressive veto power, an extra-legal check added on to the check-and-balance system. On the other hand, the bloc facilitates survival of demagogic northern liberalism by undertaking a constant parliamentary sham battle. In Congress, the Bill of Rights, the antislavery amendments, and human dignity are stage-props for both sides.

"Senator," says the Congressman from the Deep South to the northern liberal, "let me know if you are ever in trouble. I'll attack you."

### ***Federal troops to the South***

To obscure the basic dependence of the government upon the southern system, to create the illusion that the gov-

ernment desires and will effect drastic changes in the South, and to project a democratic image for international consumption, the government rattles the sword at the Bourbon South and even sends troops, ostensibly to rescue a few Blacks in distress.

What is the actual function of the troops?

*To prevent self-defense.* Eisenhower only dispatched troops to Little Rock at the mayor's insistence that the Black community was an armed camp prepared to slaughter the headstrong Klan.

Kennedy developed an ominous new theme during the Birmingham crisis. Not only did he send troops to Alabama only *after* the Blacks had gained the initiative and whipped the Birmingham police and fire departments, but he justified their continued presence by citing the "danger" from "extremists"—from both sides, of course. Blacks have a pretty good idea of which "extremists" will take the beating from federal troops.

*To help racist politicians.* Kennedy's fantastic invasion of the University of Mississippi with huge armies, out of all proportion to the need for James Meredith's safety,<sup>8</sup> was designed to prevent a split in the white community.

The town of Oxford, threatened with removal of accredited academic status for the University of Mississippi as a consequence of Governor Ross Barnett's interference, was prepared to accept Meredith as an alternative to the expected exodus of students. Kennedy's troops offset the emergence of a conflict among whites over Barnett, and held intact the authority and power of the state officials by allowing them to be defeated by an overwhelming *outside* force instead of local opposition.

*To improve the United States image.* Kennedy used troops in "Ole Miss" to enhance the image of the United States government for international consumption, projecting the government as a champion of democracy even in



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*On October 1, 1962, President Kennedy mobilized 30,000 federal marshals, national guardsmen, and army troops in response to riots protesting the enrollment of the University of Mississippi's first Black student, James Meredith.*

the face of solid racist public opinion. It is highly probable, also, that the mock battle with Barnett was staged with the idea in mind of mollifying world opinion in advance of the forthcoming invasion of Cuba.

*To intimidate the working class.* The University of Mississippi spectacle, displaying the massive, ready, arbitrary and ruthless power of the government to handle domestic conflicts, produced a bulldozing effect on workers.

*For the record.* Eisenhower used his Little Rock troops operation as a smokescreen for a drastic retreat on the civil rights front. The White House will not change the South, and the way federal troops are used divulges this clearly enough.

The administration, however, will take enough steps to mollify Roy Wilkins and Co.<sup>9</sup> and secure their allegiance

for another season.

Any gains engineered by the White House will be pure tokens of temporary character gilded with big future promises. Assistance to Blacks will be granted only to keep the southern system basically intact, and to forestall and slow down the struggle. Neither international pressure nor threats of domestic insurrection will budge the federal government into rearranging the basic pattern of southern totalitarianism.

### ***The southern labor party***

If the southern police state is so constructed as to preclude meaningful change, and if the federal government is not going to intervene decisively for social reform, the only road left for achieving civil rights is the political revolution, wherein the racist, oligarchy is destroyed and the people take the power directly into their own hands.

Indeed, such action would constitute a very *legal* revolution, merely seeking to return constitutional law to the South. The present lawless regime overthrew by force and violence the democratically selected governments of the Reconstruction, and has ruled for nearly a century by force and violence, in complete defiance of the Constitution.

But legal or not, a revolution is an enormous undertaking, and as the radicalism of the southern movement evolves, its logical strategy would comprise two main features:

1. The Black minority in the South needs allies.
2. The political struggle requires a political party as an ideological-organizational center and lever.

Average southern white workers are doomed to poverty and degradation until they are able to identify with Blacks, the symbol of southern labor whose degradation reflects on all labor. Inasmuch as the Black movement

holds the initiative and will probably continue to hold it, upon it devolves the responsibility for encouraging the white workers to join a common struggle against the police state and jointly build a political party as the instrument of struggle.

