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Progressive Labor Party: <http://www.plp.org> Email: [plp@plp.org](mailto:plp@plp.org)

Write: Challenge Periodicals, GPO 808 Brooklyn NY 11202

By R.A.

# John Brown's Raid— Guns Against Slavery

**J**ohn Brown led a multi-racial group of five black men, including two ex-slaves, and sixteen white men in seizing the Federal Arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia) on Oct. 16, 1859. Their plan was to take the thousands of muskets stored there into the Appalachian Mountains, and from there to make raids on slave plantations. Freed slaves who wished to join the guerrilla army would be trained in the mountains and help make further raids. This process, plus the slave rebellions it would encourage, would continue until slavery was eliminated.

John Brown's band made tactical errors. They were trapped in the arsenal. After a two-day gun battle, the survivors were captured by U.S. Marines led by Colonel Robert E. Lee, who became military leader of the Confederacy.

Harriet Tubman, escaped slave and organizer of hundreds of trips south to aid other slaves in escaping, famous as "General" Tubman of the Underground Rail Road, had helped in preparing for the raid. She had intended to participate, but was sick and her departure for Virginia was delayed. Meanwhile, for fear of being discovered, John Brown had started the raid two weeks earlier than planned. By the time General Tubman and others she had recruited arrived, the raid had been defeated.

John Brown and other captured survivors were tried for murder, treason against the state of Virginia, and inciting slave rebellions. They were convicted and hanged. The entire judicial process took less than eight weeks. The slave



*The raiders firing at Federal troops from the engine house. The man in the foreground is one of the hostages taken by the raiders on their way to seize the Arsenal.*

owners of Virginia were so afraid of attempts by abolitionists to rescue John Brown that a total of 1500 members of state militia, federal troops and Virginia Military Institute cadets guarded the execution.

While in jail awaiting death Brown predicted his hanging would do more to free the slaves than his original plan. In a note he handed to a guard on the day of his execution, Brown wrote that his only error had been to underestimate the amount of violence necessary to destroy slavery. Most bourgeois historians claim that John Brown's intense hatred of racism and his actions against slavery prove that he was insane, particularly because he was white and not enslaved. Yet, despite this most agree with Brown's own evaluation. They admit that the raid on Harper's Ferry and the trial and execution that followed swung the abolitionist movement onto the path of destroying slavery by force rather than "moral persuasion" and piecemeal reforms and escapes. The raid also encouraged a new wave of rebelliousness among slaves. Fear of slaves and abolitionists gripped

the slave owners, and provided the final push into secession and the setting up of a separate country based on the maintenance of the chattel slavery of four million black men and women. That in turn led to civil war and abolition of chattel slavery.

Among abolitionists and wider circles of northern working people, John Brown had become a symbol of hatred of racism and slavery and of defiance of the slave-owners. The song "John Brown's Body" was the marching song of Union troops in the Civil War. It was invariably sung by soldiers and civilians alike at departure ceremonies for newly-formed regiments of volunteers: "John Brown's body lies a mould'ring in the ground, But we go marching on."

Long before 1859, John Brown had been advocating the necessity of violence to destroy slavery. He practiced what he preached. In the struggle in the territory of Kansas between advocates of slavery and "free labor," Brown and his sons and friends led numerous armed struggles against pro-slavery terrorists. He became known as "Old

Osawatomie Brown" during 1855-56. On May 24, Brown and his followers made a night raid on the homes of some particularly vicious pro-slavery terrorists, captured five of them, and killed them with broadswords. Kansas entered the Union as a free state.

Within less than two years after John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry the Civil War was in full swing. By 1865, about 1,300,000 union troops had marched through the South to the tune of "John Brown's Body." About 200,000 of these troops were black men, many of them escaped slaves or slaves freed by the advancing Union Army. These black troops, and many of the white troops, were opposed to slavery and racism. They were an armed expression of multi-racial unity. This was in marked contrast to the Lincoln administration, which was grossly racist and wanted to maintain the union with the least possible change from the racism necessary to maintain capitalism.

That hundreds of thousands of white workers picked up the guns to destroy slavery is a hard pill for white racists and black nationalist misleaders to swallow. They frown on unity of black and white workers based on common class interests, and instead advocate unity with white or black bosses. That John Brown and other white men and women put their lives on the line against slavery and racism contradicts the theory of black nationalism.

History was made by these millions of ordinary people fighting back. The twenty others who raided Harper's Ferry are listed below. Hundreds of others aided the preparation for the raid, thousands indirectly. When we say "John Brown" or "Harriet Tubman" we are not talking about some "super-hero" contrived by capitalist press agents to impress us with our own insignificance. We are talking about people whose words and actions and thoughts best summarized the words and actions and thoughts of countless others. Bourgeois heroes reduce us to a passive audience applauding their splendid speeches or exploits. Revolutionary leaders encourage our strengths, so that we can consciously participate in understanding and changing the world. John Brown is marching on in us every time we help one fellow worker to shake off the mental and physical chains of capitalist enslavement by daring to join with others to fight the enemy. We write this article not to glorify John Brown,

but to help lead our class closer to revolution by learning from John Brown and from the millions that he gave leadership to and learned from. Much of the material we quote makes too much of John Brown the individual. We ask the reader to discard that, while retaining the other essential points of the quotations.

John Brown was a Christian, not a Marxist, and he did not attack the capitalist system along with slavery. We now realize that racism cannot finally be destroyed without destroying capitalism. But we study John Brown so that we may learn from his strengths: multi-racial unity, boldness in seizing the offensive, reliance on the masses to embrace violence to destroy a ruling class. These qualities are going to be more and more in demand now and in the near future. A celebration of their existence in the past is in order.

We in the PLP are preparing for another civil war, this time to destroy wage-slavery and with it, all oppression. History—the story of the struggles of the working classes—is the material out of which our ideas on how to make a revolution are produced. The Party and the working class must learn history to develop and embrace revolutionary theory. Revolutionary theory does not develop primarily from the conditions in one's own city, plant or campus, or even from studying present day society as a whole. It comes from studying change.

## THE LESSON OF HISTORY: RELY ON THE MASSES TO CHANGE THE WORLD

John Brown's father was a "conductor" on the underground railroad. John Brown was born, in 1800, into a household that harbored fugitive slaves. Blacks were portrayed by Southern slave owners as happy with slavery and unfit because of their "inferiority" for a life of freedom alongside whites. Racists in the north repeated the picture of blacks as servile, shuffling, meek, cowardly and dancing in blissful ignorance. This general argument has been raging about all oppressed and exploited people for thousands of years. Today we are told that white workers in the United States are happy beer drinkers glued to the boob tube incapable of thoughts more complex than the feud between Reggie Jackson and Billy Martin. Left out of the picture are the recent strike wave in New York City, the coal strike last year,

## The Harper's Ferry Raiders

John Brown, born 1800 in Torrington, Conn. Tanner, surveyor, sheep herder, seller of wool.

John Henry Kagi, a self-educated writer, teacher and lawyer. He was run out of Virginia for anti-slavery views. Killed at Harper's Ferry.

Aaron Dwight Stevens of Mass. Condemned for leading an army mutiny against a pro-slavery major, he escaped from prison and joined Brown in Kansas. Hanged after the raid.

John E. Cook, a young law student from Brooklyn, N.Y.

Charles Plummer Tidd escaped after the raid, and died as a 1st Sgt. in the Civil War.

Jeremiah G. Anderson, 27, a sworn abolitionist. Killed at Harper's Ferry.

Albert Hazlett, a Pennsylvania farm worker. Executed.

Edwin Coppoc, a farmer

and a Quaker. Executed.

Barclay Coppoc, 20, brother of Edwin. He escaped, returned to Kansas, participated in anti-slavery raids in Missouri and died in the Civil War.

William Thompson, 26, a neighbor of the Browns at N. Elba, N.Y. Killed at the Ferry.

Dauphin Thompson, 20, brother of William, also died at Harper's Ferry.

Oliver Brown, 20, was John Brown's youngest son. He died in the battle.

John Anthony Copeland, 25, an Oberlin-educated free black. He was hanged.

Stewart Taylor, 23, a Canadian wagon-maker. Killed in the Arsenal.

William H. Leeman, 19, the youngest raider. Shoe factory worker from age 14. Killed.

Osborn Perry Anderson, a black printer, escaped and later

fought through the Civil War.

Francis Merriam, wealthy young abolitionist. He escaped and served as captain of a black company in the Civil War.

Lewis S. Leary, 25, black and the descendant of a Revolutionary War soldier. Worked as a harness-maker. He died of wounds suffered at the Arsenal.

Owen Brown, another of John Brown's sons. He survived the raid and died in 1891.

Watson Brown, 24, another of Brown's sons. He, too, was killed at Harper's Ferry.

Dangerfield Newby, a freed slave. Unable to buy his wife and seven children out of slavery, he joined the raiders and was killed in battle.

Shields Green, an escaped slave with a young son in bondage. He met Brown through Frederick Douglass. Green was hanged after the raid.

the millions of working people who participated in and supported the movement against the Vietnam war, and the hundreds of thousands of GI's, black, latin, asian and white, who fraged officers, deserted and in general made it impossible for the U.S. ruling class to continue the war.

John Brown saw with his own eyes blacks who were opposite of the racist stereotype, who had planned ingenious and daring escapes from slavery, and had carried them out with courage and fortitude, in the face of whippings, jailings and often death if captured.

**S**lave owners and their racist apologists had an answer of course: the blacks who escaped were the lunatic fringe, a malcontent handful of the four million black men, women and children in bondage. Perhaps if John Brown had restricted his gaze to slavery as it was at a particular moment in the United States, he would have found that answer half-convincing. But John Brown looked far and wide. He looked at history, recent and ancient. He studied the slave rebellion led by Nat Turner in Virginia in 1831 that had the slave-owners in hys-

terical fear, forced to admit that every one of their slaves was a potential "assassin" of his "beloved" master. He knew in detail of the formation of armies of thousands of slaves on the island of Santo Domingo, and their success in annihilating their French masters and establishing the black Republic of Haiti in the 1790's.

John Brown studied the uprising of slaves on the island of Sicily in 73 B.C., led by Spartacus. It took the "invincible" Roman legions two years to destroy this uprising. John Brown studied the struggle of the masses in Italy, in a movement led by Garibaldi, to set up a unified republic and destroy the power of feudal mini-states and their mini-kings. He stated that he had read all the books on insurrectionary warfare that he could lay his hands on: the Roman warfare, the successful opposition of the Spanish chieftains during the period when Spain was a Roman province,—how, with ten thousand men, divided and subdivided into small companies, acting simultaneously, yet separately, they withstood the whole consolidated power of the Roman Empire through a number of years... the successful warfare waged by Schamyl, the Circassian chief, against the Rus-



*The men who marched on Harper's Ferry: Twenty-two men dedicated to smashing slavery through multi-racial unity*

sians . . . ." (Testimony of Richard Realf before the Senate Committee investigating John Brown, in DuBois, p. 216)

From his own participation in the abolitionist movement and from his knowledge of the uprising led by Spartacus and Toussaint L'Overture, of the slave rebellions of Nat Turner and others, of the struggle for the Italian republic, John Brown arrived at two profound conclusions: 1) people fight back against oppression. 2) their struggle causes change. These conclusions were the opposite of many that were heard then and are heard today: "Nobody where I work wants to do anything." "You can't fight city hall." "You can't win." "The more things change the more they stay the same."

While John Brown was engaged in the fight against chattel slavery, the European revolutionaries Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were leading the working class in the fight against wage-slavery. Based on their participation in the revolutionary movement and their study of history, including the history of the development of the natural sciences,

they developed the philosophy of dialectical materialism. This philosophy, outlined in the **Communist Manifesto** of 1848, when applied to history, proves that John Brown's conclusions were and are correct. Class struggle is the motive force of history. Periods of seeming passivity among the oppressed, however prolonged, are replaced by blazing struggle, like the explosion of a "dormant" volcano. Systems of class exploitation, although they seem at times permanent and even "natural," end. We are no longer cultivating crops and building pyramids in the Nile Valley. Slavery has ended. Feudalism has ended. Capitalism will soon end. Most people do not yet realize this, just as most people in 1859 did not yet realize that slavery was on the verge of extinction. Slavery had existed for over 200 years and appeared permanent, like capitalism at the U.S. bicentennial. Even socialism, which will replace capitalism, will in turn be replaced by communism and the end of class society.

Not only does the struggle of opposites cause irreversible change in social re-

lations, but in the relations of the entire universe as well. Atoms, mountains, planets, stars, galaxies—all are born to die and be transformed into something else, if not in seconds, then in millions of years. In the most apparently “stable” object, electrons are whirling around the nuclei of atom at close to the speed of light. Powerful atomic forces are tugging against each other. Passivity is relative, activity is absolute. While we cannot develop this point within the confines of this article, we urge the reader to study the Manifesto and other writings of Marx and Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mao Tse-tung and others on dialectical materialism, including the articles “Can History Be A Science” in this issue of **PL Magazine** and “Dialectics—Comprehending and Transforming Reality” in **PL**, Vol. 10, No. 6

Of all the questions raised by John Brown’s raid, this question is the most fundamental. If the oppressed are essentially passive, and if you can’t win, and if nothing really changes anyway, then we in PLP should quit the Party and seek more “immediately gratifying” things to do. But if the workers are essentially active in struggle, and if we can win, and if everything constantly changes, then you should increase your participation in and commitment to the revolutionary process, by joining the Progressive Labor Party, and by helping recruit others.

Participation in the class struggle and the study of dialectic materialism in general and of history in particular, are the ways of resolving this question.

### **MASS REVOLUTIONARY VIOLENCE IS THE METHOD OF CHANGE**

Slavery in North America began in the colony of Virginia in 1619, when the first shipload of blacks arrived. Slavery was born in the violence of capture in Africa, and violently delivered to the new world in the form of leg-ironed bodies jammed into the filthy holds of sailing ships. Slavery grew up in the violence of the overseer’s whip on the field-hand’s back, and as slavery reached maturity at the turn of the nineteenth century, the violence required to maintain it intensified because of its relationship to capitalist industry.

Slavery was first of all a system of production. In its earlier days in North America, the surplus produced by the slaves (the amount above and beyond

that required for their own survival) was primarily consumed by the local slave-owners. For the part of the surplus that was sold in commerce, demand was relatively limited.

