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MALCOLM X

The Man and His Ideas



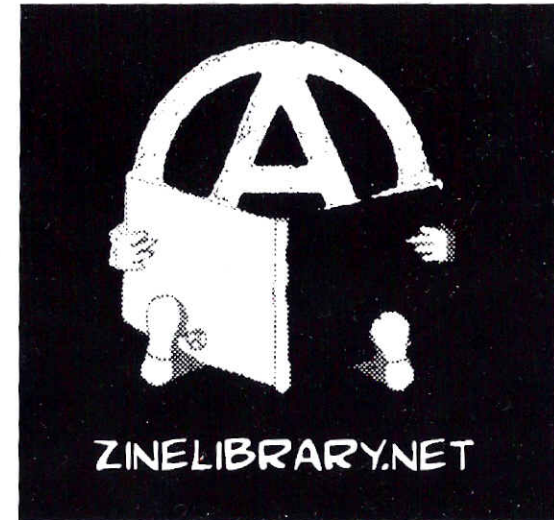
By George Breitman

A speech delivered to the Friday Night Socialist Forum at Eugene V. Debs Hall in Detroit on March 5, 1965.

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social revolutionist, or in the process of becoming one.

Socialists should be the last to be surprised at such a development. We have for some time been stressing the tendency of nationalism to grow over into and become merged with socialism; we have seen just that transformation occur in Cuba with Castro and his movement, which began as nationalist. We have argued against many opponents that the logical outcome of black nationalism in a country like ours is to reach the most advanced, most radical social and political conclusions. That is why we have advocated and predicted that black nationalists and revolutionary socialists can, should and will find ways of working together.

Malcolm's uncertainty about the right name arises from the fact that he was doing something new—he was on the road to a synthesis of black nationalism and socialism that would befitting for the American scene and acceptable to the masses in the black ghetto. He did not complete the synthesis before he was murdered. It remains for others to complete what he was beginning.

He Will Be Replaced

Now he is dead, taken from us at what might have been the most important and fruitful year of his life.

Let us not deceive ourselves. It was a stunning blow, as Frank Lovell said at last week's memorial meeting of the Afro-American Broadcasting Co., it was a stunning blow to the Negro people and to those white Americans who want to eradicate the system that breeds racism. Men like Malcolm do not appear often, or in great numbers. The enemies of human progress benefit from his death, the fighters for human progress are weakened and hurt by it.

But a stunning blow to the struggle does not destroy the struggle. Malcolm will not easily be replaced. But he will be replaced. The capitalist system breeds not only racism, but rebels against racism, especially among the youth. Malcolm cannot be replaced overnight, but meanwhile we all can and should strive harder, work harder, fight harder, unite more closely to try to fill the gap left by the death of this man we loved, and give help and encouragement to those destined to replace him.

* * *

MALCOLM X

THE MAN AND HIS IDEAS

By George Breitman

It is still painful to speak of the death of Malcolm X. It is probably too soon to appraise him adequately. It will take time before we can do him justice, before we can see him in his full stature. It is painful because with him gone, we momentarily feel smaller, weaker, more vulnerable.

Our sense of loss is for his family, for the movement he was building, for the Negro people, for the revolutionary cause as a whole. There is also something in us that cries out against the fact that he was cut down in his prime, still a young man, before he had made his full contributions to the struggle, before he had accomplished everything he was capable of accomplishing for human emancipation.

I was still a young man 25 years ago when another great revolutionary was assassinated — Leon Trotsky. Perhaps I did not fully realize how much his leadership, advice and political wisdom would be missed, and probably I was under the influence of the belief common among young people that to show certain kinds of strong emotion is a sign of weakness. Anyhow, I did not cry when Trotsky was killed, and I could not help crying when Malcolm was killed.

It was not because I considered Malcolm the greater of the two men. One reason for the difference was the realization that Malcolm, at the age of 39, was still in the process of reaching his full height, still in the process of working out his program, still in the early stage of building a new movement—whereas Trotsky, at the age of 60, had already reached full maturity, had already worked out his main ideas and his program, and left behind him the solid foundations of a movement that could not be destroyed by war, by persecution from both the Allied and Axis powers, or by cold war reaction and witch hunts.

But while it is painful to speak of Malcolm, and not yet possible to see him in full perspective, we are able even now to begin to make an appraisal of his ideas, and of how he came to the ideas that constitute his heritage. When we do this, we must try to put emotion aside, or to bring it under control. That is what Malcolm urged when he spoke here in Detroit three weeks ago—that we learn to think clearly about the struggle and the ways the power structure seeks to curb and sidetrack the struggle; that we think clearly and rely on reason and learn how to see through trickery.

Family Background

Malcolm Little's mother was born as the result of her mother's rape by a white man in the West Indies. When he was four, the house where he and his family lived was burned down by Ku Kluxers. When he was six, his father met a violent death, and he and his family always believed he had been lynched.

The family was broken up. Young Malcolm lived in state institutions and boarding homes. He got high marks at the grade school in Mason, Mich. Then, at the age of 15, he became a dropout. He went to live with his sister in Boston, and went to work at the kinds of jobs available to Negro youth — shoeshine boy, soda jerk, hotel bus boy, member of a dining car crew on trains traveling to New York, restaurant waiter in Harlem. There he drifted into the degrading life of the underworld — gambling, drugs, hustling, burglary. You can find it all described in his autobiography, which will be published soon, up to and including his arrest for burglary, conviction and sentencing to ten years in prison. That was in 1946, when he was not quite 21 years old, the age of many of you in this audience.

