



Canadian Dimension, July-August 1992 v26 n5 p8(2)

Welcome the rebellions! (Los Angeles, California riots) *Grover Furr.*

Abstract: The Los Angeles, CA, riots have been portrayed by the US media as an outbreak of racial enmity by blacks against whites. In reality, the riots are a political rebellion analogous to the nationalist revolts of Eastern Europe.

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A public workers' strike in Germany. May 1, International Workers' Day. Hundreds of cheering workers march along carrying banners. One of them reads: "Congratulations LA!"

Throughout the world millions of workers recognize the LA rebellions as something that is good for them, too. Like the German workers we, too -- American students and working people -- should welcome and support the rebellions in Los Angeles and other major US cities.

They were touched off by the acquittal of the four racist LA cops whose brutal beating of Rodney King could not be denied because millions have seen it. In a verdict worthy of South Africa or Nazi Germany, the jury found the cops were only "doing their job." Ironically, the jury was right: the cops' job is to keep the most oppressed and exploited section of the black working class in their place by a constant reign of terror. The King verdict was just the last and most blatant outrage that released the floodgates of anger.

It is always inspiring when oppressed people rise up in fury. Rebellions such as this lift the cloak of propaganda and respectability that masks the naked horror of exploitation and murder, and let us see the rage and despair this oppression causes. It would have been terrible if, faced with the King verdict, there had been no rebellions. Like the intifada of the Palestinian workers against Israeli fascism, the 15-year uprisings in the South African ghettos against apartheid, and the Soviet workers' recent strikes and demonstrations against the brutal attack on their standard of living by the Yeltsin regime, the rebels of Los Angeles, Atlanta, Sacramento, and other black working-class ghettos deserve our unqualified support.

If the Caterpillar worker's, who recently had a sell-out contract rammed down their throats by the United Auto Workers, had instead used the militancy and willingness to break the law, they -- and we -- would be much better off. If college students are ever to roll back skyrocketing tuitions; if American workers are ever to begin to beat back the cuts in jobs, wages, and health benefits that have slashed our standard of living and are destroying our children's lives, we will have to show some of the militancy and defiance of the law that the black ghetto residents have shown.

Anti-cop, anti-government -- not anti-white

The media have abandoned any pretence at "objectivity" and have done their best to portray the rebellions as anti-white rampages or as "senseless violence," and to help "quiet things down." These are the same media that sympathetically portray nationalist revolts in Eastern Europe and fascist Afghani guerrillas, but never fail to depict strikes in the US in an anti-worker light.

As usual in crises, the media have once again shown that they follow the government party line, almost as though they were government propaganda agents. In fact, just a year ago, during the Gulf War, the media

were also feeding up US government propaganda. In times of crisis, the media show themselves for what they really are -- not independent seekers of the truth, but obedient servants to oppressive power. Another example: since April 24 there has been a sit-in at Brown University, led by a multi-racial student group, to demand more admission of black and low-income students. The media have ignored it totally.

The main aspect of the rebellions -- not "riots" -- has been fury at the cops, the visible repressive force in the cities, and at the politicians. It is a significant and hopeful sign that the revolt occurred in the US city that has had a black mayor for the longest time. For it was after the ghetto rebellions of the 1960s that the Democratic Party moved to put black politicians in charge of the major US cities to "keep them cool." Black workers are now seeing through that nationalist tactic.

What really terrifies the US ruling class is that white workers will take their cue from the ghetto rebels. If white workers and students were to cast aside racism and unite with black and Latin workers, the days of the Bush Administration, and in fact the whole system of exploitation, would be numbered.

Racism is the main ideology, the "false consciousness" that keeps US workers oppressed and exploited. It is the "divide and conquer" strategy, the main tactic of ruling classes since the Roman Empire. So the media push the elite's line, just as they did during the Gulf War a year ago, and portray the rebellion as anti-white, instead of anti-cop and anti-government.

Naturally, there have been some incidents of racism against whites, Koreans, and others. How could there not be? Since the 1670s racism has been deliberately created -- there was virtually none before that time -- in order to divide white and black workers so that both might be exploited freely by the elite.

What of the liberal experts? We should beware of those who claim to "understand the despair" of the "rioters" but focus on the relatively few, though deplorable, incidents of racism. Most of them would prefer no rebellions at all! What the rest of us need is better, more effective, more militant rebellions -- free of racism, directed against the seats of state power, the cops and the government. We are glad to see such rebellions in oppressive foreign lands; we should be even more ready to welcome them, and indeed to help them, in our own country.

Likewise, looting and arson show, not a criminal" mentality, but a short-sighted one, attacking the exploiters near at hand rather than the system itself. But really democratic, popular uprisings, such as the American, French, Russian and Chinese revolutions, never occur without such disruptions. Those who claim to want a popular uprising pure of any destruction really do not want them at all. As Friedrich Engels said, they "want an ocean without the rush of its mighty waters."

The ghetto rebellions of the '60s forced many gains in US society. Without them, we at MSC would have no E.O.F. program, thanks to which thousands of black, Latin, and also white working class students have gone to college who never would have. But because they did not result in a popular, anti-racist, working class movement independent of both political parties and dedicated to fundamental political change, the rebellions of the 1960s, like the anti-war movement, dissipated, and their gains have been eroded.

From Moscow to Peru to Los Angeles, working people are fighting back against their oppression. We should support this, because it is our fight. We can start by fighting racism -- the ideology that, above all others, divides white and black workers and students from each other, and guarantees that our struggles will fail.

Business Week on the LA Riots

Grover Furr's analysis of the LA riots is confirmed in an important commentary by Troy Segal in the May 18 issue of Business Week, an authoritative voice of US capital. Segal argues that those involved in the

riots were drawn from diverse cultural and racial groups including blacks, whites, hispanics and Asians, and the businesses pillaged were owned by a similar spectrum of ethnic groups. His conclusion is that the riots were essentially class based and reflect an ominous economic and social polarization in US society.

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Article A12505796



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