The industrial revolution changed all that, in particular the development of the steam power-driven English cotton industry. The demand for cotton to feed the ever-faster spinning wheels of the English factories became relatively insatiable. Competition between manufacturers placed a premium price on the cotton crop brought in first, and plantation owners scrambled to have their cotton baled on the pier before their neighbors. Their method was to increase the hours of work of the slave, and the intensity of work during those hours, to the point where the field hands no longer had the time nor the energy necessary to reproduce themselves and guarantee a next generation of slave labor. The African slave trade having been ended legally (although in fact some slave trading continued), breeding plantations were therefore established. There, at the foothills of the mountain where the ships could not reach and the soil was not as good for cultivating cotton, slaves were grown. Karl Marx compared the cotton fields to the mines worked by slaves in ancient times:

Where not the exchange value but the use-value of the product predominates, surplus labor will be limited by a given set of wants . . . No boundless thirst for surplus labor arises from the nature of production itself. Hence in antiquity overwork becomes horrible only when the object is to obtain exchange value in its specific independent money form; in the production of gold and silver. Compulsory working to death is here the recognized form of over-work . . . Still these are exceptions in antiquity. But as soon as people, whose production still moves within the lower forms of slave-labor . . . are drawn into the whirlpool of an international market dominated by the capitalistic mode of production, the sale of their products for export becoming their principal interest, the civilized horrors of overwork are grafted on the barbaric horrors of slavery . . . Hence the Negro labor in the Southern States of the American Union preserved

something of a patriarchal character so long as production was chiefly directed to immediate local consumption. But in proportion, as the export of cotton became of vital interest to these states, the over-working of the Negro and sometimes the using up of his life in 7 years of labor became a factor in a calculated and calculating system. (Capital, V. I, p. 235—emphasis ours.)

Marx obtained this information about field-hand life expectancy from reading the slave owners' own writings on the economics of managing plantations. This "calculated and calculating" murder is comparable to the daily violence of capitalist production today: each hundred million dollars of surplus equals so many workers killed by black lung, red lung, chemical-caused cancer, and so many workers killed and maimed by industrial "accidents," all to maximize profit and, therefore, competitive advantage.

Slaves fought back against the violence of overwork, and the slaveowners enforced their system of production with the violence of the whip, the chain, the branding-iron, the bloodhound, the jail cell and the noose. "In the Old South, violence tended to be more personal and more socially acceptable than elsewhere. Slavery, after all, depended upon physical force or the threat of force, and from childhood slaveholders were accustomed to striking their chattels with impunity, because blacks struck whites at the risk of their lives." (Thomas, p. 20)

Richard O. Boyer writes of how Andrew Jackson, later the president of the U.S., advertised a \$50 reward "for the capture of a man he owned who had escaped, 'and ten dollars extra for every hundred lashes any person will give him up to the amount of three hundred.'" Boyer quotes John Calhoun, senatorial theorist of "states rights," on one of his captured runaways: "I wish you would have him lodged in jail for one week, to be fed on bread and water and to give him 30 lashes well laid on.'" Thousands of newspapers carried advertisements like these:

"**RANAWAY**, my negro man Richard. A reward of \$25 will be paid for his apprehension **DEAD** or **ALIVE**.

"**RANAWAY**, a negro woman and two children. A few days before she went off I burnt her with a hot iron on the left side of her face. I tried to make the letter M.

"**RANAWAY**, a negro woman, named Maria, some scars on her back occasioned by the whip." (Boyer, pp. 50-51)

**B**ehind these threats of death, these brandings and whippings lay the power of the federal government. Slavery had been written into the United States Constitution. Article IV of this racist document

In my opinion, the biggest things that are happening in the world today are...the movement of the slaves in America started by the death of John Brown, and...the movement of the serfs in Russia...

I have just seen in the *Tribune* that there has been a fresh rising of slaves in Missouri...the signal has now been given. If things get serious by and by, what will then become of Manchester?

—Karl Marx, to Friedrich Engels  
January 11, 1860

guaranteed the slaveowners that "No person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws there, escaping into another, shall, in consequence of any Law or Regulation thereof, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due." This Article also guaran-

teed State governments that the Federal government would respond to any request for help in putting down "domestic Violence." This provision was used in 1831 to send federal troops to aid Virginia in the suppression of the slave rebellion led by Nat Turner, and to send U.S. marines to Harper's Ferry in 1859.

With the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 the slaveowners used their control of the Federal Government to begin a pro-slavery offensive. This law not only restated the Constitution's provision that it was illegal to aid escaped slaves, it required citizens of Northern states to assist in their recapture when asked to do so by private slave catchers and/or federal marshalls. The penalty for refusing to help could be six months in prison or a \$1000 fine, even if the person being seized had never been a slave at all. Under this Act, there were numerous kidnappings of free blacks and their "return" to slavery. The Act had other features we would now call fascist, such as no trial by jury (northern juries generally would not convict anybody accused of helping an escaped slave, even if they had clearly done it) and no testimony allowed by the person being captured.

How could this have been tolerated in the "democratic" United States of America? We have something similar today. The U.S. Immigration Dept. mans checkpoints on roads leading north from the Mexican border (in some cases hundreds of miles above the border) where they randomly stop and search vehicles, particularly those containing people who "look Latin." Those who cannot prove their citizenship or produce documents showing they are legally in the country are jailed and deported. The Immigration Department has employed similar tactics in raids on factories, movie theatres and other places where there is a concentration of latin workers. The super-exploitation of black slaves led to escape from slavery which in turn led to slave-catching, which created a cloud of terror under which the entire working class lived. The super-exploitation of workers in Latin America (and elsewhere) leads to escape into the U.S., which leads to the hunt for undocumented workers, which creates a cloud of terror under which we live today.

This cloud seemed small to white workers not obviously affected by it, prior to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act. After this Act, the danger to all became more evident. As John Brown put it,

"the Fugitive Slave Law will create more abolitionists than all the lectures we have had for years! (Quarles, p. 25) But this Act was not a "mistake" on the part of the slave owners; it was a necessary reaction to sharpening internal contradictions within slavery, and between slaveowners and some sections of northern industrial capitalists.

Similarly, the U.S. ruling class today is facing sharpening internal contradictions with the working class, and, externally, with the Russian imperialists. They are discussing plans, based on the Immigration Department's "green card" and the computerized Social Security System, for forcing all workers to carry identity cards and be subject to imprisonment if they cannot produce the card. So what appears today to many workers who are citizens as a small cloud on the horizon is developing into a thunderstorm of fascist terror. Only by joining the struggle against deportations led by the International Committee Against Racism and the Progressive Labor Party, only by advocating the unity of all workers and the "abolition" of all borders, can you help today to prepare the working class for the task of overcoming fascism with socialist revolution tomorrow.

Before the Fugitive Slave Act a part of the abolitionist movement had advocated violence against slavery. The Ram's Horn, a black newspaper in New York to which John Brown subscribed, for example, called for slave rebellions. Henry Highland Garnet, an escaped slave who became a close friend of John Brown, told the National Negro Convention in Buffalo in 1843:

Brethren, arise, arise! Strike for your lives and liberty. Now is the day and the hour. Let every slave throughout the land do this, and the days of slavery are numbered. You cannot be oppressed more than you already have been—you cannot suffer greater cruelties than you have already. Rather die free men than live to be slaves. Remember that you are FOUR MILLIONS.

Although there had been some aid by this movement to slave rebellions in the South, this violence had been mainly verbal. The Fugitive Slave Act gave northern abolitionists the opportunity to pick up the gun against slavery where they lived. They responded by forming associations in many northern cities and



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towns dedicated to armed resistance to slave catchers, including federal marshalls. John Brown's involvement in this movement was to lead in the formation of the League of Gileadites in Springfield, Ohio, where he was living in 1851. This League asked its members to be constantly armed and ready to spring to the defense of any fugitive slave or free black threatened with capture or already captured. Although it had white supporters, its membership, other than John Brown, was apparently all black. This was a weakness. The League was never tested in combat because no slave catchers came to Springfield, most likely out of fear for their lives.

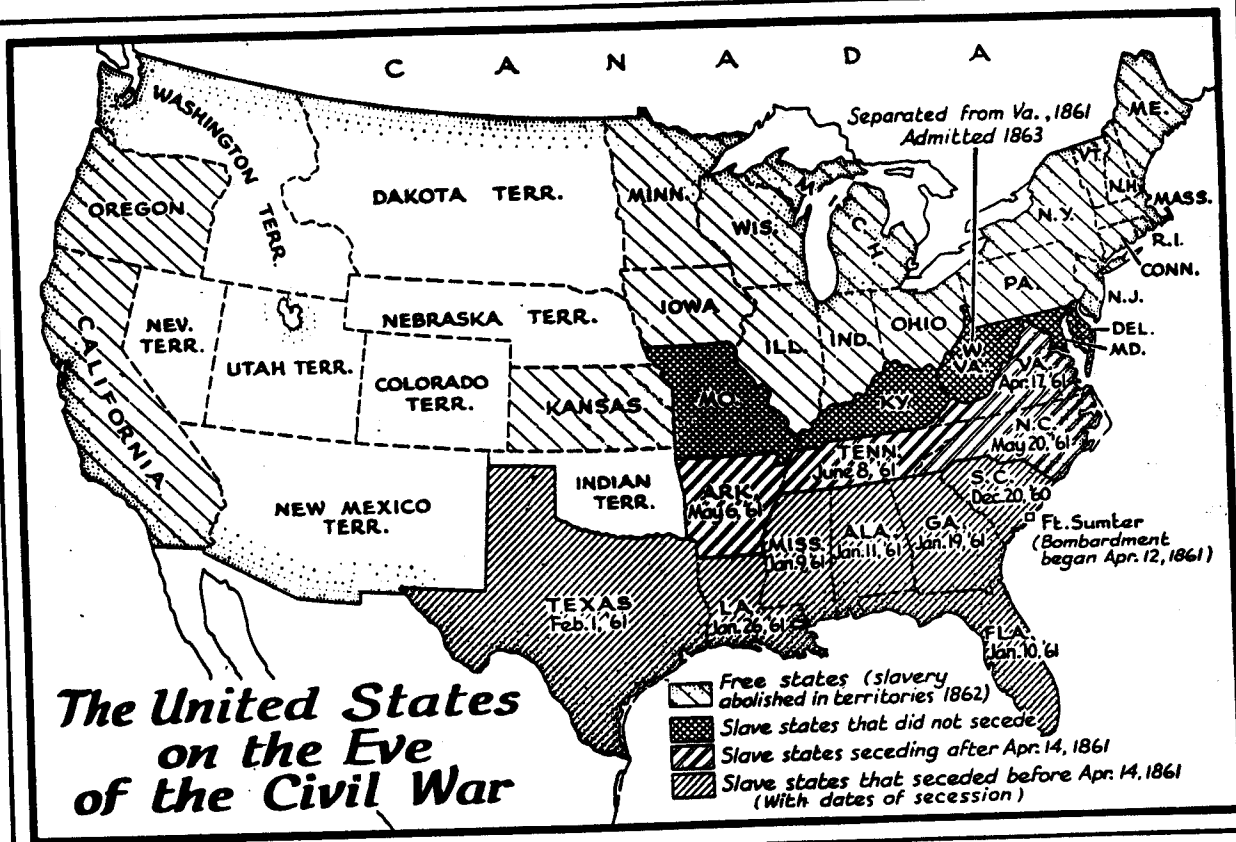
The next stage of the Federal Government's pro-slavery offensive, growing out of the increasing desperation and weakness of the slave system, was the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. This Act set aside the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had prohibited slavery in the Territories (newly-obtained parts of the U.S. not yet made into "states"). Slavery could exist until and unless the Territory was admitted to the Union with a State constitution prohibiting slavery. The constitution was written by the elected representatives of the territory, so the stage was set for what appeared to be an electoral struggle between advocates of slavery and advocates of free labor and free soil. Kansas was the territory where this struggle was fought out. **Just as elections did not win industrial unions, or the eight hour day, or civil rights, elections did not decide the issue in Kansas. Violent class struggle did.**

The first round went to the slave owners. They themselves did not go to Kansas—they were waiting until the issue was decided to bring their slaves and set up plantations. Instead, they sent "border ruffians" from the slave State of Missouri, just as the wealthy bankers and bosses of Boston stayed at home on Beacon Hill in 1975 discussing their liberal and conservative racist opinions while they mobilized white workers and unemployed teenagers of South Boston to go out and throw rocks at Black school children. In South Boston in 1975, in Missouri in 1855 some whites found their sense of superiority in the supposed inferiority of blacks, instead of identifying with blacks and all other members of the international working class, producers of everything of value. Thousands of these border ruffians, crazed by racism and liberal quantities of booze into fighting

the battles of the plantation owners, crossed over into Kansas to join with others of their ilk who had actually moved there to stuff the ballot boxes, terrorize free-state settlers, and elect a pro-slavery legislature and governor. This government was recognized as the official government of Kansas by President Buchanan.

**W**hite workers who had escaped wage-slavery by moving to Kansas and setting up farms and small businesses, white farmers who had moved to Kansas seeking more acres and fertile soil, fought back. They set up their own anti-slavery territorial government, which in turn enlisted citizens into a militia to counter the armed border ruffians and their supporters, federal troops and marshals. This movement had two related weaknesses which led to repeated defeats and the verge of disaster. 1) Most of the white settlers shared their enemies' belief in the inferiority of blacks, and did not want to live in a multi-racial environment. Therefore they either were not opposed to slavery, but only to its extension into Kansas, or advocated the abolition of slavery coupled with the "return" of the slaves (who had by this time almost all been born here) to Africa. A tiny handful of blacks, precursors of today's black nationalists, advocated such "colonization" schemes, and were thus in objective and sometimes organizational alliance with out-and-out racists.

2) Because the settlers were not won politically to the abolition of slavery and to multi-racial unity, but only wanted to be "let alone" to raise their crops ("do their own thing"), they did not **take the offensive** militarily against the pro-slavery forces, but only called out their regiments when they were directly attacked. As anyone who has ever been in a physical fight knows, you cannot win if your opponent is throwing all the punches and you are just trying to block them. Sooner, rather than later, you will get hurt. In Kansas, the main free-state settlement, Lawrence, was burned several times, and hundreds of free-staters were killed in battles and in attacks by the border ruffians on unarmed men, women and children. The South was on the verge of winning this preview of the Civil War. Abolitionists looked with horror at "bleeding Kansas," and saw the "slave-power," as they called it



spreading throughout the country.

Some did more than look.

A small minority of the settlers had gone to Kansas not only to farm, but mainly to fight in the front lines against slavery and racism. Among these politically motivated forces were five of John Brown's sons, their families, and other relatives and friends. Their letters describing developments in Kansas convinced John Brown to go west, with another son, a son-in-law, and a wagon-load of rifles and ammunition.

On arriving in Kansas, John Brown was commissioned captain of a Company of Liberty Guards by the free state legislature. Thus he came by the title, "Captain Brown" by which he was frequently called for the remaining four years of his life. His conduct in battles in the area of Osawatimie Creek earned him another name, "old Osawatimie Brown."

"Badly outnumbered at Black Jack on June 2, 1856, the Brown forces refused to wilt under fire... Twenty-five Missourians were taken prisoner, Brown exchanging their two leaders for his previously captured sons, John, Jr. and Jason." (Quarles, p. 33)

"Brown's reputation as a guerrilla leader grew.... At the end of August

(1856), he fought a skirmish at Osawatimie in which he led a band of thirty or forty men against two hundred and fifty commanded by a Mexican war veteran, John W. Reid. Though badly outnumbered, Brown fought back hard and succeeded in escaping with the bulk of his force." (Ruchames, p. 33)

John Brown and his troops were ordinary people, not supermen. Their bravery flowed out of political conviction and collective organization. The by-laws of the Company in the summer of 1856 included the election of officers, collective disposal of captured property, and trial by jury.

