

From the Other Side of the Tracks

Julius Lester

1969

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Brother Fred Ahmed Evans was scheduled to die in the electric chair of the Ohio State Prison on Sept. 23, but was granted a temporary reprieve at the last moment. The date of his execution has not been set.

If he dies, he will become the first black man to be tried, convicted and executed by the state for his role in the black liberation struggle. The state has no right to execute him, but it has the power.

It was the power which Brother Ahmed challenged; it is that power which we must challenge now to save the life of Brother Ahmed. Unfortunately, too many radicals are completely unaware of the impending execution of Brother Ahmed and the events which led the state to sentence him to the electric chair.

On July 23, 1968, the blacks of the Glenville section of Cleveland responded to months of harassment from the police by taking up arms in self-defense. The battle ended 15 minutes after it began and the black community emerged as the unquestioned military victors. Police suffered 17 casualties, including three dead. The black community—seven casualties with one dead.

Arrested and charged with the murder of the three policemen was Brother Ahmed. The police, of course, have no idea who killed the three policemen, but it was clear that they had to arrest and prosecute someone. Brother Ahmed was chosen.

He has never denied his participation in the “Battle of Cleveland.” Instead, he showed rare revolutionary courage in the statement he made to the court after he was sentenced to the electric chair. It was a courage that is rare, because it has become a cliché these days for organizations to “cry the blues” when members are arrested, to cry that they are being persecuted.

Yet, anyone who involves himself in the revolutionary struggle must recognize that, of course, the state is going to beat, jail, and kill those who are opposing it.

That is natural as water being wet and it is naive to feign shock and indignation when you step in the water and get wet. This kind of reaction sets a poor example for others and the revolutionary’s every act has to show the way for everyone else.

Brother Ahmed stands as an important exemplary figure. He has faced his period of persecution with a quiet dignity that will give many of us courage in the difficult years to come. He has accepted the necessity for revolutionary violence. He has accepted the fact that his participation in revolutionary violence will, perhaps, mean his own death.

“I don’t think there is any doubt that the people of my race have every right in the world and every reason in the world to resist and reach out and become what they were created, men—not symbols, I mean, not anything, but whole, as I am now whole. I fully understand the ways of life as they are now and the truth of the matter is I have no regret. That is to say I have no malice towards anyone, white people or anyone else, just the reality of the matter that counts.” These are the words of a man who had just been sentenced to the electric chair.

One cannot cry for Brother Ahmed. One cannot pity him. He is a man. He is a revolutionary. His acts and his words are an inspiration to those of us who have not achieved the state of love and revolutionary grace that he has.

And this is all the more reason why each and every one of us should do everything we can to keep Brother Ahmed from being murdered by the state. Because Brother Ahmed is prepared to die is no reason why he should. Because Brother Ahmed would laugh at his executioners is no reason why any of us should not be fighting to see that he is not strapped into the electric chair.

Since the arrest of Brother Ahmed last summer, the police of Cleveland continue their war against the black community. Five blacks, including Brother Ahmed, were indicted for the gun battle. Brother Non-Du was sentenced to 100 years and no chance of parole. It is obvious that the other three defendants will receive similar sentences.

In April of this year, the brother of Ahmed, William "Bootsie" Evans, was found shot to death near the office of Ahmed's attorney. It was claimed that Ahmed's brother was killed during a hold-up attempt and Cleveland's police prosecutor ruled that the shooting was "justifiable homicide." Black nationalists in Cleveland believe he was murdered by the police as a warning to Ahmed's attorney and others.

A July 23rd Defense Committee has been organized in Cleveland. It needs money as well as support in getting out information to communities across the country. Its address is P.O. Box 2404, East Cleveland, Ohio 44112.

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