

In these times, when the fight to uphold one's humanity is a revolutionary act, the false difference between "personality" and "politics" can no longer be maintained. It is in this light that we must understand the life of Angela Davis, for, as she said, the struggle of a true revolutionary is *"to merge the personal with the political where they're no longer separate."* In the profoundest of ways, it is only when *"you don't see your life, your individual life, as being so important"* that it begins to become important, politically, for others in the common fight for freedom. *"I have given my life for the struggle,"* Angela declared, *"My life belongs to the struggle."* In order, then, to understand this life, we must understand that struggle.

It is a struggle that Angela Davis, raised in the deep South of Birmingham, Alabama, was born into 27 years ago. She grew up among a whole generation of Black people who had seen their men risk their lives overseas in a fight against foreign fascism only to return home and find that same mentality still directed against themselves. They returned to a South where racism was "God's own truth" and segregation "the American way of life." It was in this South that Angela, like so many other Blacks, grew into awareness. She saw the symbols of law and order represented by the likes of George Wallace and Bull Connor, the burning cross of the old South, the electric cattle prods of the new. Yet she also saw, among her generation, the first glimmerings of a renewed resistance, and she joined that resistance, picketing segregated facilities, canvassing in voter registration, participating in integrated study groups. These early years were years of young hopes, old, abiding fears. She lived on "Dynamite Hill," where Black families lived in constant fear of racist reprisals. *"Every night now,"* she wrote, *"I'll hear white crackers planting bombs around the house. We are supposed to be next anyway."* It was this same Birmingham of her youth that brutally returned to her in those nightmare days of 1963 when four Black children were killed in the bombing of a Birmingham church. Angela knew these four girls and their families and,

like others in Birmingham, she knew who their killers were. But of course no arrests were made. No wonder she could write to a friend up North several years later, "*Policemen are watching our house all the time. Perhaps I won't leave Birmingham alive.*"

When she was 15, Angela did leave Birmingham. She received a Quaker scholarship to a New York City high school. There, despite her obvious intelligence, she had to study harder than most of the students to compensate for the inferior, segregated education she had received in the South. But she made rapid progress and at the end of her senior year Angela was awarded a scholarship to Brandeis University, where she chose French literature as her major field.

In her junior year, she studied at the Sorbonne in Paris, where she met Algerian students who told of their country's struggle for liberation from French colonialism. And she watched the French police constantly stop, search and harrass the Algerian students or any "dark-complexioned person" suspected of being Algerian, because their nation wanted independence. In her final year at Brandeis, Angela began philosophical studies with Professor Herbert Marcuse and devoted herself to her studies, graduating magna cum laude with honors in French literature.

She changed to philosophy for her graduate work, continuing her studies on a German State Scholarship at Goethe University in Frankfurt, West Germany. There, Angela became active in German SDS, a socialist student group which organized demonstrations against the Vietnam War. She also began to formulate the topic for her doctoral thesis—Kant's philosophical concept of freedom, as it related to the Black liberation struggle. After two years of study, however, she decided to leave Germany. What had begun as an escape from racist America grew to seem to her an exile from the struggle of her Black brothers and sisters in America. She returned home to join the struggle.

She enrolled at the University of California at San Diego to complete her doctoral program under Professor Marcuse. While at UCSD, Angela became intensely involved in the Southern California Black community, organizing around community issues, unemployment, police brutality, and, on her own campus, fighting for a Third World people's college. At this time, she also saw that such activities do not go long unpunished in an oppressive, racist society. The murder of 18 year old Gregory Clark by the LA police signalled to her the fascist, police state tactics that would become commonplace in countering any genuine, social advance in the struggle for equality and freedom. Later that year, she was to see two more of her friends gunned down on the UCLA campus. These were days of personal peril as well as commitment. Joining the struggle was no mere "intellectual" commitment, for it meant putting one's life on the line. Soon thereafter, Angela joined the Communist Party and became an active member in the Che-Lumumba Club, an all-Black collective of the Communist Party in Los Angeles.

Some professors maintain the luxury of merely "entertaining," playing with ideas; others, who take their task more seriously, refuse to *profess* what they do not believe. Angela was one of the latter group; she stood by and was committed to her professed ideals. Therefore, after being appointed as a UCLA philosophy professor in the Fall of 1969, when she was fingered by an FBI undercover agent as a Communist, she replied to the University of California Board of Regents, "*Yes, I am a Communist. And I will not take the fifth amendment against self-incrimination, because my political beliefs do not incriminate me; they incriminate the Nixons, Agnews, and Reagans.*" These men, she insisted, are the real criminals of this society, capitalist yes-men who have stolen the wealth of the world from the people by exploitation and oppression.

Angela was aware of the fact that, as masses of people here and abroad are radically challenging this state of affairs, so

the oppressors would respond with ever higher levels of repression and go to any lengths to silence and, if necessary, murder any individual who spoke out and organized against their system. And yet she dared to speak out. This example of a Black woman proudly admitting to being a revolutionary, a Communist, and openly challenging capitalism gave inspiration and pride to those who had been too long silent. She was becoming a symbol of free speech and open resistance that Governor Reagan and his co-conspirators could no longer tolerate. And so began the conspiracy to silence her, the legal schemes, the lynch mob atmosphere, the open use of force. First, they attempted to fire her from UCLA because she was a Communist, but when the Courts ruled this move unconstitutional, they were forced to look for other ways.