A reporter from the New York Tribune visited the camp at this time. John Brown told him, "I would rather have the smallpox, yellow fever, and cholera altogether in my camp, than a man without principles. It's a mistake, sir, that our people make, when they think that bullies are the best fighters, or that they are the men fit to oppose these Southerners. Give me men of good principles; God-fearing men; men who respect themselves; and, with a dozen of them, I will oppose any hundred such men as these Buford ruffians.'" (quoted in DuBois, p. 163)

Before any of these battles could take

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place, the killing of the five pro-slavery terrorists at Potawatomie had to occur. Lawrence had been sacked on May 21, 1856, while the demoralized free staters were trying to negotiate instead of shoot. John Brown's company, summoned from Osawatomie, arrived only to see the ruins. The border ruffians had shot up and terrorized the town for several hours. The Federal government had recognized the pro-slavery regime, and the rest of the county was sullenly going along. The morale of the free staters was low; some were getting ready to go home while the getting was good. The pro-slavery forces were issuing warnings of death for those who remained. On the night of May 24, 1856, about eight men led by Brown knocked on the doors of five of these racist vermin, escorted them out to the woods, and hacked them to death with broadswords. Even commentators who are generally favorable to John Brown shy away from supporting this deed. Quarles, for example says "Brown's name would be forever tarnished" by the incident, in which "five pro-slavery men were cruelly put to death." (Quarles, p. 33)

James Townsley was an eye-witness of the raid. He had been pressed into service by Brown's band as a somewhat reluctant guide to the pro-slave settlement in the Swamp of the Swan. In 1879 he wrote about the incident in the *Lawrence Daily Journal*:

I desire also to say that I did not then approve of the killing of those men, but Brown said it must be done for the protection of the Free State settlers; that the pro-slavery party must be terrified, and that it was better that a score of bad men should die than that one man who came here to make Kansas a free state should be driven out...

I then thought that the transaction was terrible, and have mentioned it to but a few persons since. In after time, however, I became satisfied that it resulted in good to the Free State cause, and was especially beneficial to Free State settlers on Potawatomie Creek. **The pro-slaverymen were dreadfully terrified**, and large numbers of them soon left the Territory. It was afterwards said that one Free State man could scare a company of them. (*Lawrence Daily Journal*, Dec. 10,

1879, quoted in Ruchames, pp. 208-209, emphasis Townsley's)

In South Boston in 1975 thousands came out to cheer for Louise Day Hicks as she spewed forth racist garbage, and hundreds followed R.O.A.R.—Restore Our Alienated Rights—in throwing rocks at black school children. When CAR and PLP organized even small numbers to stand up to these Racists On A Rampage, most of them politically "left the territory."

And so it goes. "Bullies," to use John Brown's word, won over through racism to do the bidding of the ruling class, be they capitalists or slave-owners, can never match the dedication of working-class forces fighting for their own liberation, united in multi-racial unity. Today, some see only the superficial arrogance of the boss and the superficial passivity of the workers. They conclude, as did most of the free staters, that we cannot win and should not fight. We can learn from John Brown to look deeper, to the profound weakness of the bosses and the strengths of the working class. We conclude that we can win and must fight.

W.E.B. DuBois explained in his biography of John Brown the relationship of the killings at Potawatomie to events in the whole nation.

Not only was there 'hell in Kansas' but the North was aflame—the very thing which John Brown and Lane and their fellows designed. A great convention met at Buffalo and mass meetings were held everywhere. Clothes, money, arms and men began to pour out of the North. It was no longer a program of peaceful voting; it was fight. The Southern party was certain to be swamped  
.... (DuBois, pp. 139-141)

DuBois explains how the Buchanan administration, fearing that events would develop into a general offensive against slavery—a civil war—had to reverse its policy from one of using Federal forces to keep Kansas a slave state to one of compromise. Free state professional politicians, described by John Brown as "always ready to sacrifice his principles for his advantage," (Ruchames, p. 220) tried to create a state where slave owners and free soilers could peacefully co-exist. As the Civil War was soon to demonstrate, this could not be. Pro-slave forces were not conditioned by slavery to compromise. They

could not keep their hands off the club and rifle. Free soilers continued to fight back. The war simmered until 1858 and ended with the total defeat of pro-slavery forces and the adoption in 1859 of a state constitution prohibiting slavery.

After the tide had turned against slavery in Kansas, the next and last act of the pro-slavery offensive prior to secession itself was the Dred Scott Decision of March 6, 1857. Dred Scott was a slave whose owner had taken him into Minnesota, a territory where slavery was prohibited, and Illinois, a free state. In Missouri in 1846 Dred Scott petitioned a Federal Circuit Court for the right to bring suit for his freedom. There followed twelve years of litigation culminating in the 1857 Supreme Court Decision. Chief Justice Taney, a well-known pro-slavery advocate, wrote the opinion for the majority of the Court.

**look deeper to  
the profound weakness  
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and the strengths  
of the working class...**

He ruled that Dred Scott was a slave, and therefore not a citizen of the United States, and therefore not entitled to bring a law suit into a federal court. The Court's opinion went on to rule that no black person, slave or free, was a citizen of the United States, because at the time the Constitution was ratified—and continuing through 1857—blacks were "considered as a subordinate and inferior class of beings, who had been subjugated by the dominant race, and, whether emancipated or not, yet remained subject to their authority, and had no rights or privileges, but such as those who held the power and the Government might choose to grant them." (quoted in Fehrenbacher, p. 343) This Supreme Court decision in essence made slavery legal throughout the United States, and officially endorsed racism as the doctrine of the U.S. government.

It was "an unusually bold venture in a desperate struggle for power" by the slave owners (Fehrenbacher, p. 3). The venture failed. The decision unleashed a wave of hatred of slavery and racism that dwarfed the reaction to the Fugitive Slave Act in breadth and depth. Intended to avert the necessity of secession, the decision helped make secession the only possibility for the slave owners. When secession did occur, hundreds of thousands whose hatred had been aroused by Taney's open advocacy of the rightness of slavery and racism were inspired to pick up the gun and smash this racist doctrine along with the Confederacy.

**I**n September, 1856, hopeful, with reason, that free-staters had their Sharpes rifle at the ready and would no longer supinely submit to slavery, John Brown left Kansas. He headed east—in order to head south. In his mind was the idea of an offensive against slavery. Instead of attacking the expansion of slavery, attacking slavery itself. Instead of fighting on territory coveted by the slave power, fighting on territory already firmly in its possession. Instead of limiting slavery, abolishing slavery. Brown's criticism of Spartacus was that instead of waiting to be attacked in Sicily, he should have marched on the capital of the Empire—Rome.

In the spring of 1857, John Brown was in Connecticut, contracting to buy 1000 pikes, which were intended to be placed in the hands of 1000 liberated slaves.

In the course of his travels to recruit men for the raid, he was back in Kansas in 1858. He left Kansas for the last time in January 1859 with eleven freed slaves whom he and other members of his band conducted on an 82-day trip through frozen wilderness to freedom in Canada, harassed by federal troops during part of the way.

A number of valuable lessons can be learned from this prelude to Harper's Ferry.

When one of the slaves snuck across the Missouri border to inform Brown that he and his family were about to be sold, and wished to take the risk of escaping rather than face separation, Brown "at once decided to go to the rescue." (Quarles, p. 54) Brown and his men made an armed, mounted invasion of Missouri and freed the slaves, at the cost of one dead slave-owner, that very day. As we in the Progressive Labor



*Escaped slaves arriving at a station on the Underground Rail Road. Brown, his parents, and many of the participants in the raid had long participated in this mass action against slavery*

Party and the Committee Against Racism develop a reputation for attacking racists and racism, we are more frequently approached by others on the job, on campus, or in the neighborhood seeking help. Many of these are golden opportunities to build the revolutionary, anti-racist movement. They must be quickly seized and made part of our overall program, and not fritted away. In many instances, a delay of a day can be a day too long.

The raiders seized "horses, oxen, foodstuffs, bedding and clothing" in addition to the slaves. Brown was convinced that "the masters should bear the costs of transporting their former slaves to freedom." Although he had never read Marx, or, so far as we know, the classical bourgeois economists, he seems to have penetrated through the nonsense of the slave-owners' and bosses' economic utterances—"Where would you have a job if it weren't for us"—to the labor theory of value. "In a larger sense, Brown held that whatever his party took belonged in reality to the slaves, their

labor having produced it." (Quarles, p. 55)

Again and again during the flight to Canada violence against the state apparatus was proven to be the absolutely necessary method of change. "The blacks were armed with rifles . . . and had practiced daily in order to become familiar with their use." "Their last day in Kansas . . . was appropriately marked by a battle between Brown and the federal forces sent by the commandant of Fort Leavenworth (anti-Indian "hero" of many a racist Western movie). The Brown party, aided by some fifteen volunteers from Topeka, defeated a force nearly four times its number and took prisoners." (Quarles, pp. 56-57) These fifteen volunteers from Topeka were but the tip of an iceberg. Large parts of the trip to Canada were essentially public, and the physical and moral support of thousands sapped the morale of federal troops and private slave catchers before they even engaged the escaping slaves and Brown and his men. Under such circumstances, a little determination to

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meet violence with violence went a long way. Samuel Harper, one of the escaped slaves, later told of the experience. "The governor of Kansas, he telegraphed to the United States marshal at Springdale: 'Capture John Brown, dead or alive.' The marshal he answered, 'If I try to capture John Brown it'll be dead, and I'll be the one that'll be dead.'" (DuBois, p. 197)

A federal marshal in Cleveland felt the same way. Following the safe arrival of the eleven slaves in Canada, Brown, John Henry Kagi (who had emerged as Captain Brown's main "lieutenant") and others returned to the U.S. to continue the preparations for Harper's Ferry. March 23, 1859 saw Brown holding a public meeting in Cleveland. Brown "stated that inasmuch as President Buchanan had offered \$250 for his capture, he wanted it known that he would give two dollars and fifty cents for the safe delivery of the body of James Buchanan in any jail of the Free States." Quarles continues,

Brown could thus confidently challenge federal authority in Cleveland because the city was in a highly emotional state over the so-called Oberlin-Wellington rescue. Thirty-seven rescuers of runaway slave John Price were lodged in a Cleveland jail awaiting trial. Sensing the angry mood of many citizens, the federal marshal's office quietly ignored the numerous posters calling for Brown's arrest. (Quarles, p. 61)

A massive, militant anti-slavery movement, powerful enough to markedly limit the actions of the federal government, existed. It had been called into being not by John Brown, but by John Price and the thousands of others like him who escaped from slavery. **John Brown did not march on Harper's Ferry to create a movement, but to put that movement on the offensive, as he had helped to do in a more limited context in Kansas.**

Militarily, the offensive nature of raiding an arsenal inside Virginia, the oldest and most powerful slave state, is readily apparent. Politically, the offensive nature of the raid is often glossed over. Of all the possible methods of obtaining weapons, John Brown and his men choose to capture a federal arsenal. They made a direct onslaught on the armed might of the government of the nation—crime of crimes. **Their purpose could only have been to dramatize that it was precisely this armed might that upheld slavery.**

The federal government tried, with increasing difficulty as it was exposed by its actions, to pretend to be "neutral" between slavery and free labor. It made moderate-sounding statements about the need for "compromise" between pro-slavery and anti-slavery forces. Just as today the President and the Labor Department talk about compromise between business and labor, about "mediation" and "impartial arbitration"—when what they really mean is enforcement of capitalism with an iron hand. Similarly, attorneys general, police departments, and the American Civil Liberties Union talk about "protecting the rights of the Nazis and the anti-Nazis, the racists and the anti-racists alike."

At Oxnard, California last summer, at dozens of other demonstrations and attacks against the Ku Klux Klan in the past year, it was only the presence of hundreds of cops that kept the KKK members from being torn apart by anti-racist fighters led by PLP and INCAR. Likewise it was only the power of the federal government to enforce laws north and south, to concentrate force against rebellion and escape, that protected the slaveowners from being engulfed by slaves and abolitionists.

Proof that the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry was seen by the guerrillas as primarily a strategic political target rather than one picked for tactical military reasons is evident from a Convention in Chatham, Ontario that took place May 8-10, 1858, as part of the preparation for the raid. At this Convention a "Provisional Constitution" was adopted, which differed from the U.S. Constitution primarily in that it outlawed slavery. Article 45 of this Provisional Constitution stated that the aim was to reform the government rather than overthrow it, and that the flag "shall be the same that our fathers fought under in the Revolution." (Quarles, p. 48) Many of the blacks at this convention did not agree with Brown's patriotism and fought against this Article, but after prolonged debate, including support by some of the key black leaders, it passed. After this debate, the entire constitution was passed unanimously. **The purpose of the document was to provide a means of governing liberated territory.** So, despite the disclaimer, the delegates were voting to create another country until and unless the United States agreed to abolish slavery. Following the adoption of this Constitution, several of the positions in what

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was to be the new provisional government were filled. John Brown was elected commander-in-chief, and Kagi secretary of war. The raid on Harper's Ferry was not only an attack on the United States Government, it was the beginning of an effort to overthrow the authority of the U.S. government in whatever areas the new power, based on the abolition of slavery, could consolidate its control. Had the guerrillas succeeded in building base areas in and around the Appalachian Mountain chain, they would have been on a collision course with the U.S. government. Instead of the Civil War that did occur less than two years later between a Confederacy of slave owners and the U.S. government there would have been a war between a federal government supporting slavery and slaves and their free black and white allies.

**P**resident Buchanan did everything he could to conceal the revolutionary implications of the raid on Harper's Ferry. He made no attempt to prosecute Brown and the other survivors on federal charges. Although their act of attacking a U.S. military installation was certainly a federal crime, he was content for them to be tried in a state court for "treason against the state of Virginia." This helped direct the anger of northern working people against the slave owners rather than against their protector in Washington as well. Buchanan tried to portray Brown and his band as a handful of isolated madmen and the raid on Harper's Ferry as an unexpected and unpredictable bolt out of the blue. He tried to conceal the relationship of the guerrillas and the raid to the slave rebellions, the fugitive slaves, the growing abolitionist movement, the civil war in Kansas. Buchanan wrote,

John Brown was a man violent, lawless and fanatical... His ruling passion was to become the instrument of abolishing slavery, by the strong hand, throughout the slaveholding States. With him, this amounted almost to insanity.... He was so secret in his purposes that he had scarcely any confidants....

But "facts are stubborn things" and the facts forced their way out even through Buchanan's pro-slavery pen:

In the already excited condition of public feeling throughout the South, this raid of John Brown

made a deeper impression on the southern mind against the Union than all former events. Considered merely as the isolated act of a desperate fanatic, it would have had no lasting effect. It was the enthusiastic and permanent approbation of the object of his expedition by the abolitionists of the North, which spread alarm and apprehension throughout the South.... On the day of Brown's execution bells were tolled in many places, cannon fired, and prayers offered up for him as if he were a martyr (from James Buchanan, *Mr. Buchanan's Administration on the Eve of Rebellion*, quoted in Rozwenc, p. 29-30)

John Brown and his men placed their greatest confidence in the most oppressed and most intensely exploited sections of the working class. Today, a disproportionate number of these workers are black, latin and other so-called "minorities," and live in inner-city ghetto areas. Today as 120 years ago with regard to the black slaves, we are constantly told by a chorus of racists that these workers are too oppressed, too tired, too concerned with immediate needs, too stupid and/or too inferior to make revolution. But it was the rebellion and escape of slaves that brought forth the abolitionist movement, and it is the heroic rebellions of these minority and white workers today that has brought forth our revolutionary movement.