A southern labor party is the only kind of organism which embodies the needs of class unity this side of socialism. Whatever it may be named, the construction of a political party serving the interests of Blacks and white workers is the next stage of development of the southern struggle.<sup>10</sup>

This party will not emanate from the unions. There is no broad union movement in the South; only a few unions exist, owing their generally tenuous hold to special circumstances like a monopoly of skilled labor and contracts derived from national negotiations. These unions for the most part are lily-white, and insofar as they represent an aristocracy of labor, tend to be supporters of segregation. Nevertheless, they have no legal protection or legal avenues of expansion.

However, there are workers in the South and there are masses in motion who need an independent political party of their own; they are entitled to form a party called "Labor" or otherwise, with or without the participation of the unions.

Significant unionism will never exist in the South short of a new regime, for democratic rights are the foundation of unionism. Consequently, the causal relation between unionism and the labor party that characterizes the North is reversed in the South: *Southern unionism will not be the basis but the product of the labor party.*

### ***The strategic power of northern labor***

The U.S. government will be even more hostile to the unfolding southern revolution than toward Cuba. It will see in the revolt the beginning of the socialist revolution in the United States—which, in fact, it will be.

The problem, therefore, arises of how to neutralize and/or paralyze the government's counterrevolutionary tactics.

Northern labor has such power. Thus, its support is decisive for the southern movement. But such support is precluded as long as unions remain impotent under bureaucratic rule.

A key task of northern Blacks is accordingly posed: activating Black and white unionists into fighting for union democracy and a new leftwing leadership that will place the financial, organizational and political resources of labor at the disposal of the civil rights movement.

What a historical reversal—and triumph—this will be! The failure of the CIO's "Operation Dixie" fifteen years ago<sup>11</sup> was one of the important causes of worker demoralization that aided the bureaucracy in cementing its stranglehold on the unions. Along with the Taft-Hartley Act,<sup>12</sup> Operation Dixie signified the end of the union movement's ability to expand. It ushered in the era of cannibal unionism—expansion over the corpses of weaker or "Communist" unions—and crystallized the trend to flagrant class collaboration, sufferance of government domination, and arrogant white supremacy.

Labor's failure in the South, never adequately explained, disheartened many union militants; their confidence in their class was weakened. But the politicalization of the southern civil rights movement will spell out the racist cause of this defeat and give militants a new understanding, a fresh perspective, and a new opportunity to build unionism in Dixie.

A new hope for southern unionism will be raised in the northern labor movement when the civil rights movement starts requesting support for southern political action. The ferment in the working class will accelerate. Significant layers of northern workers will come to understand that their own democratic rights are vitally endangered by southern

practice and its threatened northward extension.

Workers will want to strike a decisive blow in their own behalf by helping the cause of southern unionism, which demands in turn support to the democratic rights movement there.

Even sections of the labor bureaucracy fear the southern system. The runaway-shop South is the fountainhead of reactionary antilabor legislation and fascistic movements. Unionism's failure in the South is the Achilles heel of the bureaucracy, rendering it helpless before organizational erosion.

Northern labor officialdom today would have to listen to representatives of the impressive southern movement.



A dialectical interdependence links the southern labor party, southern unionism, and the left wing in northern unions.

In a police state, simple mass action (picket line, mass meeting, boycott, etc.) is not enough to win any democratic rights, including union recognition. Local tactics must be geared to the real nature of the oppressor, to interracial workingclass solidarity, and to active assistance by the northern Black and labor movements. This is the historical difference between union organizing in the 1930s and union organizing in the 1960s; the former demanded class struggle in a bourgeois democratic environment, but today we need political struggle against the iron heel of a brutal totalitarian state apparatus—the southern wing of U.S. capitalism.

The very *backwardness* of Dixie grips the more advanced northern labor movement by the throat, choking and stifling it; to survive, the North must break this stranglehold. Defense of the southern movement is the opening wedge in this struggle for self-preservation.