

# 25 years later, the heritage of Dr. Martin Luther King

by Marianna Wertz

The revival today of slander and gossip attacks on the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose birthday will be celebrated on Jan. 15, coincides, perhaps not by accident, with the upcoming 25th anniversary celebrations of the Voting Rights Act (passed Aug. 6, 1965) and the wave of demonstrations in support of civil rights for all Americans that led to passage of that historic legislation. In the climate of republican revolution now building in Eastern Europe, and in the face of growing economic hardship in this nation for minorities and a growing majority of working people, the memory of the American civil rights movement could easily spark a similar mass upsurge here—something much feared by the financial elite sitting on the tinderbox called the American economy.

To counter the slander of King, and to give support and guidance to that inevitable republican upsurge, the Schiller Institute, under the leadership of the American political leader Lyndon LaRouche and his West German wife Helga Zepp-LaRouche, plans a series of demonstrations and other activities in early 1990, prominent among which will be the publication of the writings of Amelia Platts Boynton Robinson, one of the most courageous leaders of America's civil rights movement. Mrs. Robinson is one of few Americans still active in political life, who was personally involved in the leadership of the civil rights movement from the 1930s to the 1960s, working directly with Dr. Martin Luther King.

Amelia Robinson is also today an active leader in the Schiller Institute. In 1984, together with former Manhattan Borough President Hulan Jack and dozens of American farmers and civil rights leaders—in what became known as the Ben Franklin Brigade—Mrs. Robinson traveled to West Germany, to help found the Schiller Institute, and to join in an historic trip to West Berlin. There, this delegation of far-

sighted Americans joined in a press conference, calling for the reunification of the two Germanys, and for America to play her rightful historic role as the "Temple of Liberty" and "Beacon of Hope," to help bring this about.

Mrs. Robinson first published her dramatic account of the struggle for civil rights in Alabama, *Bridge Across Jordan*, in 1979. Ten years ago, unemployment among blacks was 13%, twice the national average, and a staggering 41.1% for black teenagers. Justice for black Americans, as she amply documented, was only just beginning, a result of the decades of struggle she recounts in *Bridge Across Jordan*. With her abiding faith, she concluded nevertheless, "Deep in our hearts we do believe not too far in the future, we shall overcome these injustices."

Today, well into her ninth decade of life, Mrs. Robinson is still fighting to overcome injustice. To deal with the even more demanding problems facing all Americans, and especially minorities, in the 1990s, and to counter the slander of King, Mrs. Robinson asked the Schiller Institute to publish an updated account of the struggle for civil rights in Selma, in which Dr. King is honestly portrayed for the courageous leadership which he gave there. Featured in that account will be the role that the Schiller Institute and the political movement associated with LaRouche are playing in furthering the goals of the civil rights movement and Dr. King today.

We publish here some excerpts from the upcoming, updated version of *Bridge Across Jordan*.

### On Dr. King's role in the civil rights movement

Having one's office across from a Southern jail for 30 years has quite an effect upon one who is in sympathy with the downtrodden. I could hear cries and pleas of prisoners,

and often the sound of straps which lashed their bare backs. Many times I closed the door to keep from hearing the weeping of grown men and women. Brutality and injustice we lived with every day. . . .

In spite of the atrocities the Negro had to endure, there were many, who had no hate or malice in their hearts. Fear and ignorance, but not hate. They wanted only to know where to turn for help, so when Dr. King came into the city, along with SNCC and others, to help unshackle those in bondage, he was welcomed by all blacks of Dallas County. Most of the prisoners and the people who had been to jail for some slight provocation made up their minds that this time they would go for something important—their rights which had been taken away. This explains why the marches and demonstrations were so successful.

On Jan. 2, 1965, and thereafter, when Dr. King came into the picture to work with us, ministers seemed to gain courage and began stepping over each other to get to the rostrum and before the audience. Cooperation improved all around, whereas previously too many were afraid of what the white citizens might think and the effect such activity might have on their credit. A few women, two of them teachers, had to bear the burden until the program mushroomed into a national movement.

### **On her role in the march across Edmund Pettus Bridge**

We knew that the crux of the trouble in Alabama lay in our governor, George Wallace, and we decided to march the 50 miles to the state capital and hand our grievances to him. The march would begin the next day, Sunday, March 7, 1965.

. . . The night before the march we gathered at the church and talked with the citizens, asking them to walk with us regardless of the cost, even if it means “your life.” I was afraid of being killed and I said to myself, “I cannot pay the supreme price, because I have given too much already.” But I also then thought, “Other mothers have given their lives for less in this struggle and I am determined to go through with it even if it does cost my life.” At that moment, a heavy burden fell from my mind and I was ready to suffer if need be.

. . . As we left the church we saw scores of officers of the city, and county and state troopers huddled in groups, smiling and looking somewhat human. . . . We marched from Brown’s Chapel AME Church in the black section toward town. The officers had us close ranks and walk faster and by larger groups. . . . As we approached the Edmund Pettus Bridge, which spans the Alabama River, we saw the sheriff, his posse, deputies, and men plucked out of the fields and stills to help “keep the niggers in their place.” As we crossed the bridge, I saw in front of us a solid wall of state troopers standing shoulder to shoulder.

. . . Each officer was equipped with cans of gas, guns, sticks, or cattle prods, as well as his regular paraphernalia.

Beyond them, men on horses sat at attention. . . . The troopers with their gas masks on and gas guns drawn then began to shoot gas on us and the troopers in front jumped off the trucks. Those standing at attention began to club us. The horses were brought on the scene and were more humane than the troopers; they stepped over the fallen victims.