The one fact that President Buchanan was too blinded by racism to see, or too gripped by racism to acknowledge, was the reaction of the slaves to the raid on Harper's Ferry. Buchanan wrote that "John Brown, after all his efforts, received no support from the slaves in the neighborhood." In fact, John Brown's raid raised the level of rebellion among the slaves to new heights. His band held hostage a slaveholder, Lewis W. Washington, a greatgrand nephew of George Washington. "On the night Col. Washington was taken, a free black who had been visiting among the slaves had not raised the alarm at Charlestown, leaving its inhabitants to find out about the raid from other sources and several hours later. Train engineer William Wooley reported that before the early morning train which had been halted at Harper's Ferry was permitted to resume its journey some 300 slaves had gathered around the cars, shouting that they wanted their

freedom, having been slaves long enough.

"A great change came over Harper's Ferry slaves immediately after the raid," wrote local resident Jennie Chambers. They were not as reliable as before, often congregating without their masters' knowledge. Another resident of the neighborhood, Presbyterian minister Charles White, wrote on Nov. 10, 1859, that 'several masters have been beaten or attacked by their servants.'... Harper's Ferry whites sought to pretend that the local blacks were indifferent to the raid... But in the weeks after the raid there could be no pretending about the unprecedented number of fires in the country. Night after night, reported a Richmond daily, 'the heavens are illuminated by the lurid glare of burning property.' The torch was put to stock yards, barns, stables, haystacks, and agricultural implements, causing a general suspension of work on some farms. Wheat was threshed earlier than usual, its owners not daring to let it stand until the other fall-work had been done...

"Among those suffering loss of property were three of the jurors who had tried and convicted Brown, among them the foreman of the jury, Walter Shirley," (Quarles, pp. 107-108)

The slaveholders' dread of insurrection increased not only in Harper's Ferry and the rest of Virginia, but throughout the South. "Slave patrols were strengthened, as in Mississippi where a succession of flaming cotton mills hinted ominously at a wave of arson... Slave quarters were carefully searched for firearms. A slave in Clarke County, Va. 'Negro Jerry,' was sentenced to hang for conspiring with slaves to rebel." (Quarles, p. 159)

The Weekly Anglo-African, a black newspaper, pinpointed a source of the slaves' inspiration and the Southern ruling class' hysteria in the multi-racial nature of Brown's squad. "It asserted that Virginia would never have trembled at 17 or 1700 white men in arms, even if they had all been John Browns. It was the 5 black men, armed to the teeth, and the 500,000 black men in their midst 'armed with a quarrel,' who caused the Virginians to shudder in fear." The racist myth of the servile, shuffling black was contradicted by the reality of blacks, shouldering guns. During the Civil War, 5 black men with guns multiplied to 200,000. Osborne P. Anderson, the one black guerrilla who got away, and who then fought in the Civil War, wrote in the

first biography of the anti-slavery leader, "John Brown did not only capture Harper's Ferry for twenty hours, but he held the whole South." (Quarles, pp. 106-107) Perhaps it would have been even more accurate to say that the attackers of Harper's Ferry held the whole nation.

During the next six weeks Brown spent in jail, and following his execution, abolitionists in virtually every city and town in the North held mass meetings attended by a total of tens of thousands, and read about in the press by millions. These meetings were in the main led by the militant abolitionists, many recent converts to the advocacy of violence, and in particular, by blacks. In New York, "on the Sunday following the raid, Henry Highland Garnet told his congregation that it was the duty of every freedom-loving person to affirm the rightness

**Five black men armed to the teeth and 500,000 black men... armed with a quarrel...**

of the raid....he asserted that the only right slavery had was to die..." (Quarles, p. 117) At another New York meeting, "James Green, a former fugitive, urged his listeners to get a gun and to use it when necessary. Another speaker, J.J. Simons, said that Blacks should follow Brown's example and that this was not to be done by prayer, the best prayer for the slaveholder being powder and shot... Speaking to an all-white audience at Brockett's Bridge, New York, William J. Watkins (a black man)... extolled Brown, calling him a hero... Watkins added that the slaves were destined to be free even though they might have to wade through seas of blood... A gathering of Blacks at the Zion Church in Providence, Rhode Island, although calling attention to their abhorrence of bloodshed and civil war, expressed their full sympathy with their friend Captain



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Brown, proclaiming him a hero... Blacks in Cincinnati... adopted a resolution declaring that the death of Brown and his associates would mark an era in the abolitionist crusade... In Cleveland a well-attended meeting of Negroes passed a resolution declaring that it was the duty of the 'free-men' of the North to go to Charlestown and liberate John Brown." (Quarles, pp. 117-118)

December 2, 1859, when John Brown was hanged, was called "Martyr Day" by blacks. Throughout the North, blacks did not report for work, wore black arm bands, attended mass meetings. Thousands of whites participated as well. In Boston, "the abolitionists held a standing-room-only meeting at Tremont Temple, with 3,000 gathered outside... in Philadelphia... at a mid-morning meeting in National Hall, called by the abolitionists and attracting upwards of 4,000, an address by Robert Purvis brought the meeting to an abrupt close by order of the police." (Quarles, pp. 125-127) Purvis supported Brown to the hilt and advocated armed slave insurrection. "A Philadelphia paper expressed no surprise that blacks should revere John Brown but was shocked and bewildered 'that placid and pleasant looking white women and white men should display any other emotion than loathing and terror at a conspiracy for butchery and devastation' such as Brown had engineered." (Quarles, pp. 127-128)

Quarles sums up the results of all those mass meetings this way: "Among abolitionists their dislike of violence, previously one of their proudest boasts, now yielded to their stronger desire to see slavery brought low. Even before Brown went to the gallows, William Lloyd Garrison had done an about-face on pacifism. 'Brand that man as a hypocrite and dastard, who, in one breath, exalts the deed of Washington and Warren, and in the next, denounces Nat Turner as a monster for refusing longer to wear the yoke and be driven under the lash.'" (Quarles, p. 152)

"Abolitionist literature, hitherto more reflective than incendiary, reflected this mood of physical force. In the spring of 1860, the American Anti-Slavery Society published a thirty-six page tract, 'An Account of Some of the Principal Slave Insurrections... During the Past Two Centuries.' In its December 1859 issue, The Anglo-African Magazine reprinted

'The Confessions of Nat Turner,' prefacing it with an editorial comparing Turner's methods with those of John Brown. Thomas Wentworth Higginson wrote an article on conspirator Denmark Vesey (a freed slave) and another insurrectionist, Nat Turner (a slave) both accounts appearing in the sedate pages of the Atlantic Monthly. Higginson's sketch on Turner asserted that his plan and that of John Brown were both 'deliberately matured; each was in its way practicable.'" (Quarles, p. 153)

Support for John Brown was not limited to articles and mass meetings. "As John Brown waited in his cell for hanging on December 2, 1859," Rev. Higginson "was organizing an expeditionary force to storm the jail at Charlestown, Virginia and rescue him. At the same time, Lysander Spooner, prominent Boston attorney, who had called off his own plan for invasion of the South when he heard of John Brown's, was enlisting men and money to kidnap at pistol point Gov. Henry A. Wise of Virginia and hold him hostage... his life to be taken if John Brown were executed... In Ohio's Ashtabula County, where a secret anti-slavery, semi-military organization had been organized by John Brown, his eldest son, and others, scores were under arms determined to protect from arrest those leading citizens of their community who had known of John Brown's invasion or helped prepare for it. In Iowa at Springdale, where John Brown's company had drilled, an armed organization similar to that in Ashtabula was patrolling the roads, its members intent on preventing the arrest of any of its citizens... In Concord, Massachusetts... Franklin B. Sanborn, another who had helped plot and finance the invasion... was soon resisting the arrest of federal marshals long enough and stoutly enough to permit cultured Concord to raise a mob that rescued him... In New York, German veterans of the Revolution of 1848, meeting on November 22, agreed to join with others from Boston and Ohio in invading Charlestown with bombs and hand grenades on the day of the execution to rescue Brown as he approached the gallows guarded by fifteen hundred federal and Virginia troops." (Boyer, pp. 16-17)

John Brown rejected the rescue plans. To advance the anti-slavery cause, he said, "I am worth now infinitely more to die than to live." The realization that slavery could not be limited, but had to



*Harper's Ferry as it appeared to Brown from the Maryland side of the river. Inset shows the entrance to the Arsenal area, with the corner of the engine house in the right foreground.*

be ended, and that the slave owners would not give up their class position, but had to have their power violently destroyed, radiated from the jail in Charlestown throughout the North, beyond the ranks of the abolitionist movement. "Northern workers held mass meetings to express sympathy for John Brown. In Ohio, the Social Working Men's Association of Cincinnati, made up of many German Marxists, drew up a set of resolutions which declared: "The act of John Brown has powerfully contributed to bring out the hidden consciousness of the majority of the people.'" (P.S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the U.S.*, p. 289)

Transforming the opinions of the masses had been anticipated by Brown, and was part of the reason he chose to strike at the Federal Arsenal. Frederick Douglass, explaining why he had originally planned to participate in the raid and then declined, wrote of a conversation he had with John Brown two months before the assault: "Brown for Harper's Ferry and I against it—he for striking a blow that should instantly arouse the country, and I for the policy of gradually and unaccountably drawing off the slaves to the mountains, as at first suggested

and proposed by him." (quoted in Quarles, pp. 77)

Why does one act of violence get a mass response, while another only a mass audience? What made the ghetto rebellions of the 1960's or the raid on Harper's Ferry different from the recent killings of politicians and business executives by German and Italian terrorists and the bank hold-up by Patricia Hearst and the Symbionese Liberation "Army"? Precisely that one was intimately connected with and grew out of the mass movement, and therefore responded to the deep needs of the masses, while the others were planned and executed by people who stood apart from the mass movement, had no confidence in the masses being able to develop a political understanding, and therefore ended up being looked at by the masses as another side show in the bosses' circus of freaks. The strategy of terrorism, for all its seeming militancy, is essentially a liberal one because it relies on scaring the bosses into reforms within capitalism rather than developing a mass movement capable of wiping out the bosses with socialist revolution. Terrorism, like all forms of liberalism within the movement, tends to prevent the masses

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from adopting a strategy of mass revolutionary violence. It is based on the idea that someone else—secret conspirators—will kill a few bosses and scare the rest.

This was not John Brown's plan. He intended the attack by a few to be the prelude to a mass war on slavery by thousands of slaves and abolitionists. In a different form that is what happened.

John Brown was a conspirator second, and a public advocate of violence against slavery first. He was a conspirator in the sense that he tried to ensure that only those who needed to know, the direct participants, were aware of the time and place of the raid on Harper's Ferry or the descent on the Swamp of the Swan or the battle at Black Jack. If you are serious about winning, and not suicidal, why tell the enemy the tactical details? But as to the overall strategy of attacking slavery with violence, and the overall politics of destroying slavery, John Brown told all those who needed to know—the entire working class, or, at any rate, all those he could reach. One reason they needed to know is that without their help the plan could not succeed. Boyer writes,

It was because much of the North was imbued with a war psychology that John Brown by 1859 could publicly disclose his purpose of attacking the South's slavery by force of arms, asking and receiving contributions to bring his plan into actuality at a good many public meetings, some of which were widely attended. If his plot was a conspiracy, and it was one of the strangest in American annals, it was also perhaps the most public conspiracy in the history of the United States. In whole communities, from Ohio to Iowa to Massachusetts, his purpose was general knowledge months before he attacked Harper's Ferry, Virginia with his little army of white and black.

"The most public conspiracy in the history of the United States"—what an excellent description of the revolutionary process. Do we in PLP tell the ruling class the identity of our non-public members? Did we announce to the Chicago police in advance that we were going to invade Nazi Headquarters in Marquette Park in April, 1978? On the other hand, we have made it clear for over fifteen years now in every speech, in every

issue of our newspaper, that we are planning a crime against capitalism—the overthrow of the United States government. We have, in one form or another, from tens of thousands of private conversations to tens of millions of leaflets, announced this plan to millions of workers and requested their help, without which we cannot succeed.

The message of Harper's Ferry, the need for mass violence to destroy slavery, was clearest to those in the North who were closest to the experience of enslavement—to blacks. Prior to the Civil War, Blacks by and large did not celebrate the Fourth of July, feeling that the U.S.A. was not "their" country. Their big public holiday was August 1, the day the British Act of Parliament freeing the slaves in the West Indies went into effect in 1834. On the first August 1 following Harper's Ferry, in 1860, the turnout in many cities was bigger and more militant than before, and was characterized by a new feature—organized squads of blacks bearing arms. Blacks had been fighting for the right to enlist in a number of state militias, but had been barred by racism.

But the message of Harper's Ferry was by no means restricted to blacks. When the Civil War broke out less than two years later hundreds of thousands of whites, including entire union locals, answered the call for volunteers. A large number, although perhaps not a majority, were consciously motivated by hatred of slavery and of racism. From Harper's Ferry, "the people of the North learned, as little else could have taught them, that the structure of slavery remained intact primarily through the power of the whip, the gun and the gallows and that when these were gone there was little else left.... It was then that many in the North realized that the issue of slavery and freedom would be decided by the weapons the South had chosen. The battle at Harper's Ferry demonstrated what those weapons were" (Ruchames, p. 39).

Things are easier to see in retrospect than while they are happening. We in PLP say that capitalism, if not dead, is dying. True, the death throes of the capitalist system, like those of the harpooned whale, can and do kill people. Nevertheless, they mark the end of the life of the organism. Relatively few people, although the number grows daily, understand that capitalism is in its final agony. In 1859, relatively few understood that

slavery was on the verge of extinction. By 1861 it was clear to millions, by 1863 to millions more, and by 1865 chattel slavery was gone. Wendell Phillips, one of the leaders of the abolitionist movement, spoke at the burial of John Brown in North Elba, New York, on Dec. 8, 1859. It appeared that the slave power was putting John Brown in his grave, but, said Phillips:

He has abolished slavery in Virginia. You may say this is too much. Our neighbors are the last men we know. The hours that pass us are the ones we appreciate the least... History will date Virginia Emancipation from Harper's Ferry. True, the slave is still there. So, when the tempest uproots a pine on your hills, it looks green for months—a year or two. Still, it is timber, not a tree.

**We are planning  
a crime against  
capitalism—  
the overthrow of  
the U.S. government.**

John Brown has loosened the roots of the slave system; it only breathes—it does not live,—hereafter.