Law of the Jungle

What were his ideas then? That life is a jungle, where the fiercest survive — by fleeing the weak and defenseless; where each man looks out for No. 1, which can only be done by accepting the jungle code. "The main thing you got to remember is that everything in the world is a hustle," he was told by the friend who helped him get his first job.

Although his father had been an admirer of Marcus Garvey, feelings of race pride did not exist in the young man with the zoot suit; he tried to straighten his hair in emulation of white men who, as he later said, had taught him what he knew and instilled in him the values of racist white society. I think you can find thousands of youngsters in today's ghetto like the 21-year-old Malcolm Little in 1946.

Conversion in Prison

Prison is hell. Prison is also a place where you can think, where some important decisions have been made. Eugene V. Debs, after whom this meeting hall is named, was converted to socialism while he was in prison in 1895. Prison was where Malcolm underwent a conversion that literally transformed his whole life.

Now Malcolm was not that kind of black nationalist, or if he was a year ago, he did not remain that. As he discussed with people in Africa, in the Near East, at the United Nations and in the United States, as he studied and thought and learned, he began to become a black nationalist plus. Plus what? I have already given you many quotations from his speeches and interviews showing that as he studied the economy, the nature of the political and social system of American capitalism, as he developed greater and keener understanding of how this system functions and how the ruling class rules and how racism is a component and instrument of that rule, he came more and more to the conclusion that not only must the Negro control his own community, but that radical changes have to be made in the society as a whole if the Negroes are to achieve their freedom.

Black Nationalism Plus

Black nationalism, yes. But the solution cannot be *summed up* as only black nationalism. Needed is black nationalism plus fundamental social change; black nationalism plus the transformation of the entire society. Whatever difficulty Malcolm may have had in finding the right name, what he was becoming was black nationalist plus revolutionist. (The *Young Socialist* interview shows that he had great respect for that word.)

There are really only three ways in which it is possible to think of the Negro people getting freedom and equality.

One way (notice I said to *think* about getting freedom) is through gradualism; peaceful reform; a little bit now and a little bit more ten years from now. Not Freedom Now, but Freedom Later, which for purposes of Negroes now alive, means Freedom Never. This is the program of Lyndon Johnson, Reuther, King, Wilkins and Rustin. Malcolm, as we know, flatly rejected this approach.

The second way is through separation, through migration to Africa, or through obtaining part of what is now the United States. Malcolm, as I indicated, had turned away from this approach, whatever his reasons may have been for doing so.

The third way—and I repeat there are only these three ways, there are no other—is through the revolutionary reorganization of society, by basically changing the economy, political structure, laws and educational system, and by replacing the present capitalist ruling class with a new government instituted by the forces that are opposed to racism and determined to uproot it.

Approaching a New Synthesis

From the quotations I read you before about what Malcolm was saying about capitalism and socialism and racism, it is clear that Malcolm tended to favor this third approach, or at least had his eyes turned in that direction. He wasn't sure *if* it could be done, and he wasn't sure *how* it could be done, but he was thinking about it and how it fitted into the program and activity of the Organization of Afro-American Unity.

This, I believe, correctly explains his uncertainty about what to call himself. He was a black nationalist plus, a black nationalist plus a

The second paragraph of Malcolm's reply, which you can read for yourselves in the *Young Socialist*, relates a discussion he had with a white Algerian revolutionary he met in Ghana last May who sought to convince Malcolm that his self-designation as a black nationalist tended to alienate people "who were true revolutionaries dedicated to overturning the system of exploitation that exists on this earth by any means necessary." His third and final paragraph was:

"So, I had to do a lot of thinking and reappraising of my definition of black nationalism. Can we sum up the solution to the problems confronting our people as black nationalism? And if you notice, I haven't been using the expression for several months. But I still would be hard pressed to give a specific definition of the overall philosophy which I think is necessary for the liberation of the black people in this country."

Reappraisal of a Definition

Please notice: He was reappraising his *definition* of black nationalism and wondering if it can be *summed up* as the solution; he had stopped using the term, but he had not yet been able to find another definition for the philosophy necessary for black liberation. Now let me offer what I think is the explanation for all this.

Malcolm had been a black nationalist—it was the starting point for all his thinking, the source of his strength and dynamism. And he remained a black nationalist to his last hour, however uncertain he was about what to *call* himself or the program he was trying to formulate. It would be a bad mistake to mix up what he was with what he thought might be a better name for what he was.

The most urgent need of the Negro people is still the mobilization and unification of the Negro masses into an independent movement to fight for their freedom. Black nationalism is still highly progressive because it contributes to that process and to the creation of that kind of movement.

But black nationalism is a means, not the end; it is a means, but not the only means; it is probably an indispensable means toward the solution, but it is not the whole solution. It helps to build an independent movement, but it does not necessarily provide the program that will lead such a movement to victory.

Types of Black Nationalism

In a series of articles last summer, now being collected in a Pioneer Publishers pamphlet called *Marxism and the Negro Struggle*, I tried to clarify some questions about black nationalism by noting that there are at least two types of black nationalist.

One is the pure-and-simple black nationalist. He is concerned exclusively or primarily with the internal problems of the Negro community, with organizing it, helping it to control the economy of the community, the politics of the community, etc. He is not so concerned with the problems of the total American society, or with the nature of the total society within which the Negro community exists. He has no theory or program for changing that society; for him that's the white man's problem.

By letters and visits from members of his family he was introduced to the Nation of Islam, headed by Elijah Muhammad. This American religious sect, popularly known as the Black Muslims, worships Allah as god and practices some ritual of the orthodox Muslim religion, with certain variations of its own, especially in the sphere of race.

It teaches that original man, when the world was a paradise, was black, and that white man is a degenerate and inferior offshoot, destined to rule the world for 6,000 years and then be destroyed. The 6,000-year period is now ending, and black people can save themselves from the coming catastrophe only by withdrawing, by separating, from the white man and following Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah.

