

"They (the Hearsts) have seemingly said by their actions that they know me and therefore do not have to repent for their crimes. However, to this I would say yes. You do, indeed, know me. You have always known me. I'm that nigger you have hunted and feared night and day. I'm that nigger you have killed hundreds of my people in a vain hope of finding. I'm that nigger that is no longer just hunted, robbed and murdered. I'm the nigger that hunts you now.

Yes, you know me. You know us all. You know me. I'm the wetback. You know me, I'm the gook, the broad, the servant, the spik. Yes indeed you know us all and we know you - the oppressor, murderer, and robber. And you have hunted and robbed and exploited us all. Now we are the hunters that will give you no rest. And we will not compromise the freedom of our children."

Cinque
February 21, 1974

Sisters and Brothers:

On May 17, over 500 agents of the Los Angeles Police Department, the Sherrif's Department, the FBI, and other police agencies surrounded a small cottage in Compton, a predominantly Black community in Los Angeles. In complete disregard for the safety of the people of the neighborhood and under orders to shoot to kill, they attacked the house with thousands of rounds of automatic and semi-automatic rifle fire, tear gas bombs, and fragmentation grenades. They set the house on fire and let it roar in flames for two hours before calling in fire trucks. Two adjoining houses were seriously damaged. The target house burned to the ground, and everyone inside, six members of the Symbionese Liberation Army, were killed: Cinque Donald DeFreeze, Hizmoon Patricia Soltysik, Genina Angela Atwood, Fahizah Nancy Ling Perry, William Wolfe, and Camilla Hall.

We deeply mourn the death of these revolutionaries. Donald DeFreeze, Cinque, the leader and Field Marshall of the SLA, had a life like many Black people - continual harassment by police, in and out of jail again and again, constant anguish and frustration at his inability to provide a decent life for his family in this racist society. Like hundreds of other Black people

he became a revolutionary in prison, developing a vision of different people joining together in an army to fight oppression of all forms. Nancy Ling Perry, Fahizah, was a college student during the Vietnam war, lived through the youth culture movement in Berkeley, and left it to join the growing, beautiful movement of solidarity and support for prison struggles. Camilla Hall came from a religious family. She was a social worker, a gay activist, a gardener, and a poet. Like Fahizah she became a revolutionary through her commitment to the prison struggle.

People like these formed the Symbionese Liberation Army. The decision to create a clandestine organization and begin to build armed struggle is a very difficult one. These people made many sacrifices and many hard choices. They dedicated their lives to the destruction of the American corporate empire and its imperialist, racist, and sexist oppression and died fighting for the revolution.

The kidnapping of Patricia Hearst and the subsequent demand - that her family use a little of its tremendous riches to feed hungry people - was an ambitious and courageous revolutionary guerrilla action. It was successful on many levels. The SLA raised to the forefront of peoples' consciousness the fact that millions of people in this country are poor and hungry. They laid the responsibility for this poverty and hunger directly on William Randolph Hearst and his class, the ruling class. They forced an unprecedented concession from the ruling class, the distribution of 4 million dollars of free food to thousands and thousands of poor people in the Bay Area. In Amerika, where baby chickens are slaughtered, milk is emptied into the streets, and rich soil lies unused so that the big conglomerates that control the food industries can maintain high prices, they reaffirmed the right of all people to eat, and the right of the people to fight to obtain the necessities of life. This was the political message of their action.

The SLA successfully maintained the political initiative throughout the entire action. They thwarted the efforts of Hearst and his media to change the issue from hunger and poverty to the fate of his daughter. "Save the children" was a theme, repeated in almost every communique. They were understood by thousands of people as serious revolutionaries fighting for poor people, not as crazy terrorists. Their militancy and determination inspired many people.

But the success and the political effect of this action was only half as great as it might have been. The failure of most of the organized left to relate positively to the political initiative of the SLA was crippling. In a situation like this, like Attica, like Wounded Knee, where the contradiction between possessor and dispossessed, rich and poor, oppressor and oppressed is absolutely stark, opportunities exist as at no other time to explain to masses of people the reality of Amerika.

When Ronald Reagan said they should put botulism in the food to be distributed, where were the outcries of protest, the defense of the right of people to eat? When Black people in Oakland rioted over the quality of the food and the demeaning way in which it was thrown at them, who supported them? Where were the rallies and speeches and leaflets on racism and poverty and hunger in Amerika? When Patricia Hearst became Tania, and the genuineness and courage of her conviction was clear to everyone who listened to her voice and had followed the progression and content of her statements, where were the voices supporting her decision and attacking the stupid claims by Hearst and his "brainwashing" experts with their "stress machines"?

Many people did work to support the action. Some left papers printed articles exposing the extent of the Hearst empire, its origin in robbery and exploitation. Some movement people worked in the food program, pushing the real issues and fighting to

improve it. There were good posters and spraypainting scattered throughout the Bay area.