**MULTI-RACIAL UNITY IS ESSENTIAL  
TO WORKING-CLASS VICTORY**

The men who "abolished slavery" lived on a rented farm on the Chambersburg—Harper's Ferry Road until the evening of October 16, 1859 when they started on the five mile walk to the federal arsenal. Their average age was 25. We list them on p. 17. We include only those who marched on Harper's Ferry bearing arms. If we were to include the women who were at the Kennedy Farm House until the last moment, helping to prepare ammunition, equipment and meals, and serving as camouflage; if we included those who helped to recruit the

guerrillas and those who donated money for weapons; and if we included the thousands who aided directly and indirectly in building the movement to abolish slavery, the list of names alone would be longer than this magazine. It would include blacks and whites, chattel slaves and wage slaves, native Americans who helped the Brown family in Kansas, English cotton workers who fought slavery against their immediate economic interests, and workers born in every country on earth. To itemize each one's important contributions to the movement would take an encyclopedia.

**O**sborn Perry Anderson, one of the black members of the company, described the atmosphere at the Kennedy Farm prior to the raid in the first biography of John Brown; *A Voice From Harper's Ferry*, published in 1861:

A more earnest, fearless, determined company of men it would be difficult to get together... There was no milk and water sentimentality—no offensive contempt for the negro, while working in his cause; the pulsations of each and every heart beat in harmony for the suffering and pleading slave. I thank God that I have been permitted to realize to its furthest, fullest extent, the moral, mental, physical, social harmony of an Anti-Slavery family, carrying out to the letter the principles of its antetype, the Anti-Slavery cause. In John Brown's house, and in John Brown's presence, men from widely different parts of the continent met and united into one company, wherein no hateful prejudice dared intrude its ugly self—no ghost of a distinction found space to enter. (quoted in Ruchames, p. 249)

So high a level of multi-racial unity did not develop overnight. The Brown family was at a revival meeting in the Congregational Church in Hudson, Ohio in 1838 when they noticed that the few blacks present were given seats in the rear, by the stove. They invited the blacks to sit in their family pew, moving to the seats in the rear to make room, and sharply raising the issue of racism within the church. (Quarles, p. 17) In 1848-1849 the Brown's were living in North Elba, N.Y., in a community largely

composed of free blacks, including run-away slaves.

Brown took the horrors of slavery personally. In a letter to his wife after a long absence, he wrote that "his own mounting joy at the prospect of rejoining his family...made him even more sensitive to the lot of the 'vast number' of slaves who experienced separation from their loved ones with almost no hope of ever seeing them again." (Quarles, p. 18) While he was meeting with blacks in Springfield, Ohio to form the League of Gileadites, some of them told Brown they were unable to sleep for fear of their wives or children being kidnapped under the Fugitive Slave Law. In another letter to his wife Mary, Brown wrote, "I want all my family to imagine themselves in that same dreadful condition." (Quarles, p. 25)

Within the anti-slavery movement in Kansas, the Browns stood for making the Territory one of multi-racial unity. They were in a minority among the settlers, most of whom wanted no blacks in Kansas, slave or free.

John Brown's anti-racism with regard to black Americans was part of his general conviction that all oppressed people are more the same than different. Here is an account from an interview he had with a journalist when his company was camped on the Wakarusa River in Kansas in July, 1856, revealing the reporter's racist fantasies about Roman slaves and blacks as well as Brown's reply:

He then went on to tell me of Spartacus and his servile war, and was evidently familiar with every step in the career of the great gladiator. I reminded him that Spartacus and Roman slaves were warlike people in the country from which they were taken, and were trained to arms in the arena, in which they slew or were slain, and that the movement was crushed when the Roman Legions were concentrated against it. The negroes were a peaceful, domestic, inoffensive race. In all their sufferings they seemed to be incapable of resentment or reprisal.

'You have not studied them right,' he said, 'and you have not studied them long enough. Human nature is the same everywhere.' (W.A. Phillips, *Atlantic Monthly*, Dec. 1879, quoted in Ruchames, p. 226)

Struggle against exploitation is the central aspect of the culture of all nationalities. To those who tell us out of the most uninformed prejudice, that whites don't fight back, or blacks, or Cubans, or Mexicans, or Puerto Ricans, or Dominicans, or Haitians, or Jews, or some other group, or workers in general, we can think of no better answer than to rely on the stubborn facts of history that show that **struggle is universal**, and to reply with John Brown, "You have not studied them right and you have not studied them long enough. Human nature is the same everywhere." The slave-owners, with all their talk of the "docile" blacks, knew this well. They were petrified of "outside agitators" and patrolled all night with dogs and guns to keep 'Yankees' and abolitionist pamphlets and newspapers away from their slaves. But what could a handful of abolitionists and their ideas do without the four million slaves? A Virginia legislator spoke in 1832 of the terrifying "suspicion that a Nat Turner might be in every family, that the same bloody deed could be acted over at any time and in any place, that the materials for it were spread throughout the land and always ready for a like explosion." (Litwack, p. 62)

Whenever the bosses talk about "outside agitators" what they are really afraid of are internal contradictions. Today, the "outside agitators" are the communists of the PLP, fighting to abolish capitalism. The bosses assure us that the residents of the ghettos—this even after the rebellions of the '60's—are too ground down by poverty, too alienated to fight back collectively—yet the bosses organize cops, preachers, and black nationalists to try to snuff out the slightest communist spark in the ghetto. What are they afraid of? The bosses assure us that the auto workers have it too good, are too happy, to get together and fight back. They tell us that the workers hate communism. Yet the bosses organize cops, plant security, KKKers, black nationalists, and, most especially, union hacks to try to stop communists in the plants, to try to instantly fire them when they are discovered. What are they afraid of?

Multi-racial unity developed over a period of years among black and white militant abolitionists as they worked with and got to know each other, along with their families and friends. As we mentioned, the first blacks John Brown met, when he was a small child, were



*Slave rebellions struck fear into the hearts of the slave-owners. Above is Nat Turner, leader of one of the most important U.S. slave rebellions. The slave-owners were well aware of the possible consequences for their system.*

escaping slaves who stayed over at his house. In the nineteenth century black people staying in the homes of white people as overnight guests or vice versa, was even more unusual than it is today. Far from being woven into the "natural" fabric of society, it more often than not required the tearing of that fabric, such as the act of escaping from slavery. Similarly, today, one of the main ways in which people of different "races" and cultural backgrounds are able to overcome the "natural" segregation of capitalist society and become friends is through joining together to fight the mutual class enemy. **Racist and nationalist ideas cannot be overcome primarily inside one's head. It requires material change in the way one lives.** Thus the importance of building the International Committee Against Racism, and having INCAR chapters lead workers in multi-racial unity against the boss.

With the smashing of slavery and the development of large scale industry, in order to super-exploit black and latin workers at the key point of production,

U.S. capitalism has been forced to create a contradiction between segregation in housing and integration within the factory, hospital, office or campus. The bosses try to bring segregation into the factory too, in the form of racist job classification and reliance on different types of bourgeois culture to keep the workers apart (e.g., Soul v. Country Music). Nevertheless, the workers rub shoulders every day and become acquainted. It is the job of class conscious workers in INCAR and PLP to develop acquaintance into friendship.

**C**an such multi-racial working-class unity grow in the midst of a society permeated by racism? Then, as now, society was racist to the core, with most of the white workers accepting a good part of the ruling class's racist ideology. But, operating under the surface were developments that required the workers to **either** move toward anti-racist thoughts and actions, **or** suffer severe economic and social setbacks. Both of these possi-

bilities were open, but staying still was not. The farmers and workers who had picked up the gun to keep slaves out of Kansas, despite their racist ideas, had started a war that could not be ended without the abolition of slavery. John Brown's identification with the anguish of the slave and his hatred of the slaveowner had a basis in objective class interest. Karl Marx explained why in articles for the *Vienna Presse*, Oct. 25, 1861 and Nov. 7, 1861:

"The cultivation of the Southern export articles, cotton, tobacco, sugar, etc., carried on by slaves, is only remunerative as long as it is conducted with large gangs of slaves, on a mass scale and on wide expanses of a naturally fertile soil, that requires only simple labor. Intensive cultivation, which depends less on fertility of the soil than on investment of capital, intelligence and energy of labor, is contrary to the nature of slavery. Hence the rapid transformation of states like Maryland and Virginia, which formerly employed slaves on the production of export articles, into states which raised slaves in order to export these slaves into the deep South.

"In the Secessionist Congress at Montgomery, Senator Toombs, one of the spokesmen of the South, has strikingly formulated the economic law that commands the constant expansion of the territory of slavery. "In fifteen years more," said he, "without a great increase in slave territory, either the slaves must be permitted to flee from the whites, or the whites must flee from the slaves." Marx explained why the war had to be fought to a conclusion without compromise on the issue of slavery:

"With the relinquishment of its plans of conquest the Southern Confederacy would relinquish its capacity to live and the purpose of secession. Secession, indeed, only took place because within the Union the transformation of the border states and Territories into slave states seemed no longer attainable. On the other hand, with a peaceful cession of the contested territory to the Southern Confederacy the North would surrender to the slave republic more than three-quarters of the entire territory of the United States.

"Thus there would in fact take place, not a dissolution of the Union, but a reorganization of it, a reorganization on the basis of slavery, under the recognized control of the slaveholding oligarchy.

In the Northern states, where Negro slavery is in practice unworkable, the white working class would gradually be forced down to the level of helotry. This would accord with the loudly proclaimed principle that only certain races are capable of freedom, and as the actual labor is the lot of the Negro in the South, so in the North it is the lot of the German and the Irishman, or their direct descendants.

The present struggle between the South and North is, therefore, nothing but a struggle between two social systems, between the system of slavery and the system of free labor. The struggle has broken out because the two systems can no longer live peacefully side by side on the North American continent. It can only be ended by the victory of one system or the other." (Marx, *Civil War*, pp. 67-68)

Just as slavery had to expand or die, wage-slavery must expand or die. As capitalists compete domestically and internationally, they increase investment in machinery to lower the cost of production. But rate of profit is the surplus value extracted from labor divided by the total invested. Therefore, as investment in machinery increases, the rate of profit must decrease. Faced with this declining rate of profit (even with absolute profits at record heights) the capitalist turns to his workers to squeeze out more surplus. Thus, decline in real wages, cutbacks in schools, hospitals, etc., stepped up racist attacks on black and latin workers to justify lower wages and living conditions, union busting. Internationally, stepped-up competition between imperialists for control of Africa, Asia and Latin America for the super-low wages that are paid to workers there, and stepped-up fights for world markets to sell the flood of products created by the more advanced machinery but which the workers increasingly cannot afford to buy back.

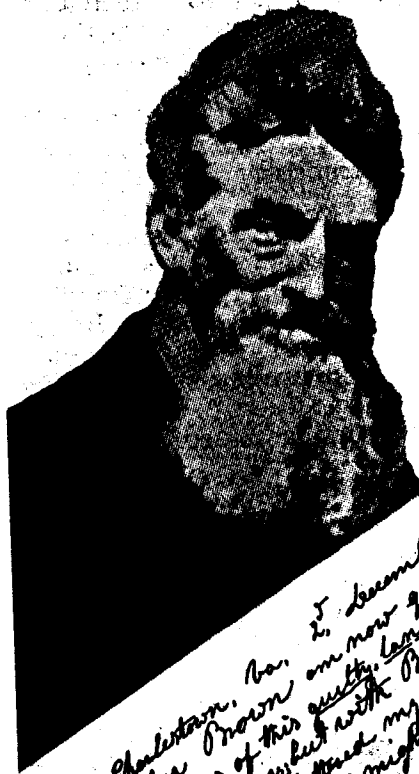
These developments are leading the U.S. ruling class today closer and closer to war with their chief imperialist rival, the Soviet Union, and closer and closer to the fascism within the country required to maximize profit and to force the working class to support and fight that war. War and fascism will mean the death of millions of working people and their families, and qualitatively increased suffering for millions more. Relatively comfortable, higher-paid workers will be plunged into conditions similar to those already existing in ghettos such as the South Bronx or Harlem or in the Watts

area of Los Angeles. Appeals by the bosses to race hatred, patriotism, nationalism and anti-communism will be used to win the workers to accept wholesale slaughter and degradation. Only multi-racial unity and communist leadership can transform severe economic and social set-back via socialist revolution, into working-class victory. Both possibilities are open to the workers, but staying still is not.

Objective political-economic processes determine the limits of the potential development of the working class. The subjective efforts of the workers themselves determine their actual developments within those limits. In the States that became the Confederacy, anti-slavery forces among white farmers and workers had been developing as the crisis of slavery deepened. In 1857, the same year as the Dred Scott decision, Hinton Rowan Helper's *The Impending Crisis of the South* was published. Helper, a non-slave holding North Carolinian, "exploited class divisions and struck at white solidarity by condemning slavery as an economic curse for the plain folk of the South." (Fehrenbacher, p. 527) But the anti-slavery forces were not strong enough to withstand the attacks of the secessionists, and were temporarily silenced. 270,000 white southerners died fighting to maintain the slave owners' system (90,000 in battle, 180,000 from disease), and several hundred thousand more were injured. Most of them never owned a slave. Of the one and a half million heads of families in the South in 1860, "only about one-fourth... owned any slaves at all, and of these as estimated 60 percent owned no more than five." (Thomas, p. 6) "In 1860 only about 2,300 people owned as many as 100 slaves and extensive acreage." (ibid.)

Racism propelled these white workers and farmers to their deaths on behalf of the plantation owners who exploited them as well as enslaving their black fellow workers. The present U.S. ruling class used racism to send 50,000 U.S. workers to their deaths, and to the murder of one million Vietnamese, as recently as seven years ago. They plan to use racism to line up workers to put down strikes and rebellions here, and to fight our fellow workers, be they blacks in South Africa, arabs in Saudi Arabia, or Russians in Europe.

As the Civil War ground on for five years, and the standard of living in the Confederacy sharply declined with losses



*Charleston, Va. 5 December 1859.  
John Brown on how quite certain that  
the crimes of this guilty land will never be  
punged away, but with blood I had as I now  
think, vainly, planned myself that without any  
much bloodshed, it might be done*

in battle and a tightening blockade, class struggle intensified. A wave of food riots (largely led by women) broke out in Southern cities. The Southern politicians' answer—in addition to calling the cops—was, Are you with us, or with the slave-loving Yankees? Racism proved stronger than hunger, and the riots were suppressed without leading to the answer to that question that would have reflected class interest—We are with the slaves, against you! A series of strikes was also defeated primarily by racism, such as this one in one of the Confederacy's few remaining growth industries:

The classic example of the effect of black labor upon white occurred in a Richmond cemetery in August 1864. One morning a crew of white gravediggers went on strike against the city in the hopes of getting higher wages. Almost immediately the municipal authorities hired a crew of blacks to dig the graves. When the white gravediggers learned of their replacement, they returned to the cemetery, drove the blacks away, and



resumed digging graves. The black men had broken the strike and then absorbed the anger of the white workers, all within a single day. (Thomas, p. 236)

By August 1864 Richmond and nearby Petersburg were confronted by 100,000 troops of the Army of the Potomac. The city was to fall after an eight-month siege in which everybody who could be drafted was sent to man the fortifications. Thousands were killed. Racism caused these cemetery workers actually to dig their own graves, instead of to fulfill the historic role of the workers as "the gravediggers of the bourgeoisie."