From a scientific standpoint, Black Muslim mythology is no more and no less fantastic or bizarre than other religions. But the Black Muslims are a *movement* as well as a religious group, providing a kind of haven and hope and salvation for outcasts, encouragement at self-reform, brotherhood and solidarity against a cruel and oppressive world.

I am not going to go into details about the Black Muslims; you can find plenty about it in writing. The point is that Malcolm experienced a genuine religious conversion in prison, believing that Elijah Muhammad was a holy man, and that the Nation of Islam provided a path of salvation not only for him but for his people.

Process of Self-Education

While in prison this dropout after the 8th grade began to educate himself and learn how to speak and debate, so that he could participate more effectively in the movement after he got out. Not knowing how else to proceed, he started with a dictionary, copying into a tablet words beginning with "A" that might be helpful. He was astonished to find so many "A" words, filling a tablet with them alone. He went through to "Z," and then, he writes, "for the first time, I could pick up a book and actually understand what the book was saying." The story speaks volumes about the quality of education in Michigan—and the U.S.

From then until he left prison, he spent all the time he could in the library, "picking up some more books." Within a few years he was to become the most respected debater in the country, taking on one and all — politicians, college professors, journalists, anyone, black or white, bold enough to meet him.

There are tremendous reservoirs of talent and even genius locked up in the black ghettos and white slums, among the masses — which can be set free and put to work when they acquire hope and purpose.

Organizing Ability

After six years in prison, when Malcolm was 27, he won a parole by getting a job with his oldest brother, Wilfred, as a furniture salesman in the Detroit ghetto. That was the spring of 1952. Later that year he traveled to Chicago to hear Elijah Muhammad, and he

met him. He was accepted into the movement and given the name of Malcolm X. He volunteered his organizing services in Detroit, and did so well that he was made assistant minister of the Detroit mosque after the membership had tripled.

At the end of 1953 he went to Chicago to live with Muhammad and be trained by him for some months. Muhammad sent him to Philadelphia, which had no mosque; in less than three months a mosque had been formed. He was obviously a man of unusual talent, energy and devotion. Muhammad picked him to head the movement in New York, and he went back to Harlem in 1954, before he was 30 years old. In a few short years his work helped to transform the Black Muslims from a virtually unnoticed to a nationally very well known organization; and he himself had become one of the country's most noted figures, one of the most desired speakers on the nation's campuses, and the object of admiration by the most militant youth.

Malcolm as Public Speaker

Before proceeding chronologically, I want to say a few words about Malcolm as a public speaker. I am not an expert in this field, and I hope somebody who is will make a study of it. There is certainly plenty of material, thanks to the fact that many of his talks were taped and are readily available.

His speaking style was unique — plain, direct like an arrow, devoid of flowery trimming. He used metaphors and figures of speech that were lean and simple, rooted in the ordinary, daily experience of his audiences. He knew what the masses think and how they feel, their strengths and weaknesses. He reached right into their minds and hearts without wasting a word; and he never tried to flatter them. Despite an extraordinary ability to move and arouse his listeners, his main appeal was to reason, not to emotion.

This is true even about speeches where he was presenting ideas that he had abandoned in the last year of his life, such as the last great speech he made as a Black Muslim — his speech to the Grass Roots Conference in Detroit in November, 1963, which is on sale from the Afro-American Broadcasting and Recording Co. It is one of his best speeches, although I repeat it does not reflect his thinking at the end, and worth listening and relistening to, because of the qualities I have been trying to pinpoint; and because his main appeal was to reason, he was the very opposite of a demagogue, the very opposite of what the kept press called him.

It was also a style very different from Elijah Muhammad's. I don't mean only that Malcolm commanded the weapons of wit and humor, which are alien to Muhammad. Muhammad's appeal was to faith, to authority (divine authority), to the hereafter; Malcolm's appeal was to reason, to logic; it dealt with the real and the present, even when he was expounding Muhammad's line. To be able to listen to Muhammad for any length of time you had to be a believer, convinced in advance, while Malcolm seemed to achieve his greatest success with non-Muslims.

in America or in Africa. Black nationalism is a tendency for Negroes to unite as a group, as a people, in organizations that are Negro-led and Negro-controlled, and sometimes all-black, in order to fight for their freedom. Black nationalism, as it now exists, does not imply any position on the question of a separate nation in the future, for or against. So you can be a black nationalist without being a separatist, although all separatists are black nationalists.

You will find a much better and longer analysis of this greatly misunderstood distinction in the Socialist Workers Party's 1963 convention resolution, *Freedom Now: The New Stage in the Struggle for Negro Emancipation*, Pioneer Publishers.

Changed Position on Separation

When Malcolm was a Black Muslim, he was of course a separatist. At his first press conference after leaving the Black Muslims last March, he said he was out to build a black nationalist movement, and the major stress was on black nationalism. But he also had a few words to say about separatism. He said he still thought separation was "the best solution"; previously he would have said the *only* solution. "But," he continued, "separation back to Africa is still a long-range program, and while it is yet to materialize, 22 million of our people who are still here in America need better food, clothing, housing, education and jobs *right now*." (His emphasis)

At the time I took this to be a declaration of his intention to build a black nationalist movement that would attempt to unite the Negro people in a fight for immediate needs, while at the same time continuing to hold up separation as a nation as an ultimate objective, and to make propaganda for it accordingly. But I was obviously wrong, because after that statement last March I cannot find any place where Malcolm advocated a separate nation. And on May 21, a few hours after returning from his first trip to Africa, when he was asked at a press conference if he thought Negroes should return to Africa, he said he thought they should stay and fight in the United States for what is rightfully theirs.

