

STATES

ST NIGERIA

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Why Because He Has The
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The March that Failed

by Warren Hinckle

Harlem.
Saturday.

THE MIMEOGRAPH MACHINE slowly stopped turning, like the cord had been pulled out of the wall, and the young Negro who had been running off the sheets of blue paper leaned over to see what went wrong. He didn't hear the telephone ring beside him, and someone else had to cross the room and pick up the receiver and say "Progressive Labor Movement."

Those are bad words in New York. The Progressive Labor Movement is the most radical, ultra-militant group in Harlem where its leader, 32-year-old William Epton, left the Communist party because he felt it "too conservative." The PLM has a rag-bag ideology of Chinese-style Communism, African nationalism, black supremacy, and Marxist-Leninist theorizing. Its goals are vague, but its tactics are uncompromisingly tough.

This toughness was apparent on the Saturday following the days of bloody rioting in Harlem, when the PLM announced plans for a new mass demonstration which police were sure would touch off the rioting again.

The demonstration, a march down Lenox Avenue, was scheduled for 4 p.m. I arrived at PLM's headquarters at 336 Lenox Avenue shortly before 2 p.m. The mimeograph machine had been whirling off blue sheets which were snatched up by volunteers and rushed downstairs and out onto the crowded Harlem streets. These were broadsides urging the people to turn out for the march, despite a ban by the police and opposition from most of the other Negro groups in Harlem.

The PLM office on Lenox Avenue is in the heart of the most depressed slums in Harlem. It is a loft

up a narrow, broken flight of stairs in a decaying two-story building permeated with the smells of urine and stale cabbage. A full plate-glass window fronted the loft, but not much light came in because the window was plastered with crude inflammatory signs and a brutal drawing of a cop beating up a Negro. The glass had a bullet hole in it, a scar of the week past. I looked out the window and saw three cops on the roof directly across the street, staring in at me and at the window that carried to them the message of the Negroes' hate. Up and down Lenox Avenue, along the route of the march, cops with long clubs were standing at every corner and in the middle of each block.

The door to a small back room opened and the PLM leaders walked out, laughing, unconcerned with the tension that was building outside. The talk among them turned to Communism. As is true of all talk in the PLM, it was blunt and to the point. "This is not a black organization," one of the PLM leaders was saying. "It's black, all right, here in Harlem, but outside, in other cities, the membership is often largely young white kids, students, many of them from middle class families.

"That is what people don't understand. People in Harlem like us because we're tough. Because we're willing to fight and they're tired of talk. The papers say this business is Communist influenced, but most of our workers are so anti-white they're anti-Communist. They feel the Communist party is a white man's party. Negroes have never forgotten the Scottsboro case; they feel that the Communists have been using them for their red goals and not the Negroes' goals which are much more physical than ideological.

"Even when a Negro is a Communist — and I will include Negroes who are Communist officials — he is a Negro first and a Communist second. Political theory is one thing, but he can never forget the color of his skin. And he can never betray it."

The door crashed open and three white Catholic Workers came in. They had come to join the march. They were wearing sweat shirts, hand-cut Bermuda shorts and tennis shoes. They looked like kids going to a beach party. The Negroes nearly threw them down the stairs.

"Get out! Get out of here! No whites, no whites in the march!" a woman screamed at them.

"You'll start a riot! This is a black march! Get away and go back where you belong. We welcome your support, but not today," a PLM leader told the startled trio. Everyone in the room was yelling, screaming for them to leave. The Catholic Workers disappeared quickly down the stairs. They didn't understand the desperation of the new Negro militancy which is a fight to make life in the ghetto liveable before the ghetto explodes into terrible cycles of violence and death, and it is a black fight. "If we had white men in that march," a PLM leader said, "it would send Harlem up in flames. There is

mean feeling today for white people who come here and walk and then go back to their white homes again."

But it wasn't the white people, not even the massed forces of the white police, who stopped the march. It was the Negro leadership of Harlem — the "black establishment" — as the black radicals call them.

While the PLM people were talking, another meeting was going on further uptown in Harlem, on 125th Street. There, representatives of the major Negro groups, CORE, NAACP, other established civil rights organizations, Negro churchmen and Harlem businessmen, met to kill the march. They feared it would bring new violence to the streets and further weaken their faltering hold on the unhappy people of Harlem. They drafted a handbill urging Harlem people not to join in the march, and to stay inside the tenements. Sound trucks, supplied by the city, drove up and down Lenox Avenue and Negroes sat in the trucks' front seats and pleaded with everyone to stay home. "Let's get our community back to normal," the loudspeakers on top of the trucks blared. "Let's not have no more trouble."

