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Malcolm & Mao:

Intercourse of Black Liberation and The Proletarian Revolution

Prior to the 1960s, anti-communist ideals prevailed in American public discussion. Anti-communism became conflated with Christianity—and many God-fearing Americans saw silencing communist doctrines as a moral obligation. The fear that was rallied in opposition to communism invited the political, economic, and military intervention of the United States internationally; the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan were all respected in practice—as they seemed intentioned towards the interests of the American people, and free peoples abroad. All political dissent to these actions in the war against communism was seen as sympathy with the authoritarian leftism present in eastern Europe—and a threat to American freedom. Thus, a potential American class struggle was stifled, and feminism, racial justice, and free speech would dominate mainstream 1960s activism. In addition, the success of capitalism in the 1950s would trump any argument in favor of consequentialist communism. But by the late 1960s, the American people were exposed to the evils committed in Vietnam and many became fearful of the international agenda of the United States. Racial struggles did not rest at the passing of the Civil Rights Bill, and rebellions in Black society were present at the assassination of MLK. Wider questions concerning problems in American society had been posed, and radical responses were imminent.

“What kind of system is it that justifies the United States or any country in seizing the destinies of the Vietnamese people and using them callously for its own purpose? What kind of system is it that

disenfranchises people in the South, leaves millions upon millions of people throughout the country impoverished and excluded from the mainstream promise of American society, that creates faceless and terrible bureaucracies and makes those the place where people spend their lives and do their work, that consistently puts material values, and still persists in calling itself free and still finds itself free and still persists in finding itself fit to police the world?”

— Paul Potter, 1965: *THE INCREDIBLE WAR*

At the time, the Black Panther Party was devoted to the armed resistance. Huey Newton, the founder of the Party, was greatly influenced by Robert F. Williams—a militant revolutionary who took exile in China at the invitation of Mao Tse-Tung. Newton became interested in the Chinese social revolution and saw the People’s Republic China as a utopian society when he visited in 1972.



Robert F. Williams meeting Mao Tse-Tung: 1964

Black Liberation, and Black Power, in the perspective of Malcolm X, may only be achieved through separatism. The means of achieving Black Liberation in the perspective of the Black Panthers seem to distinctively include violent resistance. But the division in the Civil Rights Movement, between those behind MLK and those associated with the Black Panthers, resulted in a lack of passive backing majority—which crippled the power of violent resistance as a means of achieving the goals of the Party. A legitimate critique of Malcolm X is the question of how plausibly the use of violent resistance coincides with his preferred ends.



"Without a political goal, guerrilla warfare must fail, as it must if its political objectives do not coincide with the aspirations of the people and their sympathy, cooperation, and assistance cannot be gained. The

essence of guerrilla warfare is thus revolutionary in character.”

— Mao Tse-Tung, 1937: On Guerrilla Warfare

Maoism gave the Black Panthers a strong philosophical base upon which to be unified. As a variant of Marxism, Maoism contained an analysis of the links between the expansion in imperialist involvement and domestic injustices to the economic interests of crony capitalism. With the Black Panthers' adoption to Maoism, international struggles of the proletariat were inseparably bonded to Black Liberation. In the words of Mao, “racial struggle is fundamentally a matter of class struggle.” All of the political dissent and resistance of the Black Panther party became contained in Maoism. A front of revolutionaries from all ethnic backgrounds was unified by the party—which represented a divergence from the Party's original philosophical base on the doctrines of Malcolm X.

As the success of capitalism and a relative lack of state-sponsored evil prevailed in the 1970s and '80s, Marxist ideals deteriorated, and American Maoism died with the Black Panthers. Its revival is unlikely as in modern America, a strong philosophical basis for political movements is uncommon. Most activists are devoted to working within the system to achieve their political goals and do not need a basis on philosophy to achieve them.

Because the goals of the Black Panther Party have not been achieved, and today, we are further from them, the potential complementarity of Maoism to Black Liberation is alive and well. Proletarian Revolution is a means by which Black Liberation can be achieved. But at the core of Black Liberation and proletarian dictatorship is a strong, unquestioning Nationalism—strengthened by the unification of those involved. Black Liberation is especially Nationalistic, as its activists have a strong sense of inter-belonging. They are unified in struggle—and the leaders of these movements, regardless of how truly benevolent, are capitalizing on their anger—and anger, even with a strong philosophical base, is ill-fated. There is no realistic teleology for Black Power.

The true value of revolution, however, is not the consequential outcomes it presents. Even with the unification of the People's Republic of China, and the success of powerful Confucianism used to govern them came an economic failure.

The value of revolution is awakening to the status quo.