Perhaps he thought a separate nation, while desirable, was so far off there was no use talking about it. Perhaps he thought it was a divisive issue impeding black unity. Or perhaps he no longer thought it desirable. In any case, he stopped being a separatist at the time of his break with the Black Muslims, or soon after.

Answer on Black Nationalism

What about his position on black nationalism? Everyone called him a nationalist, friend and foe, and there was no question about it until a few weeks ago. Then he was asked, in the *Young Socialist* interview, "How do you define black nationalism, with which you have been identified?"

He began his answer by saying, "I used to define black nationalism as the idea that the black man should control the economy of his community, the politics of his community, and so forth." That is, he used to define it in the traditional way, as I tried to do a few minutes ago.

and of course he was.

At most of the OAAU rallies he would put in a plug for *The Militant*, without any solicitation on our part. He smoothed the way for it to be sold at Harlem stands and shops. In January, when he gave his interview to the *Young Socialist*, he discussed with the YSA leaders the probability of his making a tour of the nation's campuses in collaboration with the YSA later this year. He would almost surely have spoken here at Debs Hall for the Friday Night Socialist Forum while making that tour. Black SWP and YSA members were welcome to join his organization; whites associated with *The Militant* were welcome to attend OAAU rallies.

Basis of Collaboration

So our relations were friendly and mutually helpful. On our part, because we believed that he and we were on the same side in the struggle, had the same enemies and were traveling in the same direction. In our 1963 convention resolution, the Socialist Workers Party had stated that black nationalism and revolutionary socialism "are not only compatible but complementary forces, that should be welded closer together in thought and action." We predicted that would happen, and so far as Malcolm and we were concerned, it was beginning to happen.

On his part, I think, collaboration was taking place because he felt that we, unlike the liberals, unlike the Communist Party, unlike the Socialist Party, unlike most white radicals, did not want to subordinate his movement or the Negro struggle generally to the government, to the Democratic Party, to the American labor bureaucrats, to the privileged bureaucrats in non-capitalist countries, or to anyone else; and that we did and do want the Negro movement to attain full independence of program and action and to develop uninterruptedly in an uncompromisingly militant direction along the lines that best suit its needs.

Once Malcolm was convinced of that, and of our sincerity, as evidenced by our readiness to stick by our principles, however unpopular they might be, there was no bar to our collaboration. I want to stress that he would have taken this attitude to any militant group, even non-socialist, provided it was, in its own way, independent of the government and opposed to racism.

Black Nationalism and Separatism

Let us now conclude this discussion of Malcolm's ideas during the last year of his life by examining his positions on black nationalism and separatism. This is important because some political opponents of Malcolm already are circulating distorted stories about him, alleging that he was on the verge of quitting his movement, going over to his opponents, etc. And important also because there may be some ambiguity about his relation to black nationalism as a result of a statement in his interview in the current issue of *Young Socialist*.

Black nationalism and separatism are not the same thing, though unfortunately they are often confused. Separatism is a tendency favoring the withdrawal of Negroes into a separate black nation, either

These few remarks about Malcolm as a speaker are admittedly inadequate; I make them only in the hope of interesting someone more qualified than I to study and write about it. I wanted only to convey the idea that there rarely has been a man in America better able to communicate ideas to the most oppressed people; and that this was not just a matter of technique, which can be learned and applied in any situation by almost anybody, but that it was the rare case of a man in closest communion with the oppressed, able to speak to them because he spoke for them, because he identified himself with them, an authentic expression of their yearning for freedom, a true product of their growth in the same way that Lenin was a product of the Russian people.

Split With Muhammad

We come now to the end of the second period of Malcolm's life, 1963, and the split with Muhammad which was consummated in March, 1964. The year 1963 was a year of stirring and movement in the Negro struggle, with hundreds of thousands in the streets; the year that the struggle moved from the South to the Northern ghettos, where the Black Muslims were strongest. It was not yet a revolution, but a prelude to revolutionary struggles. This was the situation that sharpened a dilemma and then produced a crisis in the Black Muslims.

By their militant stance, they had helped to push other Negro organizations to the left. This was their positive contribution. But they were on the sidelines of the struggle, not participants. They talked in angry tones, but did nothing when non-Muslim Negroes were under attack. They were separated not only from whites but from Negro militants.

Among the members, younger and less conservative than in the pre-Malcolm period, signs could be detected of a desire to get into the battle, to pass from propaganda to action. Muhammad tried to allay the ferment; one example was his call, at the organization's national convention in February, 1963, for independent black political action. But he soon pulled back from this and other moves that might have drawn the Black Muslims out of their abstentionism. When the Freedom Now Party was started six months later, he refused to endorse it or let the members join.

The occasion for the split was a remark made by Malcolm after Kennedy's death in November, 1963, followed by Muhammad's silencing of Malcolm with a virtual suspension that was humiliating and deliberately intended to be humiliating. But this was only the occasion, not the cause. The basic factor behind the split was the growth of militancy and mass action in the Negro community, and the different ways in which the two main tendencies in the Black Muslims wanted to respond to the masses knocking on the doors of their mosques.

Growth and Development

There is an instructive relation between the way Malcolm came into the Black Muslims and the way he left. He turned to them from a state

of isolation, not only the physical isolation of prison, but an alienation from society generally and from his own people as well. His years in the Black Muslims had been good for the organization, and they were good for him. He had traveled all over the country as Muhammad's chief trouble-shooter, and he knew the ghetto nationally as no one else did. His vision had broadened, his interests had widened.