But word of more than these preparations came back to the PLM. A Negro rushed into the crowded loft 30 minutes before the march time of 4 p.m.

"Goons!" he yelled. "They're gonna let black goons break up the march!"

The tiny loft exploded. Epton, the Harlem PLM leader, finally got silence and the informant continued. He said that opposition leaders had quietly agreed to let one of the splinter black nationalist groups in Harlem "break up the march."

"His goons will jump us, then the cops will move in and it'll be all over. That's the plan."

"Let's go anyway! We'll fight 'em!" someone yelled.

"No."

It was Conrad Lynn, the attorney for the PLM, who spoke. "We can't have blacks fighting blacks; it's the old shell game. They want to divide us, to show the world that Harlem is not united."

Epton spoke up. "We can't fight our black brothers," he said. Then he was silent; everybody knew what he meant. The word went out.

Epton, Lynn and some other PLM officials left the loft a few minutes later, to walk the half dozen blocks down Lenox Avenue to 116th Street where the march was to have formed, a short walk of protest which ended in arrest.

There was no big crowd walking with them. The word was out. The loft drained slowly of people, and I walked down the rickety stairs to the hot and dirty streets of Harlem.

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There is a gap of understanding between Jews and Arabs which must be bridged if we are to have peace . . .

ON THE NIGHT AFTER CHRISTMAS, 1963, an extraordinary sound pierced the silence of the Arab village of Taibeh, northeast of Tel Aviv in Israel. From the home of one of the village's most respected dignitaries came the loud and lively strains of a Hebrew melody "David, King of Israel . . . is alive and existing . . ." If an Arab strolling by could scarcely believe his ears, it was no less astonishing to most of the 80 Arab and Jewish guests crowded within the home. From the moment the towering young Arab school teacher, son of the host, burst into the Hebrew song, and his Arab friends hesitantly joined in, there was a feeling of warmth and good will indescribably moving to all those present who knew only too well the hatred, wounds and bitterness in the hearts of Arabs and Jews in the Holy Land.

For Nina De-Nur, who was responsible for this unique meeting, that unexpected song meant less than her fervid hope it might also be an omen for the future. It was the future she had talked about in Hebrew and Arabic earlier in the evening when she told the old story of one little boy in Holland, who, by keeping his finger in the dike, had prevented a disastrous flood. Perhaps from a small beginning the development of understanding and friendship among Jews and Arabs in Israel could lead to peace in the Middle East and prevent a world conflagration. She stood there, a woman in her forties, buxom and flamboyant, her face flushed with excitement, introducing people of good will to each other, with formal little Middle Eastern flourishes. The Jews knew her as a third-generation

"sabrah," daughter of the prominent surgeon, Dr. Joseph G. Asherman, and the wife of one of Israel's most famous authors, a survivor of Auschwitz who retained his concentration camp number, Ka-tzetnik 135633, as his pen-name and his pledge to make the world never forget.

The Arabs watched Mrs. De-Nur with reserve, shy about their first social contact with Jews, ears and spirits warily tuned for the faintest false note. Their wives, in Western dress, some holding babies in their arms, sat beside them, but how many worlds apart, one couldn't know. The presence of the women had involved many discussions and was conditioned on a decision to bar all bachelors (with the exception of the young poet, Rashid Hussein, a favored friend of the host's family). Other Arabs who had known Mrs. De-Nur over the past year, listened with respect because they had come to value the conviction that underlies her words: "If I say I have a right to this country because of the dialogue between God and Abraham, then I must accept Ishmael as my brother."

Until a year before, Mrs. De-Nur had never known a Palestinian Arab; until a few years ago, Abdal Aziz Zuabi, 38-year-old deputy mayor of Nazareth, had not known any Jews well, but just as Auschwitz in a sense helped to assure the foundation of the State of Israel, so also Auschwitz had helped to burn a belief into these two Israelis of the need for friendship between their two peoples. Mrs. De-Nur's way is womanly, impulsive, non-political, personal and her dream: an Israeli "peace corps" for Arab villages and establishment of a John F. Kennedy peace center for the Middle East on the Israel-Jordan border in Jerusalem. Zuabi's way is more organized and political, any conflict he may feel between loyalty to the State of Israel and love of his own people has been restrained and submerged in a drive to break down the walls of suspicion and ignorance that stand between Arabs and Jews. To further this end, he toured the United States recently to raise funds for a new school which opened

Arabs & Jews

by Judy Stone

