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Murder of Fred Hampton was domestic version of My Lai massacre

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Fred Hampton speaks at a Chicago Black Panther rally in 1969.

Struggle-La Lucha is republishing this article about the global ramifications of the U.S. government's execution of Chicago Black Panther Party leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark on Dec. 4, 1969. It was written some 50 years ago by Marxist thinker and fighter Sam Marcy and originally appeared on Dec. 23, 1969.

It would be woefully wrong and extremely one-sided to regard the murder of Panther leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark as just another in the series of cruel and barbarous atrocities against Black people.

It is all that, to be sure, and more. The event, however, marks a certain turning point and discloses an objective orientation by the ruling class which must be taken by us

as a point of departure for a more concrete, more accurate appraisal of the entire situation in the United States.

For one thing, it indicates that the ruling class has definitely abandoned, if it ever really entertained, the idea that a series of what it called “basic reforms,” carried out over a period of time, would solve the fundamental problem of racist oppression and super-exploitation of Black people.

These measures, even in minimal form, have never really gotten off the ground. And what has been granted in the way of concessions came in the wake of more than two hundred mass rebellions, and has been of such a meagre character that it has served only to enrage the mass of the impoverished population and to harden its determination for sustained struggle.

Policy of naked violence

The series of coordinated attacks by the Nixon administration on the Black Panther Party in Chicago, Los Angeles, Connecticut and New York takes the Johnson policy a long, long step further into the blind alley from which the master class will never again emerge.

It shows that in spite of the fabulous, utterly incalculable wealth that the ruling class has accumulated, especially in the last few decades, it is less willing and less capable of carrying out the basic, elementary democratic reforms fully a hundred years after a protracted, bloody Civil War, in which these very issues were presumed to have been settled once and for all.

Instead, the master class has embarked on a policy of open, naked violence as the “final and ultimate solution.”

The Nixon administration hopes to “ride out” the storm of protest that the murders have evoked. It counts on the liberal bourgeois politicians to say their piece, to stage

phony independent investigations like that headed by Goldberg, Clark and others, to pass harmless resolutions, present petitions, and engage in condemnatory orations against “excessive and unnecessary force” by the police – while at the same time more Panthers are jailed and more brutal assaults continue.

But this time-honored approach of the possessing classes to the social problems they themselves created by their oppression and robbery of the poor and exploited has dubious value for them in the world of today. The use of mass repression by exploiting classes is not a new phenomenon; it has been characteristic of the domination of the ruling classes since the dawn of class society.

It has had, however, lasting significance only when the foundations of its social system were still relatively stable and firm. It is precisely this which is much in question today. The truth of the matter is that the U.S. is now engulfed in an unparalleled social crisis. The crisis is of such proportions that there are scarcely any leading political representatives of the bourgeoisie who by their utterances do not show awareness of the acute character of the crisis.

For this crisis is unlike any that the U.S. has experienced. It is superficial and misleading to say that the crisis is caused by the Vietnam War, and that if this war were ended, the money expended on it would be used to improve the lot of Black people, other oppressed people and the working class generally.

Symptom of disease

The Vietnam War is merely a giant symptom of a malignancy which is ravaging the entire social fabric of the capitalist system. The crisis that the U.S. is passing through is a crisis of the whole system, not merely a cyclical economic crisis as in the past. Nor is it a crisis which is exclusively geared to the effects of the Vietnam War.

Of course U.S. capitalism has experienced many grave and acute economic crises which in their time were soon accompanied by serious political struggles and which later were overcome by the bourgeoisie as a new cycle of capitalist development emerged.

But all of these crises were more or less resolved, especially those following the turn of the century, by outward expansion into the world markets and by subjugating Asian people (as in the Philippines), Latin Americans (as in Cuba, Puerto Rico, etc.) and African people (as in Liberia).

The great economic crisis and subsequent stagnation of the early 1930s was resolved by U.S. intervention in the Second World War and by its subsequent economic and political subjugation of practically the entire world, with the exception of the countries where the bourgeoisie had been overthrown.

The deadly contradiction

The crisis in which the U.S. finds itself today is one where the area subject to its economic exploitation and political oppression is rapidly contracting precisely at a time when the productive forces at the disposal of the U.S. ruling class continue to expand at a staggering rate.

(The technological advances in electronics, aeronautics and space technology generally are only some of the well-known and outstanding examples. But perhaps of equal importance are the still secret advances in the research and development laboratories of the giant monopolies such as AT&T, Du Pont, GE and others – aside from those that are directly controlled by the research and development laboratories of the Pentagon, which are the collective technological storehouse of the bourgeoisie.)

This contradiction, namely the contradiction between the monstrous expansion of

the productive forces and the ever sharper curtailment of markets and areas under political and military control of the U.S., is the most acute expression today of the general crisis engulfing U.S. imperialism. It expresses itself on the world arena politically as the struggle between U.S. imperialism and the liberation movements of the world and their supporters.

The Vietnam War constitutes an effort to resolve this contradiction in its favor by military means. What the U.S. does in the Middle East and in Latin America, as well as other areas, is the same thing, but accomplished by slightly different means.

War's end won't change it

Soon the U.S. will have a gross national product worth a trillion dollars. Ending the war in Vietnam and transferring some of the money for concessions to Black people and working people generally would make only the smallest dent in this astronomical sum of money. Yet this is not at all likely to happen.

The avariciousness of the bourgeoisie when it comes to allocating any sum of money was illustrated just a short time ago by the most venomous opposition to a relatively piddling sum of \$70 million for such an imperious necessity as rat control in slum areas.

There is no reason whatever to expect the bourgeoisie to have a change of heart if they end the Vietnam War. For in their calculation, the ending of one war creates an imperialist peace which is merely a preparatory period for another imperialist war.