He entered the Black Muslims because he was alone and lost, and he left, you could say, because now he was in closest touch with the Negro people, attuned to their needs and wants more than the Black Muslims were or wanted him to be; because he was becoming the spokesman of a growing multitude looking for a new road; because he had found a new role, or rather because a new role had been thrust upon him, which his whole life's experience told him he had to accept, however difficult it would be.

It could not have been an easy decision. Consider the circumstances: 38 years old; a wife and several dependent children; a secure post, relatively well paid, home provided, car provided, expenses; great prestige; a position in an organization second in authority to a man in his late sixties who was not in good health. Some men in his place would have taken the easy way—keep quiet, do as you are told, stay out of the line of fire, mend your fences, and wait. That's the American way—in business, government, church, fraternal and labor circles.

Essence of the Change

But Malcolm was not that kind of man. He had been disturbed to see that Muhammad and some of his ministers were, like other preachers of puritanism, not living in accord with the strict puritanical code they prescribed for the rank-and-file Black Muslims. He tried to overlook things like this—his eyes were mainly turned to the outside world of the broad Negro struggle. He was not the only minister who knew that new, bolder and more active policies were needed if the Black Muslims were to fulfill their real responsibilities to the Negro people. But the other ministers who recognized the need for change—they played it safe. They weren't Malcolm X.

Malcolm had what can be called a second re-birth early in 1964 when he decided his place was with the Negro masses more than with Muhammad's organization. As a Black Muslim leader, he had rejected corrupt American society. Now he passed from merely rejecting it (a negative, passive position) to rebelling against it and organizing to change it (a positive, active position). That was the essence of the change.

Some ultra-lefts in the Negro community did not understand this and talked condescendingly about Malcolm's becoming "weak" or "soft." But the American ruling class and its spokesmen understood what was happening, and they were more hostile to him after the split than before. And they had greater reason to hate and fear him after he set out to build a new movement. That is why, as William F. Warde puts it, he "was crucified by the paid press long before he was martyred by the assassin's bullets."

the United States. When he was asked last May at the Militant Labor Forum what kind of political system he wanted, he said:

"I don't know. But I'm flexible. As was stated earlier, all of the countries that are emerging today from under the shackles of colonialism are turning towards socialism. I don't think it's an accident. Most of the countries that were colonial powers were capitalist countries and the last bulwark of capitalism today is America and it's impossible for a white person today to believe in capitalism and not believe in racism. You can't have capitalism without racism. And if you find a person without racism and you happen to get that person into conversation and they have a philosophy that makes you sure they don't have this racism in their outlook, usually they're socialists or their political philosophy is socialism."

Clifton DeBerry was sitting on the same platform, and took the floor to comment on when and where flexibility was correct: in tactics, yes, but not in relation to the principle that the capitalist system and capitalist parties are enemies of freedom, justice and equality. To which Malcolm replied: "And that's the most intelligent answer I've ever heard on that question."

So I think it fair to say that the legacy of Malcolm is not only plainly anti-capitalist but also pro-socialist. I do not say he was a Marxist—he wasn't—and we can only guess if in his further evolution he would have become one, as Castro did in his later development. But that clearly can be reckoned as a possibility.

Relations with SWP and YSA

A few words about Malcolm's relations with the revolutionary socialists, the Socialist Workers Party and the Young Socialist Alliance:

The record is plain about our attitude to Malcolm. We regarded him as one of the most gifted and important leaders of the struggle while he was still a Black Muslim. When he started his own movement, we called it a momentous development that might turn the struggle onto the road to victory, and publicly pledged our aid in the job he was undertaking. For this we got abuse and condemnation from so-called radicals and liberals; our white members were called "white black nationalists" and other names because we supported Malcolm's movement. All this was long before he had said a single word favorable to socialism, and when the image of him in most so-called radical minds was of a man who would rather die than have anything to do with whites, even revolutionary whites.

On the other side was Malcolm's attitude to us. As a Black Muslim he used to buy *The Militant* when it was sold outside his rallies. He later said that even then he urged Negroes to read it. Less than a month after his break with Muhammad, he spoke at the Militant Labor Forum in New York, and publicly praised *The Militant* for telling the truth and wished it success. He spoke for the Militant Labor Forum another two times during the next nine months, after each of his trips abroad. He wasn't even scheduled to speak the second time: His secretary, James Shabazz, was to be part of a panel, but Malcolm phoned and asked if he would be acceptable in James Shabazz's place;

self for one more sentence, I noted:

"Revolutionary socialists will certainly agree (with Malcolm) that a meaningful and mutually beneficial labor-Negro alliance will not be forged until the Negro people are organized independently and strongly enough, numerically and ideologically, to assure that their interests cannot be subordinated or sold out by the other partner or partners in any alliance."

The subject must have come up often during his subsequent travels abroad, where his ideas were strongly influenced during his last year. But he stuck to his position. When he spoke at a Militant Labor Forum panel in New York last May, he said:

"In my recent travels into the African countries and others, it was impressed upon me the importance of having a working unity among all peoples, black as well as white. But the only way this is going to be brought about is the Negroes have to be in unity first."

So far as I have been able to learn, that remained Malcolm's position to the end. He was not opposed to alliances with other forces, including labor, provided they were the right kinds of alliances and provided the Negro part of the alliance was independently organized, so that it could guard against betrayal by being able to pull out of any alliance that went bad.

There is no doubt whatever in my mind that Malcolm would have favored an independent mass black movement making alliances with a radicalized mass labor movement when conditions produced two such components for an alliance. I have no doubt about it because he was willing, even now, in the absence of two such mass movements, to collaborate with radical whites under certain conditions. A man willing to collaborate with numerically weak radical forces, as I will try to show Malcolm was, would have to be out of his mind not to collaborate with mass radical forces. And whatever the *N. Y. Times* and *Muhammad Speaks* say, Malcolm was not out of his mind.