But these peoples' political leadership was largely ignored. Most of the white left was criminally blind to the fact that tens of thousands were heartened and inspired by the opening up of new fronts of struggle, by the real victories that were achieved, by the determination of the SLA. A wide range of community groups and leaders expressed varying degrees of support for the SLA--all supported the right of the people to food. And at each distribution, 40,000 people lined up to wait for what was often inadequate amounts of poor quality food, defiantly fighting Hearst's recalcitrance, knowing that Reagan was calling them accomplices and making veiled threats about prosecuting them.

Yet too many movement spokespeople and organizations attacked the SLA for being "isolated" and organized against them, cutting them off from potential support--political and material. They encouraged people to close their ears to the SLA's words, to be cynical about the necessity to fight for freedom. They said the SLA wasn't attacking the real enemy, as if Hearst isn't a perfect symbol of the ruling class.

The article, "Terrorism In The Left," written by the editors of Ramparts, exemplifies the reactionary nature of this kind of criticism. Throughout, they define armed struggle as something dangerous to the revolution. In the guise of criticizing the action they actually organize sympathy for the Hearsts. And most seriously, like the Hearst press, they characterize revolutionaries, especially those who engage in armed struggle, as crazy. They assert that rebelling prisoners and their supporters have a warped and exaggerated view of the brutality of Amerika. They present the work of Fahizah - Nancy Ling Perry - in support of prisoners and their struggle not as beautiful, and as a practice to be encouraged, but as an example of mental illness. These are the politics of liberalism. They must be defeated.

Revolutionaries must be bold and creative in giving and accepting criticism. Many serious revolutionaries had criticisms or felt differences with the SLA. But so-called criticisms of the SLA outside a context of active support for peoples' right to eat and peoples' right to fight for liberation are indistinguishable, in effect, from the attacks of the enemy. The movement, by not activating itself to support the action - to explain it, build and extend it, to struggle over strategy - created the political climate where this massacre could take place. Those whose criticisms of the SLA and of their action helped organize support for the enemy must share responsibility for the result.

Opportunism in the left takes many forms. In the white left it traditionally means abandoning the struggle against racism to push self-interest, economist struggles. Sometimes it means "reaching people where they're at", ignoring that where they're at is racism. Sometimes it means reducing the complexities and uncertainties of revolution to simplistic formulas derived from misreadings of revolutionary literature. Always it means taking the easy way, the non-struggle way. Revolutionaries who fight cannot be left to fight and die alone. The spectacle of those women and men, trapped in a burning building, surrounded by 500 state agents, all on national TV for hours and hours, without support from the left, without a rally or a speech or a leaflet or an action, cannot be repeated. It is intolerable.

"However, the irrefutable truth is that a liberation struggle is revolutionary war. Revolutionary war is a complicated process of mass struggle, armed and unarmed, peaceful and violent, legal and clandestine, economic and political, where all forms of struggle are developed harmoniously around the axis of armed struggle. Anyone who by now has not grasped these basic facts does not know what liberation struggle is--or is trying to palm off reformism for liberation struggle."

Martin Sostre, in a letter
in support of the SLA

Revolutionary armed struggle in this country has begun. It was

begun by Black and Third World women and men frustrated by the unwillingness of Amerikan imperialism to grant them the most rudimentary human dignity and rights. It is as old as the Indian Wars of Resistance and as new as the Black Liberation Army. It cannot be wished away, and it is not wrong. We support the right of all people to take up arms and fight for their liberation.

Armed struggle is not the only form of revolutionary struggle. Armed actions and mass movements together make the fabric of revolutionary struggle. Today the US government is in complete chaos. In Asia, Africa, and Latin America imperialism is on the defensive. Black, Brown, and Native American resistance here continues to grow. The prisons are exploding with tension. Alienation permeates the entire society. It is possible to begin organizing thousands of people to oppose imperialism, support Black liberation, and fight to destroy this sick system that oppresses us all. This work must be begun. Armed struggle also must be built and supported. Armed struggle can illuminate the nature of the struggle, identify the real enemy, win some victories, inspire people, give them experience in different forms of struggle, and prepare for the future. Armed struggle cannot become a spectacle. It is the responsibility of mass leaders and organizations to encourage and support revolutionary armed struggle, in the open as well as quiet ways. Without mass struggle there can be no revolution. Without armed struggle there can be no victory.

The "destruction" of the Symbionese Liberation Army that Richard Nixon, Randolph Hearst, and Charles Bates crow about is only a lie and an illusion. The SLA represents thousands and thousands of people in this country who have learned there is no alternative to US corporate fascism besides revolution, and many more who are beginning to learn. Joe Remiro said from prison: "What the SLA has done, there's no way of going back and telling people to forget what happened, forget what they saw, forget what they did."

Six revolutionaries fought and died in our struggle. We must commit ourselves to study their practice, to remember their courage and determination. If we do not honor those who die in our struggle, they will be forgotten. We will lose sources of inspiration and strength and examples to study. This cannot happen.

Finally, many members of the SLA are still free. They must be defended, publically and privately. Anyone who is in a position to help them directly should give them encouragement, support, shelter, and love. Empty your pockets. Struggle with them. Learn from them. We must protect our fighters.

WEATHER UNDERGROUND