On the other hand, the working people who joined the Union Army including the approximately equal number that died from wounds and disease, provided the armed power that smashed slavery and advanced the interests of the working class. As Marx wrote in *Capital*,

In the United States of North America, every independent movement of the workers was paralyzed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded. But out of the death of slavery a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was the eight hour's agitation, that ran with the seven-leagued boots of the locomotive from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California. The General Congress of Labour at Baltimore (August 16th, 1866) declared: 'The first and great necessity of the present, to free the labour of this country from capitalistic slavery, is the passing of a law by which eight hours shall be the normal working day in all States of the American Union. We are resolved to put forth all our strength until this glorious result is obtained.' (*Capital*, Vol. I., p. 301)

After decades of struggle, including the massacre of workers in 1886 at Haymarket Square in Chicago that resulted in our international working-class holiday May Day, the eight hour day was finally won for most workers in this century. But, many workers must work overtime or two jobs to survive, and the typical family with the husband working an eight-hour job and the wife working at home has been replaced by a typical

family in which both husband and wife work eight-hour jobs and at home. Furthermore, although the Civil War resulted in emancipation of the slaves, after a brief period of "black reconstruction" it resulted in about 80 years of crude Jim Crow segregation and discrimination and the continuation to this very day of social and economic second-class status for blacks.

What happened? Did the union locals that volunteered en masse make a mistake? Did the 187,000 blacks who enlisted in the Union Army fight and die in vain?

**W**e have seen that the political-economic laws of slavery required that the war end with the Union either all slave or all free. How was this reality grasped by the Union leadership, and how did this effect the outcome?

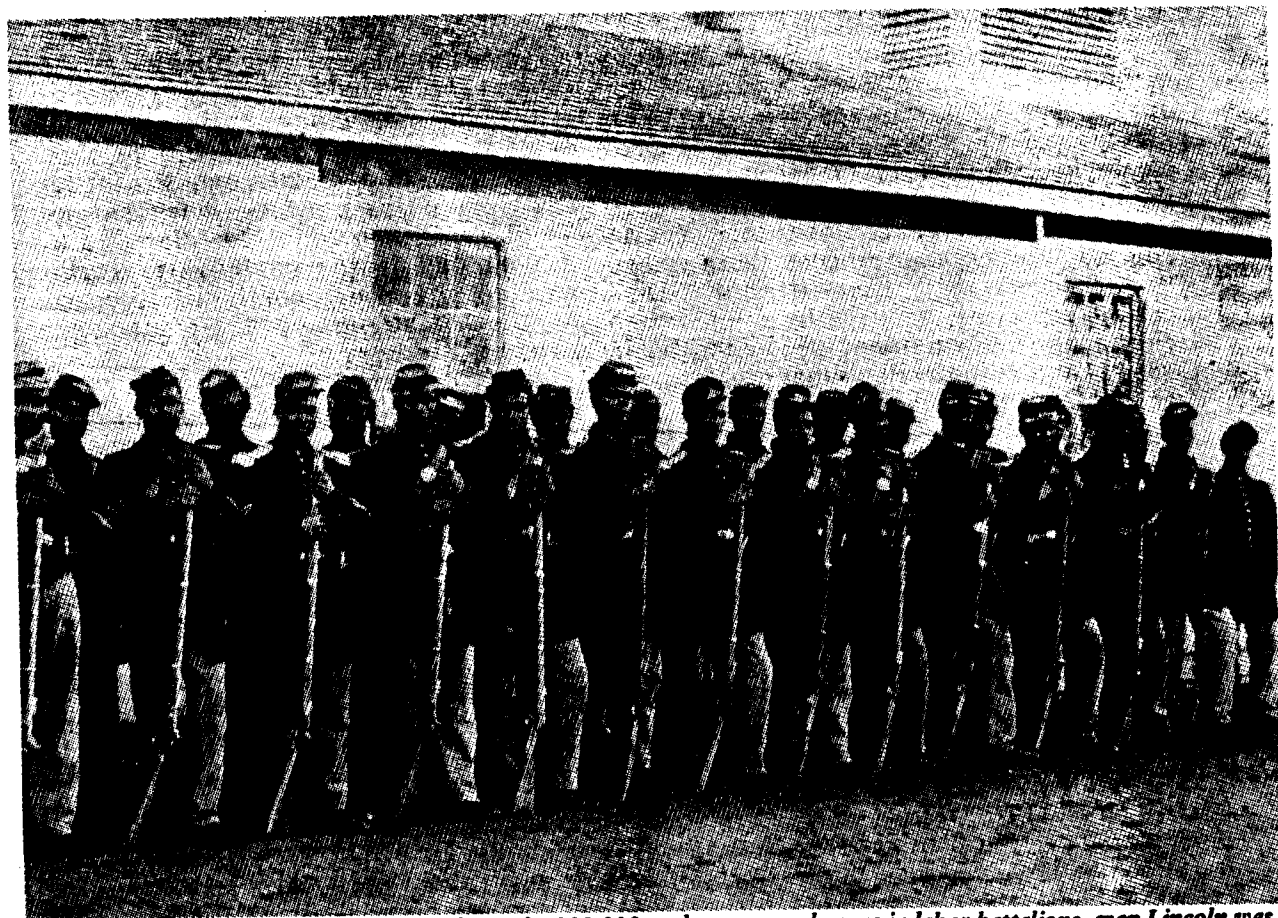
Abraham Lincoln was President of the United States from the beginning of the Civil War until his assassination a few days after the South's surrender. The need to abolish slavery to save the Union was grasped by Lincoln with the greatest reluctance.

Many times during his political career, most notably during the debates with Douglas in 1858, Lincoln openly stated his belief in the inferiority of the Negro. He never retracted these statements.

By his famous phrase "a house divided against itself cannot stand" Lincoln took great pains to explain that he meant the eventual, gradual elimination of slavery, most likely with cash compensation paid to the slave owners for their "property," which would then most likely be disposed of by shipment "back to Africa."

On what we have seen to be the key dividing line between racists and anti-racists, the question of violence, Lincoln showed where he stood in a campaign speech at Cooper Union in New York City in 1860: "Old John Brown has been executed for treason against a state. We cannot object, even though he agreed with us in thinking slavery wrong. That cannot excuse violence, bloodshed and treason." (quoted in Gold, p. 59)

Not only was slavery to be ended gradually and far in the future and at a profit—it was to be ended voluntarily! The Republican platform of 1860 pledged no interference by the national government in the internal concerns of States. Under pressure from secession, the Republicans positively grovelled before



*Black troops of the Union Army. With nearly 200,000 under arms and more in labor battalions, even Lincoln was forced to admit their crucial role in the winning of the Civil War.*

the slave owners:

A proposal to amend the Constitution in the direction of a perpetual commitment to the sanctity of slave property in states as opposed to territories where it then existed came from the special House committee on sectional conciliation....By March, 1861, the proposed amendment had passed through Congress. It reached the White House in time for Lincoln to refer to it in his inaugural address. Such a restriction on Congress's power was already 'implied constitutional law,' Lincoln said. Therefore, he could not object 'to its being made express, and irrevocable.' (Hyman, p. 46-47) emphasis ours except for 'states.'

This amendment was on the verge of final approval by Lincoln, but the Southern leaders would not give up their war plans in return for its passage.

Even with the war well underway, Lincoln kept trying for a compromise with slavery. In 1861 Major General

John Charles Fremont, (who had been the first Republican nominee for President, in the election of 1856) issued a military order emancipating the slaves in Missouri. General David Hunter likewise emancipated the slaves on islands off the Georgia Coast, Lincoln countermanded both of these orders. Even northern, free Blacks who fought to join the Union Army in 1861 were denied admission. To "make it perfectly clear" where he stood on slavery and racism, Lincoln appointed George McClellan to be commander of the Union Armies. This General, in Nov., 1861, wrote, to one of his political backers,

Help me to dodge the n....r—we want nothing to do with him. I am fighting to preserve the integrity of the Union and the power of the government—on no other issue. To gain that end we cannot afford to mix up the negro question—it must be incidental and subsidiary. The President is perfectly honest and is really sound on the n....r question. I will answer for it now that things go right with him (quoted

in Nevins, p. 304)

The Emancipation Proclamation, issued Sept. 22, 1862 and taking effect Jan. 1, 1863 freed slaves only in rebel states, and not those in Union-controlled Kentucky, Missouri, Maryland and Washington, D.C. That is, it "freed the slaves where the U.S. government was not in control, and refused to free them where it was in control." Even after that Lincoln "still flirted with colonization chimeras." (Hyman, p. 265) Finally, in 1864, Lincoln defended emancipation and enlistment of black troops, against even more overt racists, thus:

There are now in the service of the United States near two hundred thousand able-bodied colored men, most of them under arms, defending and acquiring Union territory . . . . Abandon all the posts now garrisoned by Black men; take two hundred thousand men from our side and put them into the Battlefield or cornfield against us, and we would be compelled to abandon the war in three weeks. (quoted in Foner, p. 320)

Production by slavery was the strength of the South, but, once multi-racial unity was achieved, it was the Achilles heel of the South. Super-exploitation of blacks, latins, asians, native Americans is the strength of U.S. capitalism, but once multi-racial unity is achieved, it is the Achilles heel of U.S. capitalism. As is clear from the process by which Lincoln was dragged, kicking and screaming racist imprecations, into becoming the "Great Emancipator" in order to defeat the South, the strength of multi-racial unity is an objective fact, independent of the propaganda, agitation and struggle led by the Abolitionists or by the International Committee Against Racism.

Lincoln did not go through a moral change during the Civil War. He was a racist through and through, from beginning to end. The northern ruling class had been split in 1860 into at least three groups, all in relative agreement on maintaining the Union but in relative disagreement on the question of slavery. All three looked forward to super-exploiting black labor in one form or another after the war. As President, Lincoln had the job of arranging compromises between these factions so that the entire Northern ruling class could avoid defeat at the hands of the Slave Power. The abolition of slavery emerged during the war as the only way to achieve

this end, at which point the big bankers and their moderate republican representatives moved to make this program their own. Inherently conservative, they looked south to see who they could rely on to keep the freed slaves and the increasingly rebellious white workers down. They could see only—the slave owners. And so, as junior partners to Northern capital, the South continued to be ruled by the aristocrats of the plantation and urban hilltop:

As William B. Hesseltine observes, "the men who led the Confederacy were still the leaders of the Southern people" after Appomattox. (Thomas, p. 232, footnote quoting Hesseltine, *Confederate Leaders in the New South*.)

This was hardly the intention of the rank and file of the union army, black or white. Even the relatively racist section of the white troops had no love for the Southern aristocrats, who they blamed for the deaths of their comrades and their own danger and discomfort. "We'll hang Jeff Davis on a sour apple tree" was one of the most popular verses of the John Brown song. The 187,000 black troops fought heroically to destroy slavery and racism. A disproportionate number of them—some 68,000—died. Hundreds of thousands of white troops—a large minority—were anti-slavery and anti-racist by the end of the war. But they had not broken their ties to the racist Lincoln administration and to the capitalist class it represented. Their movement was not an "independent movement of the workers" to use Marx's phrase—it had failed to substitute the red flag for the red, white and blue. Such an independent movement was of course more difficult to build until industrial capitalism, which emerged as the dominant force in the U.S. from the civil war, became more developed along with a massive industrial proletariat.

At any rate, if we are to note this weakness in the rank and file of the union army, and in John Brown and his men, we must note it all the more among the German Marxists who had come to the U.S. in 1848 and participated in the war under Lincoln's leadership (e.g., General Wedemeyer) and in Marx himself, who wrote several letters to Lincoln offering friendly advice, rather than attacking Lincoln for the class enemy of the workers that he was. The workers' movement for the eight hour day that emerged from the Civil War was of great historic im-

portance, but to view it as Marx and the First International did, along with the workers themselves, as "the first and great necessity of the present to free the labor of this country from capitalistic slavery" was, in retrospect, an error. The first necessity for a truly independent movement of the workers was then and is now **the advocacy of socialist revolution**, because it is the smashing of the capitalist class that will make the working class "independent." The second necessity, without which the first necessity cannot exist, was then and is now **an all-out attack on racism**. The opposite of racism is proletarian internationalism: Workers of the world, unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains, and a world to win—a socialist world, "independent" of the bosses. Without an all-out attack on racism, we go the way of the Richmond cemetery workers—we dig our own grave.

## Lincoln was a racist through and through from beginning to end.

But John Brown and his men, and the abolitionist movement, and the early Marxists, and the black and white union troops, did not fight and die in vain. We stand on their shoulders, learning (if we will take the trouble) indispensable lessons from their strengths and weaknesses. They negated chattel slavery, which led to the gigantic growth and development of wage slavery and to the monopoly capitalism of today. But dialectical materialism teaches us that change continues, that the end of one process is but the beginning of another. We will negate modern wage slavery with socialist revolution—the negation of the negation.

The present ruling class, having incorporated the slave owners as junior partners, absorbed some of their culture. They look back fondly to the "good old

days on the plantation, sipping mint juleps on the veranda," the stench of the branding iron on the skin of the slave masked by the scent of magnolias. John Brown remains convicted of murder and treason. Recently, the U.S. Congress granted posthumous amnesty to Robert E. Lee, who violated his oath of allegiance as a U.S. Army officer and led a war that inflicted 300,000 deaths on the U.S. army. Not that Lee was ever inconvenienced even while alive. In return for collaborating with the northern ruling class after the war, he was made president of Washington College (now Washington and Lee University) in Lexington, Va. Countless streets, avenues, circles and squares in the South are named for Lee and Jefferson Davis, whose birthdays continue to be celebrated as legal holidays in the States of the Confederacy.

The present main political representative of the U.S. ruling class, Jimmy KKKarter, is an ardent waver of the Confederate Stars and Bars, although of course all his racist statements are made through a grin:

The first unquestionably Southern president of the United States since 1865 (stated) that his favorite motion picture was *Gone With the Wind*. Jimmy Carter then added that he may have seen a 'different version' of the film in his native Georgia. 'My favorite scene was the burning of Schenectady, N.Y., and President Grant surrendering to Robert E. Lee.' (Thomas, p. 306. The quote from Carter is from *Newsweek*, Nov. 28, 1977, p. 85)

**E**lements of the struggle against slavery are retained in our communist movement. We retain John Brown's open advocacy of mass violence to smash racism. We retain multi-racial unity throughout rank-and-file and leadership. We retain the taking of the political and military offensive against the state apparatus. We incorporate these qualities within scientific socialism: a dialectical materialist philosophy, a democratic centralist party, proletarian internationalism, relying on the working class to destroy capitalism and build a classless society.

Let Jimmy Carter sit in his auditorium and rerun racist films. Workers, soldiers, sailors, students are joining INCAR, a mass, multi-racial organiza-

**JOHN BROWN**

## HANG KILLER COPS!

Thursday's murder of 26 year old Louis Bass by the police is not an isolated incident of police terror. It is one of the many examples that minority communities have witnessed in the past two years. In Brooklyn alone, it was Randy Evans, last summer Arthur Miller, on Thursday, Louis Bass. In light of this record who would you say should be getting bullet-proof vests, cops who carry guns or the average working person?