On Capitalism and Socialism

Next let us consider briefly Malcolm's attitudes to capitalism and socialism. In the *Young Socialist* interview he stated:

"It is impossible for capitalism to survive, primarily because the system of capitalism needs some blood to suck. Capitalism used to be like an eagle, but now it's more like a vulture . . . and can only suck the blood of the helpless. As the nations of the world free themselves, then capitalism has less and less victims, less to suck, and it becomes weaker and weaker. It's only a matter of time in my opinion before it will collapse completely."

Marxists might question whether capitalism will collapse, or have to be collapsed, but who can question that in his last months Malcolm was taking an unequivocally anti-capitalist position?

Malcolm did not learn about socialism by reading Marx, but he managed to learn about it anyway. He learned about it from the colonial revolution, especially its pro-socialist contingent. He had discussions with Castro and Che Guevara and Algerian socialists and socialists in Ghana, Guinea, Zanzibar, and elsewhere, including

Abiding Beliefs

We have heard the expression, "the new Malcolm X." It is appropriate in some ways, misleading in others. Some of his ideas did change starting last March, but others did not. Let us at least mention the latter before examining the former.

That Negroes can get their freedom only by fighting for it;

That the government is a racist government and is not going to grant freedom;

That gradualism, the program of the liberals, white and black, is not the road to equality;

That Uncle Toms must be exposed and opposed;

That Negroes must rely on themselves and control their own struggle;

That Negroes must determine their own strategy and tactics;

That Negroes must select their own leaders.

—These are ideas that Malcolm believed before he left the Black Muslims, and that he still believed the day he died.

A More Democratic Movement

In approaching the immensely difficult and exhausting job of building a new movement, in opposition to new as well as old enemies—a task which radicals should best be able to understand and sympathize with—Malcolm showed from the start that he did not want merely a replica of the Black Muslim structure plus some modifications in policy. He wanted a different kind of organization, with a different kind of relation between the leaders and ranks.

The Black Muslims built everything around a mystique of leadership, faith in and submission to a divine, all-wise chief. That Malcolm wanted something radically different could be seen from the statement he made at his first press conference after the split. He denied that he was "expert in any particular field." He called for help in the form of ideas and suggestions from all quarters, especially students, white or black.

He not only accepted advice, but sought it. He not only invited criticism, but welcomed it. I am aware of one such case personally. I never met Malcolm or saw him in person, but I wrote many articles about him, most of them supporting and defending him. It was typical of him, I think, that the only one of these articles about which he sent me a message of appreciation was the one that was most critical of some implications in a speech he had made.

When he read something useful or pertinent to the problems of his organization, he would go out of his way to get copies for his fellow leaders so that they could read and think about it and develop informed and collective attitudes. On the day he was killed, he was scheduled to present for discussion his ideas on the program of the Organization of Afro-American Unity. It is plain that he was trying to build a far more democratic organization and a far more collective leadership than the Black Muslims ever dreamed of. This is evident also from the fact that he did not fear to associate with radicals and refused to bar them from the organization, despite the discontent of some of the more conservative members.

Thinking for Himself

Malcolm's courage was not only physical, but intellectual. We can appreciate its magnitude only if we fully understand the degree of his dependence on and subordination to Muhammad before the split. For more than 12 years, for most of his adult life, he had been to Muhammad like a son to a father—no, more than that, for few sons are so voluntarily and so long obedient. And then, with very little advance notice, he was on his own. Three days before his death he told a *N. Y. Times* interviewer:

"I was the spokesman for the Black Muslims. I believed in Elijah Muhammad more strongly than Christians do in Jesus. I believed in him so strongly that my mind, my body, my voice functioned 100 per cent for him and the movement. My belief led others to believe." In Contrast, he continued. "I feel like a man who has been asleep somewhat and under someone else's control. I feel what I'm thinking and saying now is for myself. Before, it was for and by the guidance of Elijah Muhammad. Now I think with my own mind, sir."

To think with his own mind—that is what all the forces at the command of the ruling class in this country are organized to discourage and prevent the Negro from doing. You need intellectual as well as physical courage to think and say things for yourself, to think new thoughts, to search out ideas that have been forbidden by the ruling class, to seek them among the Mau Mau in Kenya or the Simbas in the Congo. That is the true mark of an open, honest and free mind—and of a revolutionary leader.

Religion and Black Unity

Malcolm remained a believer in Islam after the split with Muhammad, but it was in the official and orthodox Islam after his trip to Mecca last year. He praised Muhammad even as he left his organization, thinking or hoping that friction with the Black Muslims could be avoided while he turned his attention to the broad Negro struggle. With the advantage of hindsight, we can see this hope was unfounded. An independent movement of the Malcolm X type was a threat to *every* vested interest in the country, *every* privileged hierarchy. And it did not take long for Muhammad to launch ruthless and slanderous attacks designed to isolate Malcolm, because he feared that otherwise he would be deserted by his own members. Perhaps Malcolm might still be alive if he had realized from the start how much he imperiled the status quo, and had acted and prepared differently. This we don't know, can't know.

Malcolm believed in black unity after as well as before the split. But as a Black Muslim, what he meant and had to mean was black unity under the leadership and control of Muhammad, and with unquestioning acceptance of his religious dogmas and discipline. The kind of black unity Malcolm sought after the split was the unity of all Negroes, whatever their religions, whatever their philosophies, so long as they were ready to fight for freedom.