Meanwhile, Angela continued to teach at UCLA. Her classes in recurring philosophical themes in Black literature were the most widely attended in the history of the school. She prepared her lectures scrupulously, gave freely of her time and knowledge, and at the class evaluation, was given "excellent" ratings by all but one of her several hundred students. She was invited to address the philosophy departments of Princeton, Yale, and Swarthmore during this time, and also turned down several offers to teach at prestigious Eastern schools because of the deep commitment she felt to her struggle in California.

In early 1970, Angela became active in the defense of the Soledad Brothers, three Black prisoners unjustly accused of killing a prison guard. In her speeches, she constantly pointed out the fact that 30% of the national prison population was Black, while Blacks were only 15% of the population at large. This, she said, was indicative of the inherent racism of the American judiciary system. She protested against the growing number of political activists, especially Black Panther Party members, killed and jailed under the guise of law and order. Wherever she appeared, she emphasized the rise of police



terror and repression and she continually explained that the loss of her job was small compared to the growing loss of Black and Brown lives.

In the course of the struggle around the Soledad Brothers' case, Angela became good friends with Jonathan Jackson, the younger brother of one of the Soledad defendants. Her own life was placed in constant jeopardy from a barrage of vigilante threats. Jonathan Jackson, as well as members of the Che-Lumumba Club, acted as security for Angela in order to prevent those threats from becoming reality.

Because of Angela's refusal to be silenced, because she continued to speak out against the growing repression of the state, because she organized people against the coming reign of police terror, Reagan once more tried to take away her job. In June, Angela was again fired by Reagan's Board of Regents. This time, the reason given was her speeches and active opposition to the genocidal policies of this government. Those people who had earlier accepted her being fired for Communist Party membership now began to have second thoughts. Could a person lose her livelihood only because she exercised her constitutional right to free speech? If this were the case, who might be next?

Reagan's firing of Angela came too late to stop the mass upsurge in her defense. Angela Davis had become a symbol of open and courageous resistance. She articulated a broad sentiment of defiance against oppression and the abridgement of civil and human rights. Her expulsion from the university only served to make those issues all the more clear. The Constitution, it seemed, was an expendable document to be bent to the wishes of those who rule us. Since taking Angela's job had not proven sufficient, Reagan now sought a new way to destroy her. He seized upon the August event at San Rafael courthouse as the perfect excuse. Using the most vague and unsubstantiated of charges, not of direct involvement but of "conspiracy," he is attempting to take

Angela's life.

Thus ensued what was perhaps the most vicious and intensive manhunt in the history of this country. A young Black woman without any prior record of arrest, not directly accused of the commission of a crime, became the third woman in history to be placed on the FBI "Ten Most Wanted" list. Placing Angela on this list, where she was described as being "armed and dangerous," was equivalent to giving any crazed racist the right to shoot her on sight. The manhunt was also used as a pretext to raid private homes and movement offices across the country in an attempt to intimidate and harrass all those who shared Angela's political views.

While held in the Women's House of Detention in New York City, fighting extradition to California where she had been charged with kidnap for ransom, murder, and conspiracy, Angela was placed in solitary confinement. She had been isolated on a "psychological ward," isolated from her fellow prisoners, placed under 24 hour surveillance and harrassment. In the tradition of all political prisoners, her captors had separated her from contact with others, for they fear, even here, her right of free speech, the power of her ideas. And while she was bound in solitary, outside, her accusers have continually attempted to try and convict her in the mass media. Richard Nixon congratulated J. Edgar Hoover over nationwide television upon her "capture," saying that her arrest would serve as an example to "all other terrorists." A lawsuit by the National Conference of Black Lawyers, mass demonstrations, thousands of letters and telegrams, achieved a victory by Judge Lasker's ruling to have Angela Davis released from solitary confinement.

And so we stand, once more, in Angela's words, "*at the crossroads on the path of liberation.*" Some would have us believe that Angela's political activities stem from a misguided or purely intellectual curiosity. But Angela's

involvement in the struggle, as we have seen, grew out of the deep roots cast in the bloodstained earth of her Southern childhood, her experience of alienation as a token Black in an all-white university, the small, everyday indignities of being a Black woman in racist America; they are the result of her constant and continual resistance to injustice and inequality; her search for solutions to our problems of racism, exploitation, repression; her refusal to be silenced in that search by force or intimidation.

Of what, then, is Angela Davis guilty? Of being the natural product of a society based upon racism, exploitation, and dehumanization? Of her struggle for a socialist society? Her accusers have locked her into their cells of silence for they fear what she professes, what she freely and courageously declares. But when they cannot silence her even here, when her words echo far beyond these closed and soundproofed walls, then they seek to take her life. The final solution—Death.

So, for her, the life—the struggle, are one. Not merely in conjecture, in abstract theory, but in brutal fact. For her beliefs, for her life, Angela Davis stands accused. Her life is at stake. And yet she is innocent. Innocent of the charges of murder and kidnap. She stands guilty only of loving humanity and fighting with her life for the freedom of all of us.

FREE ANGELA! FREE OUR SISTER!
FREE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS!

To join in the fight to Free Angela, call or write to:

NATIONAL UNITED COMMITTEE TO FREE ANGELA DAVIS
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