Cops are well known licensed killers for the U.S. bosses. In light of the staggering U.S. system which is in an economic crises-recession and is preparing for world war against its chief competitor, the Soviet Union, the cops are serving the same purpose as the KKK. They as well as the KKK are needed to create an atmosphere of terror in an attempt to weaken the unity of the working class.

For NYC workers police terror is not unlike the violence of racist hospital and school closings, the deterioration of our living conditions, racist slave conditions in NY's main industry-garment which employs thousands of black and latin workers and massive unemployment. We must take the offensive against cops-KKK-KOON terror. The Committee Against Racism along with the revolutionary communist Progressive Labor Party have been in the lead against racist attacks whether be the cops in Brooklyn or the Klan in Tupelo, Miss. Our protection lies not even in getting bullet-proof vests but in joining in the mass multi-racial movement being built by the Committee Against Racism. WE MUST DISPEL THE ILLUSION THAT COPS ARE HERE TO PROTECT US. They are not here to defend us any more than police victims of whatever party or nationalist forces. WE MUST RELY ON OUR CLASS- THE WORKING CLASS- BLACK, LATIN, ASIAN WHITE. DEATH TO KILLER COPS! BUILD MULTI-RACIAL UNITY! JOIN CAR! CELEBRATE THE 120th ANNIVERSARY OF JOHN BROWN'S RAID IN HARPER'S FERRY!

For information call 989-5499.

## BUILD MULTI-RACIAL UNITY!



*Sanity is a class question—the police brutality and endless oppression of workers makes sense to the ruling class. The leaflet inset above leaves no doubt about what is sane for the working class.*

tion. They are determined to overcome racism in the heat of class struggle. Within and outside this process, the Progressive Labor Party is gaining strength and size. We will lead the working class to give this racist yet another scene. The White House will be burning. The President will be dying. Capitalism will be "gone with the wind."

### SANITY MEANS COLLECTIVE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM

Pro-slavery President Buchanan, as we have seen, charged John Brown with insanity. The paid mouthpieces of the bourgeoisie have followed his lead ever since.

Allan Nevins and Bruce Catton were the big bourgeois historians of the Civil War of the 1940's, 1950's and early 1960's. Their multi-volume works, combining "scholarship" with popularity, have won Pulitzer Prizes, National Book Awards, and numerous other "honors." They have been picks of the Book of the Month Club and the History Book Club. Nevins' Ordeal of the Union is read in most college courses on the Civil War.

We could go on for pages with the list

of "historians" turned quack psychiatrists. The Civil War Dictionary lists "Brown, John: Fanatic abolitionist (1800-1859)... Asserting that he was an instrument of God," (p. 91) Shelby Foote calls the anti-racist, counter-terror attack in Kansas a "massacre" and refers to Brown as "the old fanatic." (The Civil War, A Narrative, Vol. 1, pp. 31-32) Stuart H. Holbrook, in Dreamers of the American Dream, a book which treats 19th century feminists, founders of utopian communities and fighters for the abolition of alcohol with great seriousness, leaves out the movement for the abolition of chattel slavery and refers to "the madman John Brown," "the most lunatic reformer in the country." (pp. 39, 274)

Nevins believes as did Buchanan, that the Civil War could have been avoided, and slavery ended in an evolutionary, non-violent manner. "Instead," he writes, "John Brown's mad raid fell on public opinion like a thunderstroke, exasperating men everywhere and dividing North and South more tragically than ever. The last chance of persuading the South to submit to an essential step, the containment of slavery, was gone."

Catton describes Brown as "a brutal murderer if there ever was one... unbalanced to the verge of outright madness." (*The Coming Fury*, p. 20) Catton regrets that many made a martyr out of John Brown: "The institution of slavery had one maddening quality: it ennobled its opponents... he (Brown) had touched a profound moral issue, an issue that ran so deep he took on a strange and moving dignity when he stood upon the scaffold."

Catton, who shares Nevins' thesis of the possibility of non-violent reconciliation between North and South, keeps the racism rolling: "What had happened in San Domingo (victorious slave rebellion resulting in the republic of Haiti) might conceivably happen on the Yazoo Delta or in the South Carolina rice fields, and John Brown had been so frightening precisely because no one could be entirely certain that his monstrous dream was impossible of attainment." (p. 87)

Samuel Eliot Morrison, the "dean" of American historians, writes in the *Oxford History of the American People*, that, "Excepting that lonely fanatic John Brown, no abolitionist attempted to incite a slave insurrection, but many took part in a conspiracy of evasion (the Underground Railroad escape route)." (p. 521) Here is Morrison's reference to Brown's slaying of five pro-slavery terrorists in the Kansas War of 1856: "A fanatic named John Brown killed a number of innocent people at the 'Pottawotami massacre'." (p. 591) Morrison has received countless awards for lying for the ruling class: he was given the Presidential Medal of Freedom, for example, by Lyndon Johnson, butcher of Vietnam, no doubt another "innocent."

"Scholarship" such as this sets the tone for more popular treatments of John Brown, which merely repeat the same unfounded accusations without benefit of footnotes, and sometimes without words at all. The brochure given out at the John Brown Wax Museum at Harper's Ferry shows a picture on its cover of Brown with eyes bulging out and mouth open in a scream. Actual photos show a composed, dignified expression. Elementary and high school social studies textbooks routinely refer to Brown as a madman.

Clearly, these accusations of insanity are not allegations that Brown was unable to function. If anything, Buchanan and the rest of the pack think that he functioned only too well. It will be re-

called that the Harper's Ferry guerrillas were taken for the cure not to the asylum, but to the scaffold with the endorsement of A. Lincoln. Mental hospitals seem to be reserved for cops like Robert Torsney who kill black children.

John Brown is charged with insanity because, in the eyes of his accusers, mass violence against slavery was illogical, unnecessary and uncalled for. In their eyes it was particularly illogical for a white person to attack slavery, and absolutely uncalled for to attack a federal arsenal and incite slave rebellion.

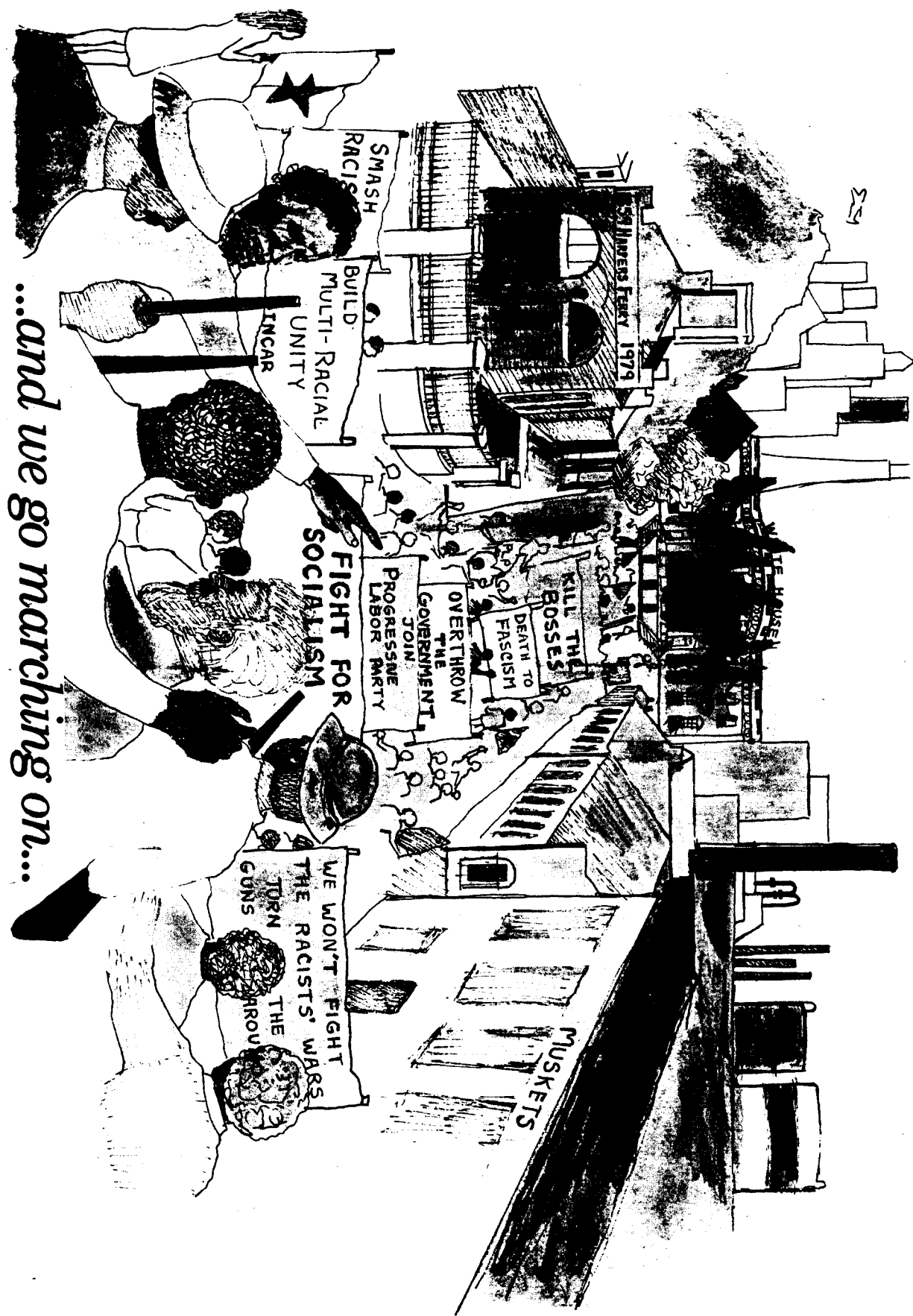
The facts are, as we have shown above that slavery would expand unless smashed by violence; that it was in the class interest of white working people to attack slavery; and that the federal government was the main protector of slavery and therefore the most logical target to attack.

Not that these historians are categorically opposed to anyone giving up his life for reasons of political commitment. They praise Crispus Attucks, a black man who was the first victim of British bullets in the American War of Independence. They chime along with Patrick Henry:—"Give me liberty or give me death." They tell us we should have undying gratitude for the 50,000 young men—disproportionately black and latin—who "gave their lives for their country" in Vietnam. In other words, it is logical—even noble—for a black man to die for the interests of the U.S. ruling class; but it was insanity for a white man to die for the interests of the slaves!

To use the word "monstrous" that Catton applied to John Brown's "dream" of slave insurrection, this is monstrous racism. Recall the Philadelphia newspaper (see above) that "expressed no surprise that blacks should revere John Brown but was shocked and bewildered" that placid and pleasant looking white women and white men should display any other emotion than loathing and terror at a conspiracy for butchery and devastation such as Brown had engineered."

To these racists, any act of violence against slaveowners quickly calls words like "monstrous" and "butchery" to the tongue, but the true "devastation," the day-in and day-out "butchery" against four million blacks gets a rare mention, in terms far less passionate.

This racism is part and parcel of their fear and hatred of the entire working class, particularly when the workers take the offensive against the system as



*...and we go marching on...*



*The use of violence against oppression at Harper's Ferry is not unique in U.S. history. Armed miners above were on strike against Rockefeller's mines in Colorado in 1914. They defeated Rockefeller's private army and won the strike.*

did the guerrillas who raided the arsenal at Harper's Ferry. In retrospect, even Harriet Tubman is grudgingly accepted by the bourgeois historians, even though at the time she was called a thief, a murderer, crazy, a man masquerading as a woman, and many other vile racist and sexist terms for her success in leading hundreds of slaves to freedom. With the Emancipation Proclamation, Harriet Tubman was transformed into a "good reformer" while John Brown remains an "insane revolutionary." That General Tubman's experiences in fighting slavery had led her to agree to participate in the raid on Harper's Ferry is rarely mentioned by bourgeois historians.

Racism and anti-working class sentiments always emerge when violence is the issue. In the recent coal strike, the bourgeois press "sympathized" with the miners grievances, but described their violence of the mainly white miners in crude terms similar to the above. During the anti-Vietnam war movement, the bourgeois press "sympathized" with some of the grievances against the government, but when it came to violence on campus, the zoological references

usually reserved for participants in ghetto rebellions were applied even to Columbia University students. These same papers used a far more pleasant vocabulary to describe the dropping of jellied gasoline on Vietnamese villagers!

When pressed, of course, these racists will suddenly "remember" the violence of the slaveowner, or of the U.S. Air Force, but then they have a "defense": Using violence will make you "just like them." On the part of politically sophisticated people, this statement is pure hypocrisy. It is addressed always to the oppressed, never to the oppressor. As for naive people thoughtlessly repeating this statement—shed your dangerous innocence. Do not mouth "God-given" maxims that help only the boss. You probably don't believe it anyway. Do you believe that a woman who fights back against a rapist is "just like him"? There is not a shred of evidence for the proposition that violence against the ruling class makes us like them, unless you want to "prove" it by saying that people have been fighting back for thousands of years and we still have exploitation, "Nothing changes." By this



"logic," it would have made no difference if the Nazis had won World War II. By this logic, all those slaves escaping to the North on the Underground Rail Road must have run into just as many coming back South, saying "Don't bother, brother. Don't risk your life. It's just exploitation up there too, and it's colder. Everything is the same. Nothing changes."

Counter-revolutionaries have another way of putting precisely the same argument against mass revolutionary violence: "Does the end justify the means?" They have repeated this one so many times that it doesn't sound ridiculous—until one asks, "What else?" God? The bosses' questions are designed to obscure reality, not clarify it. The questions we workers must ask is does the means—in this case mass revolutionary violence—help us get to our desired end—smashing racism and achieving socialism? The verdict of history is an overwhelming "yes."

One reflection within the revolutionary movement of these bourgeois attacks is that mass revolutionary violence is necessary, but "regrettable." Even DuBois's splendid analysis of the Pottawatomie executions, and to a lesser extent of the raid on Harper's Ferry, is couched in these terms. To "regret" necessity is not to have one's emotions in line with one's thoughts. This discrepancy is inevitable. We have been trained on all levels by bourgeois society that "illegal" violence is bad, and as we learn to know better it is generally our conscious political thoughts that change first. Our emotions lag behind, still mired in the "humanism" that says the taking of any life is evil (except when done by the government). But to be effective revolutionaries, we must fight to resolve this contradiction. To quote from one of our songs, about a murderous fire in a coal mine caused by the bosses' greed for profit, we must learn to "rejoice when they die." Our only "regret" should be for our casualties, and it should deepen our hatred for the bosses that caused them. John Brown, despite his advocacy of violence against slavery, had not shed a humanistic outlook. He could not have, in the absence of a dialectical materialist outlook with which to replace it. One result was excessive concern for the safety of the hostages (e.g., George Washington's grand-

nephew) held at Harper's Ferry. This partly accounted for the band's failure to get away before the arrival of the Marines. We must learn from this error. The only good Nazi, or KKK member, or, most especially, member of the ruling class, is a dead one. A good rule of thumb is to worry about their health and safety as much as they worry about ours.

The accusation of insanity against John Brown (or Nat Turner, who was and is similarly accused) stands even more revealed as thorough-going racism when we compare it to the historian's treatment of other violent events of the period.