It was a movement away from religious sectarianism toward non-sectarian mass action. But this aim could not be fulfilled by his first

was in Africa last summer he briefly gave consideration to an offer that he run on the Michigan FNP ticket for the U.S. Senate; he decided instead to remain in Africa longer. However, he never affiliated with the FNP, for reasons not discussed publicly; maybe he thought the FNP was premature or launched without sufficient groundwork on too narrow a basis.

But while his thinking on politics was still in a process of development, and uncompleted, there was nothing general or tentative about his attitude to the capitalist parties and the two-party system. To him they were both enemies of the Negro people, currently as well as historically, and neither merited an iota of support from Negroes. He had nothing but contempt for the Communist Party's support of Johnson in 1964.

While he did not endorse Clifton DeBerry, the Socialist Workers Party candidate for president, he did attack both of DeBerry's major opponents; and in his own way made it easier for DeBerry to get a hearing from Harlem audiences, thus indicating a measure of sympathy. He said he would be willing under certain conditions to consider running as an independent candidate for mayor of New York against the Democratic and Republican candidates in 1965. In terms of the political spectrum he stood on the radical side, although he had not reached strong conclusions about *how* to organize independent black political power.

The Question of Alliances

The speech Malcolm had started to make when he was shot down was to deal with the program of the Organization of Afro-American Unity, and of the militant black movement generally. We know that he had been thinking about the question of "alliances," the question of the independent Negro movement's relations with other forces in this country, and that he had circulated among other OAAU leaders literature dealing with some aspects of this subject.

Even if we did not know that, it would be logical to assume that he would touch on this question, because no organization defines itself and clarifies its own program and perspectives without simultaneously defining its relations to its enemies and its friends, present or potential. Now we may never know where his thinking had led him on this point, and can only speculate. But even speculation can be oriented by some definite facts.

At his first press conference last March, Malcolm had this to say on the question of alliances:

"Whites can help us, but they can't join us. There can be no black-white unity until there is first some black unity. There can be no workers solidarity until there is first some racial solidarity. We cannot think of uniting with others, until we have first united among ourselves."

This, as I pointed out at that time, is not the statement of a man claiming that black and white working class solidarity is unnecessary, or that it is impossible. On the contrary, it is the statement of a man explaining one of the conditions through which workers solidarity may be achieved on a broad and durable basis. And if I may quote my-

between the older and younger white generations in America.

When Young Socialist Alliance leaders interviewed him and asked what he considered to be the cause of race prejudice, he didn't give anything resembling the Black Muslim position. "Ignorance and greed," he replied. A scientific socialist of any race might turn the three words around, saying "Greed and ignorance," and might expand on the theme at greater length, but would not say anything essentially different. "You can't have capitalism without racism," he said on an earlier occasion.

A True Internationalist

Malcolm had been abroad before his break with Muhammad, but only briefly, carrying out assignments for Muhammad, not on his own. But after the break in 1964 he traveled to and through Africa and the Mid East twice, spending almost half of his remaining life abroad—studying, searching, discussing, learning, seeking help and giving it. And when he returned he was not just a sympathizer of the colonial revolution, but a staunch internationalist, on the side of the oppressed and exploited masses of the world against their oppressors and exploiters, whose central fountainhead he recognized to be U.S. imperialism, the dominant force in what he called the international power structure. No one in the world denounced the U.S. role in the Congo more forcefully and effectively.

One purpose of his trips was of course to mobilize African support behind the project to put the U.S. government on trial in the United Nations for the continued oppression of American Negroes, with which he had limited success. But the State Department credited him, or rather blamed him, for a good part of the strong stand against U.S. imperialism taken by African nations in the UN at the time of the latest atrocities in the Congo. As he knew, the CIA and similar agencies take an interest in what the State Department doesn't like. Those who heard him in Detroit the week before his murder knew about his hope to unite the many millions of the oppressed in Latin America and the Caribbean together with their Afro-American brothers and sisters against their common exploiter.

So he was simultaneously broadening his horizons and zeroing in on American imperialism—this product of the segregated, locked-in ghetto who broke through and over the walls of national boundary and race to become an internationalist; this internationalist who admired John Killens' definition of a patriot: "Dignity was his country, Manhood was his government, and Freedom was his land."

Political Action

In the area of political action Malcolm was also far ahead of the Black Muslims. That didn't take much doing, since they abstain from politics. He favored Negroes organizing politically and running and electing their own candidates, and driving out of office black stooges of the major parties. He participated in a Harlem conference on independent political action two months before his death.

But his position on politics was largely general. He said he found some good in what the Freedom Now Party was doing, and while he

organizational step at the time of the split—the founding of the Muslim Mosque, Inc. As a religious organization, it would obviously be limited in its appeal. Malcolm soon corrected this by forming the broad Organization of Afro-American Unity. The selection of a religious group first showed how closely he was tied to his past even one year ago; the addition of the OAAU not many weeks later showed how rapidly he was able to transcend the limitations carried over from his past.

The Question of Self-Defense

We must spend some time on the issue of self-defense, or, as the press called it, "violence." We have to spend it, although the truth is so obvious, because the press centered their attacks around this issue.

Malcolm always was for self-defense—in his teens, when he was part of the underworld; when he was a Black Muslim; and in his last year. In each of these three periods, however, the idea had a different content for him. The Black Muslims say you have the right to defend yourself when attacked, and that this right is granted by Allah and his messenger. Malcolm validated the right on political and constitutional grounds; he brought it down from heaven to earth. The Black Muslims defend themselves, but Malcolm went further and said all Negroes should defend themselves; with him the right became specific, concrete and practical. The difference was apparent when Muhammad's first attack on Malcolm revolved around Malcolm's advocacy of defensive rifle clubs.