The bitter war that the U.S. is waging at home is only one aspect of a war that it is fighting on a world front against all the liberation movements. To prosecute this war as ruthlessly as it can, it must also, in its wake, carry on a desperate undercover war of economic aggression, even against its closest imperialist allies, and sometimes on issues which, measured on the scale of world events, appear petty and avaricious in

the extreme.

This best can be gauged by an example from the way the Nixon administration handled a decision that the U.S. should go ahead and build the SST (Super Sonic Transport). In the face of the well-known objections of their imperialist allies, France and Britain, the United States decided to go ahead and build the SST because, Nixon said, “We must retain world leadership in aviation.”

Competition and decay

The significance as well as the arrogance involved in this decision by Nixon illustrates perfectly the sharpening contradiction between the need of U.S. monopoly capitalism to expand and at the same time the danger which it entails for it.

France and Britain are two of the oldest and most important allies the U.S. has. They are in fact blood brothers from the same monopoly capitalist family. It is true that both France and Britain have been reduced to somewhat of a semi-colonial status by the U.S., but they are still imperialist brigands themselves.

In view of the heavy reliance that the U.S. places upon them in the event of any major military adventure the U.S. undertakes, logic would seem to dictate that the U.S. should make a minor economic concession to them in this instance even if it were only for the purpose of strengthening them as imperialist allies.

But, said Nixon, the U.S. “must”-and we repeat, “must”-retain world leadership, even in a minor case like this. And there is not an aircraft company in the United States that would say otherwise.

Hue and cry of liberals

A sanctimonious hue and cry went up from many newspapers in this country

berating Nixon for making the SST decision – especially from the New York Times. But would any one of those newspapers, each of which is an imperialist establishment in competition with others, cede leadership in its own industry to a competitor? Would the New York Times cede leadership in circulation or advertising to a competitor? On the contrary, it fights tooth and nail, and as avariciously as any aircraft company, to expand and retain its own leadership against any and all competitors.

Such are the laws of imperialist competition. The growth of huge monopolistic dynasties, and the latest form that they take, such as conglomerates, has not softened the nature of the competitive struggle, but has made it more violent in character and subjected it to catastrophic solutions beyond the control of the capitalist government itself.

Sanctimonious editorials and preachments on the need for “reasonable concessions” in foreign policy carry about as much weight with the Pentagon as the same moral preachments and exhortations for “reasonable” concessions to Black people carry with Strom Thurmond and the entire racist establishment.

The foreign policy of an imperialist government is no more than an extension of its domestic policy. The murder of Hampton and Clark is a domestic version of the My Lai massacre.

Repression and strikes

The general intensification of the class struggle at home as evidenced by the attack against the General Electric workers by the GE oligarchy is bound to be repeated on a wider and more massive scale.

Boulwarism, the GE version of modern, space age strikebreaking, is merely a precursor of the tactic that the ruling class will apply on a more general and

widespread scale as the crisis of the ruling class deepens. Boulwarism concretely takes its name from the GE union-busting representative who has consistently pushed to establish a “new era” in “labor relations.” His particular assault consists of submitting as GE’s new “contract offer” to the union a take-it-or-leave-it ultimatum, and arrogantly stating that whether the workers like it or not, GE will negotiate no further.

The sheer gall of this pronouncement at contract expiration date, let alone the criminal indifference displayed to the many valid and unresolved grievances of the workers, is an obviously well-calculated provocation – a deliberate attempt to smash the unions and demoralize the workers.

It's all one policy

The Kennedy-Johnson-Nixon policy is merely an application of Boulwarism in U.S. foreign relations. It is a policy of the use of military force where threats and ultimatums have failed to intimidate the oppressed.

The action of the steel barons in shooting down the striking steel workers in the 1930s was not an accidental, episodic event torn out of the context of the historical development of heavy industry and high finance. Not more so than My Lai, Chicago, Los Angeles, Connecticut and New York.

By taking the broader historical view of the evolution of U.S. finance capital, we can see that the architects who fashioned the My Lai massacre, the Chicago murders, the GE attack on the workers, have threads that reach down to the roots of the very nature of the capitalist system of exploitation.

The steel barons of today, even more so than those of the 1930s, are inextricably tied in with the dynastic rulers of the auto, electric and space industries, all of whom have staked their destiny on world domination or “leadership” as they like to call it.

Not one of these industrial-financial combines, whether it be based on the oldest or the newest modern technology, evinces any but the most aggressive, most vicious drive to control and dominate all the economic arteries of the globe.

And in truth, the bourgeoisie has little choice in the matter. Given their insatiable lust for super-profits and driven by the inexorable law of capitalist accumulation, the productive forces at the disposal of the capitalist class become ever larger, spanning continents and oceans, underwater and in outer space. They can least of all be confined or reduced or driven back to their national borders.

Force: theirs and ours

Force, which the bourgeoisie used so frequently and with such devastating results throughout its long and bloody history, was effective as long as the conditions of production (i.e., exploitation) favored it. But force alone has never been able to maintain the existence of a social system or the ruling class which dominates it when the material conditions for its existence are crumbling.

The contradiction between the growth of the productive forces and the confines of capitalist private property is derived from another fundamental contradiction: that between the social character of capitalist production and individual private appropriation and ownership which is finally reaching the point in the United States of having fully matured.

It is what Marx long ago called the rebellion of the productive forces, which are social in character, against the capitalist relations of exploitation that confine them. This heralds the coming of a proletarian revolution as the only rational solution to a social crisis threatening to devour society as a whole.

Force, however, is also, as Marx said, “the midwife to revolution.” A billion people on the face of the globe have learned that lesson well. This is a nightmare for the

bourgeoisie. It is also the hope of the rest of humanity.