On August 21, 1863, a band of 300 Confederate troops under William Quantrell, a commissioned officer in the Confederate Army, entered Lawrence, Kansas—eight years before totally destroyed by Missouri border ruffians—and, without a shot being fired against them, killed 100 men and 50 boys, all civilians. On Oct. 2, 1864, Confederate soldiers defeated a Union attempt to capture strategically important salt mines at Saltville, Virginia. After the battle, "the Southerners murdered their one hundred Federal prisoners, most of whom were black, and some of whom were wounded. (Thomas, p. 276) Neither that fine gentleman, commander-in-chief and university president Robert E. Lee nor the Confederate government ever repudiated these or many similar events, nor disciplined anybody involved. Most historians that villify John Brown either don't mention these events or pass over them in a business-as-usual manner—like another napalmed village or another dead coal miner, or the murder of another ghetto child by another racist policeman.

Part of the accusation of insanity against John Brown involved his belief that it was the will of God to destroy slavery, and that to attack Harper's Ferry was therefore in accord with God's will. John Brown was a deeply religious man who saw his own actions and those of others within the context of Christianity. He prayed daily. He had memorized the Bible, and he frequently quoted it. He emphasized passages that suggested that "all men are equal in the eyes of God," and that "God is no respecter of persons," meaning that it was not a person's fame, fortune or skin color that was important, but his inner essence.

The charge itself is just another example of seizing on anything to attack

# JOHN BROWN

multi-racial unity and mass revolutionary violence, and can be quickly dismissed. Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, and many of the generals of the North and South frequently prayed, knew and quoted from the Bible, and almost invariably justified their actions as dictates of the almighty. Some believed it—it was a more religious age. Needless to say, none of these men are subjected to the charge of insanity, although each of them was further removed from objective reality than John Brown. Stonewall Jackson, one of the Confederacy's top generals, is widely noted to have lost at least one important battle because he halted his troops on Sunday to observe the sabbath in rest and prayer rather than march.

While dismissing the insanity charge, we should investigate the question of John Brown's religion.

**Our only regret should be for *our* casualties, and it should deepen our hatred for the bosses.**

What made John Brown and some other religious people (the Abolitionist movement was largely a Christian one) attack slavery, while most used religion to justify defending or ignoring slavery? Brown did not use religion as a self-serving escape from political and social obligations, like the "Jesus movements" of today who interpret the Bible to mean we cannot break the law or fight the boss. "Prayer to Brown was a prelude to action, not a release from further involvement . . . Lyman Epps, Sr., a black neighbor of his at North Elba, New York, relates that Brown told him that he did not like to think of Heaven as a place of rest—it 'must be a state of activity where all our powers are being continually developed for the better.'" (Quarles, p. 12)

The outlook of embracing struggle, of

looking for continued development, which John Brown certainly lived in this life as well as anticipated in heaven, is not a typically religious notion. It is more akin to dialectical materialism, which reveals that the only constant is change. Religion contradicts reality by looking for unity and serenity, where there is mainly division and turmoil. It is like a worker with three young children, bills to pay, a house to maintain, shopping to do, company coming and committed to go to a PL demonstration on Saturday looking forward during the week to a restful weekend.

**J**ohn Brown's religion, and that of the abolitionist movement, was part of the philosophy that justified attacking slavery. But Christianity was mainly used to justify slavery, and the slaves were taught Christianity to prevent them from rebelling. Religion has been used more recently to mislead the civil rights movement, most notably by the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. urging black and white demonstrators not to fight back against the violent attacks of Southern sheriffs. "If there is any blood flowing in the streets, let it be ours," said this agent of the ruling class. When Christianity wasn't sufficient to fool some segments of black workers, misleaders came along with the religion of Islam.

All religion is fundamentally counter-revolutionary and must be discarded if we are to make socialist revolution and build a classless society. Religion is anti-scientific and always gets in the way of analyzing objective reality. In practice, this prevents a thoroughgoing class approach. We have seen how some of the tactical errors of the Harper's Ferry raid flowed out of a sentimental concern for the slave-owning hostages. Such an attitude was certainly fostered by religion. The Chatham Constitution outlawed slavery on the grounds that it was a "barbaric" aberration in a free country. Because the analysis was based on religious and humanistic principles rather than on objective reality as revealed by dialectical materialism, the framers of this constitution saw only the **difference** between chattel slavery and capitalism, and not the **similarities** between the two systems and their **inter-relationships**. Their aim was therefore limited to the destruction of slavery, and they were unable to think beyond that process to the next stage of development.

It is not that John Brown did not have elements of a class outlook. He did. On being sentenced to death, he told the court:

Had I so interfered in behalf of the rich, the powerful, the intelligent, the so-called great, or in behalf of any of their friends—either father, mother, brother, sister, wife, or children, or any of that class—and suffered and sacrificed what I have in that interference, it would have been all right; and every man in this court would have deemed it an act worthy of reward rather than punishment. (Gold, p. 56)

Nor was Brown's indictment of the country, nor that of others in his guerrilla army and in the abolitionist movement, limited to the single evil of slavery. In the same interview with W.A. Phillips where he spoke of Spartacus, Brown thought society ought to be organized on a less selfish basis; for while material interest gained something by the deification of pure selfishness, men and women lost much by it. He said that all great reforms, like the Christian religion, were based on broad, generous, self-sacrificing principles. He condemned the sale of land as a chattel, and thought that there was an infinite number of wrongs to right before society would be what it should be; but that in our country slavery was the "sum of all villainies," and its abolition the first essential work. (Quoted in Ruchames, p. 220)



*Frederick Douglass*



*Harriet Tubman*

But without the science of dialectical materialism Brown could not make the leap from thinking society "ought to be organized on a less selfish basis" to knowing how to organize it that way. The "self-sacrificing principles" of Christianity revealed the hypocrisy and greed of capitalism, but could not reveal the inner workings of the system. The equalitarian ideal within their view of Christianity was good enough for Brown and others to set events in motion that ended in the abolition of slavery and thus completed "the first essential work." But if we are to perform the next essential work, the destruction of wage-slavery, we must discard religion and pick up the weapon of scientific socialism.

Should we therefore turn our back on people who believe in God? No—we should urge them to join INCAR and participate in the class struggle against racism. Within the struggle we who are communists must point out that the way to overcome the evils of capitalism, the rapidly approaching war and fascism, is not to determine the will of God but the will of the working class, and that the aspirations of the working class cannot be satisfied by admission to heaven after death, but only by socialist revolution here on earth. A religious revival swept the Confederate Army as it went



*And we go marching on...The fight against racism did not end with the Civil War. The U.S. ruling class today relies on racism for profit today as in the past, and we are building a multi-racial, militant movement to smash it.*

down to defeat—at the same time as the massacre of prisoners, as at Saltville, became more frequent (Thomas, p. 277)

In the final analysis, the symbol of religion in the era of monopoly capitalism is the burning cross of the KKK. To extinguish that cross requires that we fight against all forms of mysticism within ourselves, including religion, and learn to live our lives by the scientific guidelines of dialectical materialism.

Within the limits of being able to function in society, sanity is a class question. Lincoln was not insane for not adopting John Brown's plan of organizing slave insurrections, which would most likely have destroyed secession in one year instead of five. He was responding to the needs of a class that did not wish to face the revolutionary implications of a frontal assault on "property" relations and racism.

For the workers in a New York City garment sweatshop this July, taking a coffee break was the height of sanity. The boss's response: "You're crazy, furthermore, you're fired."

Lewis Sheridan Leary and John A.

Copeland, Jr. were two of the young black men who attacked the Arsenal. Leary was killed in the shootout with the Marines, and Copeland was captured and hanged. Henrietta Evans was Leary's sister and Copeland's aunt. She and her family assembled in Copeland's home in Oberlin, Ohio, on Dec. 16, 1859, while her nephew was being hanged in Charlottesville, Va. At the moment of execution she stated to visiting newsmen, "If it could be the means of destroying slavery, I would willingly give up all my men-folks." (Quarles, p. 6)

John Brown began a letter from jail to his wife and children on Oct. 31, 1859, and finished it on Nov. 3. He concluded this letter as follows: "P.S. Yesterday Nov. 2nd I was sentenced to be hanged on 2 Decem. next. Do not grieve on my account. I am still quite cheerful" (Entire letter is in Ruchames, p. 137).

Neither Henrietta Evans nor John Brown had a casual attitude about life. Quite the contrary. **These fighters against slavery were determined to have their lives mean something beyond a mere struggle for personal survival.**

Animals "work hard" for themselves and their children. Human beings, a higher form of life, can make their lives meaningful by learning how to work hard for their class. Fear of injury or death is only the apparent cause of people hanging back from participating in the class struggle. The very fellow worker who refuses to go to a demonstration against the KKK because "I might get hit over the head or shot by a cop" may well go to a party that same Saturday night and ride home in a car with a driver who is intoxicated. The more fundamental question is not how to avoid death but how to live. John Brown and his fellow guerrilla fighters, along with thousands of other opponents of slavery, had learned through study and, especially, through practice, how to live for the abolition of slavery. They were therefore prepared, if necessary, to die for the cause. Bourgeois ideology teaches that each person is the center of his own universe—that you are the most important thing to yourself, and that you must therefore guard your own existence and not foolishly give up your life for others (unless they are bosses). But the stubborn facts of life under the bourgeoisie teach us every day that we are not all-important, not the center of the universe—that we are in fact ordinary people like the rest of the workers. This contradiction between what they tell you and how they treat you tends to make people crazy. We can learn from John Brown how to resolve this contradiction in favor of sanity.

Our real importance lies not in our mere physical existence, but in the contribution we can make to the class struggle. Every day that we sell Challenge-Desafio to a fellow worker, or help a friend to join CAR or the Party, or raise the level of struggle against the boss, is important. These acts all help to "cure" the insanity of capitalism by revolution. They are "something to write home about." The revolutionary process goes on outside of us, involves a collective that is far more important than any one of us, and continues after each of our deaths. Therefore it is what we contribute to this process in our life that is important. Death really is a "P.S." like John Brown's.

Although John Brown was brought up in a home that harbored runaway slaves, he was not born asking if anybody else was hungry before he took his mother's breast. He had to struggle against selfishness, like all the rest of us. Until

age 37, he put the movement against slavery second but important, and the struggle to earn a living for himself and his family first. But quantitative acts against slavery gradually led to a qualitative change in his attitude, to fighting slavery first and putting earning a living second but important. This leap forward was made evident at a mass meeting at the Congregationalist Church in Hudson, Ohio in November, 1837. The meeting was a memorial tribute to Elijah P. Lovejoy, an abolitionist editor in Alton, Illinois, who had been killed by a pro-slavery mob a few days before after refusing to heed their warnings to leave town. According to the Reverend Edward Brown, a participant in the meeting and a cousin of John Brown, "Just before the close of the meeting, John Brown, who had sat silent in the back part of the room, rose, lifting up his right hand, saying, 'Here, before God, in the presence of these witnesses, from this time, I consecrate my life to the destruction of slavery!'" (quoted in Ruchames, p. 189) Concrete actions against slavery, including many smaller ones leading up to those in Kansas and at Harper's Ferry strengthened this dedication and made it a living reality.

The realization that participating in the class struggle by fighting for socialism is primary in our lives is a leap forward that is made evident by joining the Progressive Labor Party. Once we join, our Party club helps us to make our dedication a living reality by raising the level of our participation in the class struggle. Without this collective process, none of us are strong enough to overcome capitalism's siren song with its insane chorus of "Look out for yourself," any more than John Brown could have fought against slavery in isolation from the abolitionist movement and the fugitive slaves. But with this collective process building and guiding the class struggle the bosses' great weapon of selfishness is transformed into their great weakness, and the capitalist system, based on the insanity of individual ego, must succumb to the power of a united working class.

We must not wait too long. In the 1850's the slaveowners' offensive required an immediate abolitionist counter-offensive. Today, and in the 1980's, the bosses' offensive against the working class requires an immediate counter-offensive. Stepped-up racism, unemployment, and inflation, and the move toward fascism and war, must be

met with socialist revolution. This requires that many more people join the Progressive Labor Party, and begin to recruit others even as they do so. It requires that those who have dropped out rejoin, and that all of us rededicate ourselves to increasing our commitment. It requires that we help recruit thousands more to INCAR. It requires that we learn the lessons of the guerrilla fighters who set out to overthrow slavery, and the power of the federal government that protected it, at Harper's Ferry one hundred twenty years ago.

These rich lessons, many of which we have not had the space to go into, are summarized in the section headings of this article. They can be further condensed into one word—**Boldness**. Boldness means we rely on our fellow workers, enlightened by the Party's ideas and their own experience, to attack the

**We ordinary people—  
not some  
great men—  
will make  
our own history.**

enemy. Within the limits of our size and strength, PLP has always operated in this manner. We broke the bosses' ban against traveling to Cuba in 1963. In 1964 we broke that ban again, led hundreds in breaking the police ban on demonstrations in Harlem during the first ghetto rebellion of the '60's, and led the first mass demonstration demanding U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. We fought within the emerging student movement for the at first very unpopular idea of allying with the working class, and we led students to do so, in theory and in practice. In 1970 we published **Road to Revolution III**, discarding all nationalist concepts and boldly relying on the working class to directly embrace revolutionary communism. **Reform and Revolution** in 1975 sharpened the application of this concept to the class struggle, as did the Party's

participation in founding the International Committee Against Racism. PLP and INCAR boldly marched through South Boston on May Day 1975, beating back an attack by racists armed with baseball bats. Since then PLP and INCAR have led workers and students to physically attack Nazis and the KKK on dozens of occasions throughout the country, including inside Nazi Party Headquarters in Chicago's Marquette Park and in the Klan "heartland" of Tupelo, Mississippi. At Oxnard, California, we led over a thousand workers in attacking the Klan and on May Day 1979 we led 600 in marching through the supposed Nazi bastion of Marquette Park. Every one of these actions, along with countless others of a similar nature, relied on ordinary people to fight for change. We must now, by increasing the size and strength of the Party, raise the limits of this activity, especially by directly confronting the bosses at the point of production—by leading workers to the offensive around revolutionary communist ideas in the mines, the steel mills, the auto plants, the fields, the garment sweat shops. We must do this in the armed forces as well. We, and our fellow workers, soldiers, students are the John Browns, the Harriet Tubmans, the Kagis, the Learys and the Cope-lands of today. They brought about the most important change in U.S. history to date, the abolition of chattel slavery. We will abolish wage slavery. We dare rely on ourselves to change the world. We ordinary people—not some "great men"—will make our own history. The ruling class tried to stop John Brown and the guerrillas of Harper's Ferry with the bullet and the hangman's noose. They are trying to stop us with jailings and gun-wielding racists in blue uniforms and white sheets. But mass revolutionary violence grows. Multi-racial unity grows. INCAR and PLP grow. Perhaps under workers' power Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy, will be renamed John Brown City, and all those "Jefferson Davis Highways" and "Robert E. Lee Boulevards" will be renamed after rebelling slaves and abolitionist fighters. For it is not John Brown that was killed by violence, it was slavery. John Brown lives within us as we go marching on to socialist revolution and the final destruction of racism, to the building of communist society, where the workers of the world shall be the human race.

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