Seeing many students in the audience, I shall try to convey my point this way. Let me suggest that one or several of you prepare a research paper on the subject: "How the Press Reported Malcolm X's Views on Violence." It would be very enlightening. It would give you insight, through one example, of the way 99 per cent of the American people get the "information" on the basis of which they form their ideas. It would illuminate more than the single example; it would reveal some basic features of American society as a whole and how it is controlled through propaganda posing as news or fact.

Curtain of Distortion

As a model for such a research paper on Malcolm and violence, I recommend a recent book called *A Curtain of Ignorance* by Felix Greene, a journalist familiar with China. What it does is compare the facts about China with what the American press has been writing about China for the past 15 years. The result is devastating. I will read but one example:

In 1963 Mao Tse-tung issued, at the suggestion of Robert F. Williams, a statement on racial discrimination in the U.S. The key sentence said:

"I call upon the workers, peasants, revolutionary intellectuals, enlightened elements of the bourgeoisie, and other enlightened persons of all colors, white, black, yellow, brown, etc., to unite to oppose racial discrimination practiced by U.S. imperialism and to support

the American Negroes in their struggle against racial discrimination."

Here is how the *Christian Century* (and many other publications in this country) described that statement:

"A summons to colored peoples to unite in war against the white race was issued from Peking in the name of Mao Tse-tung. His call for worldwide racial war reflects a degree of hate and desperation which can only be described as psychotic."

The writer of my proposed research paper will find Greene's book useful because *exactly* the same method was used with Malcolm's statements on violence. And its use was no more accidental in one case than in the other.

Those of you who heard Malcolm know that he did not advocate violence; he advocated that Negroes defend themselves when attacked. He said it 100 times, he said it 1,000 times. He said that he was opposed to violence and wanted to stop it, and that Negroes could contribute to stopping it by letting the attackers know they would defend themselves. He could have said it 1,000,000 times and the readers of the American press still would not have known the truth.

The Times' Editorial

Take the *N. Y. Times*. This is supposed to be the best daily paper in the country, in the world. Urbane, sophisticated, liberal on certain civil liberties and civil rights questions. But it hated Malcolm with a fury I cannot recollect it showing to anyone else in the 30 years I have been reading it. The mask slipped the day Malcolm was killed, and the ugly face of American capitalism showed through in the editorial that appeared the next morning. There is a Latin saying: *Speak nothing but good about the dead*. The *Times'* approach to Malcolm was: *Speak nothing good about the dead, and if you must, twist it to make it look bad*.

"He was a case history, as well as an extraordinary and twisted man, turning many true gifts to evil purpose," says the *Times* editorial. ("Case history" and "twisted" is their way of saying Malcolm was mentally unbalanced. So he was insane, and evil to boot.)

"... his ruthless and fanatical belief in violence ... marked him for fame, and for a violent end." (So his alleged belief is linked to his death, in some kind of cause-and-effect relation; he was responsible for his own murder.)

"... he did not seek to fit into society or into the life of his own people ... The world he saw through those horn-rimmed glasses of his was distorted and dark. But he made it darker still with his exaltation of fanaticism. Yesterday someone came out of that darkness that he spawned and killed him." (The darkness that *he* spawned! So Malcolm was not only mad and evil, he also possessed magical power—he made himself look like 39, but he must have been at least 350 years old to have "spawned" racial violence.) The editorial concludes with the magnanimous concession that the murder "demands an investigation." Not because it was a criminal act, but because it "could easily touch off a war of vengeance of the kind he himself fomented."

The Logic of Racism

Now why is this? Suppose that I, a so-called white man, or any white person, went downtown and stood on a box and said, "White people should defend themselves *when attacked*." Would I be branded an advocate of violence, a racist or a fanatic? No, the worst I would be called would be a nut.

And if a white person got up there after me and said, "White people should defend their interests when they are attacked in Cuba or Vietnam by sending invasion armies or 160 bombers," would the press condemn him as a fomentor of violence, or a racist fanatic? No, some would say, "Of course, it goes without saying," and others would declare, "That man belongs in the White House." The White House, not the nuthouse.

What is the difference? The difference is that black people, not whites, are being attacked or are subject to attack. And the very thought of someone encouraging Negroes to defend themselves makes the apologists for American racism see red, or black. So much so that they can hardly work up the pretence that they are in any way unhappy about Malcolm's murder. This difference shows beyond doubt how permeated with racism this country and its press are. The only other country in the world with such phobias and psychoses is South Africa.

It is too bad that so much time has to be spent explaining such obvious truths, because Malcolm's stand on this issue was not the central part of his philosophy—just the most controversial. It was an indispensable part of his program, for how can anyone expect to win freedom unless he is willing to defend his person, rights and property against violence designed to terrorize and silence him? But it was not a central part, and is not, by itself, the solution to the Negro's problems. Even when Negroes organize for self-defense, as they should and inevitably will, they will still not be free, because inequality is built into this society, in every warp and woof; the system itself exudes and perpetuates inequality.

The Question of Race

Next is the question of race. Here Malcolm made a very pronounced change in his thinking. Partly through the influence of Islam, a religion which views and treats all races alike, and partly through his contact with revolutionaries in many countries, he threw overboard the whole Black Muslim mythology about superior and inferior races and its doctrine about inherent evil and degeneracy in a white skin.

Repudiating racism in all forms, he resolved to judge men and movements on the basis of their deeds, not their color or race. Deeds, not words; and he was pretty shrewd about distinguishing between the two, as in the case of white liberals (or black liberals, for that matter). He developed an historical approach to racism. He knew American whites had been conditioned, miseducated and infected on race worse than most European whites, for example, and he remained more on guard with Americans. He distinguished in similar way