As I stepped aside from the trooper’s club, I felt a blow on my arm that could have injured me permanently had it been on my head. Another blow by a trooper as I was gasping for breath knocked me to the ground and there I lay unconscious. Others told me that my attacker had called to another that he had the “damn leader”. . . . Some of the marchers said to the trooper, “She is dead,” and they were told to drag me to the side of the road.

. . . It was months before I recovered completely from the experience, but my spirit soared as I realized what it meant to sing and really feel, “Oh freedom, over me; and before I’ll be a slave, I’ll be buried in my grave, and go home to my Lord and be free.”

### **On Lyndon LaRouche**

I compare the trials and crosses through which my husband Samuel William Boynton and I (in a very minute way) went, to Lyndon LaRouche’s punishment for trying to save the world from collapse, which will surely happen if injustice and hate are not stamped out.

America’s top political officials, some top officials in other countries, satanic groups, and ignorant and naive citizens hold a contempt for Lyndon LaRouche. I have read many of his books, listened to his philosophies, made comparisons with supposed progress, particularly in this country, and I cannot understand the why of it at all.

Any teenager can see and is affected by the economy. Our country appears to be unconcerned to a remarkable degree about the increase in the use of drugs, suicides, immorality, and satanism, and is unable to cope with these situations. Many think there is nothing they can do. Still there are others who camp in the streets, stage sit-ins, walk-ins, ride-ins, you name it. All of these are done to call to the attention of the lawmakers, locally and nationally, that something is wrong with the system, and we will soon be at the point of “no return.”

. . . Are the lawmakers willing to let this country, with its democratic way of governing (which is the best if we follow the constitutional guidelines), turn from the principles for which it stands, and substitute a dictatorial system? Do we realize that some people are more endowed by God with wisdom and understanding than others? Mr. LaRouche is one. If Mr. LaRouche were given the chance to give of himself, with his wisdom in science technology and experience in economics, the country could be saved.

It is said that he is against the system. What sane person isn’t? To fight against drugs, food shortages which are causing starvation, lack of decent or no shelter, poor educational

system, discrimination, poor environmental conditions, and satanism—all of which are destroying this country and the moral values of its citizens; the struggle against these evils is what some governing bodies have against Mr. LaRouche, and fighting against drugs heads the list.

If we don't conquer these evils that are taking over the system, where men in high office are gambling and grabbing more power and money, then we are a lost country, because we have allowed the baby to be thrown out with the bath water—we are lost, and the world will be no better off.

## Six months too early, 20 years too late

by Nina Ogden

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### **And the Walls Came Tumbling Down: An Autobiography**

by Ralph Abernathy

Harper and Row, New York, 1989

640 pages, hardbound, \$25

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Three days after witnessing the assassination of his friend Martin Luther King, Jr., Rev. Ralph Abernathy asked a fundamental question in a sermon called "My Last Letter to Martin." "We were never separated until the other day, as you know," he said. "I was right behind you as I have always been. I don't know why they got you and left me. I can't help but talk about it."

Much has been said to condemn this book. But beyond the self-indulgent jealousy and vulgarity which have earned it infamy, it is a tragic story of defeat. Its loudest critics have played the biggest roles in the tragedy and must now reflect on the injunction: "Judge not lest ye be judged. For with . . . what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged."

The civil rights leaders who never adapted to the hopelessness of the last 20 years can be counted on the fingers of one hand. The best of the others were left behind by history. The worst of them, who are among the loudest critics of this book, became witting traitors.

The sad story of this book is Reverend Abernathy's unconscious adaption to that hopelessness and to his own weakness. He says, "When I took over from Martin, I did so after the civil rights movement had peaked and the SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference] had already begun to decline in influence. In Montgomery, [Alabama] we had begun in hope and had won a great victory. We had grown in strength and purpose at Birmingham and Selma

. . . but we had lost our fighting edge and the singleminded allegiance of our people."

Contrast this with his light-hearted description of an Advent season almost 40 years ago, in the days preceding the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott of 1955, when Dr. King and Dr. Abernathy were young ministers in their first major churches. "As soon as Martin and [his wife] Coretta moved to Montgomery we called on them and from the beginning he and I became inseparable. Though both of us had heavy responsibilities as pastors of important churches, we tried to meet for dinner every day to talk and make plans. . . . Because of Jim Crow [racial segregation policies], we could only have dinner at home. So, the four of us had dinner every night, with Coretta preparing the meal one evening, Juanita [Abernathy] the next—and usually conversations among the four of us would last beyond midnight.

"For me it was exciting because we were talking about large and important projects. . . . Martin had some general ideas about the means of attaining freedom, while I had the specific understanding of Montgomery that he lacked. . . . Both of us recognized the seeming impossibility of the task but we also understood that change was inevitable and imminent. . . .

"It all seemed so reasonable and yet so remote on those autumn nights when we sat over a bowl of soup or a plate of stew and outlined the future. Then as we put the final touches on our plans, God intervened with a plan of his own and a more urgent timetable."

It was the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott: The first major battle of the civil rights movement in the strategy of nonviolence unfolded. Dr. King said, "When we say, 'love your enemies' we do not mean to love them as a friend or intimate. We mean what the Greeks called *Agapē*—a disinterested love for all mankind. This love is our regulating ideal and the beloved community our ultimate goal. As we struggle here in Montgomery, we are cognizant that we have cosmic companionship and the universe bends towards justice." King stressed the words of Mohandas Gandhi, "Rivers of blood may have to flow before we gain our freedom, but it must be our blood."

This battle in Montgomery, the younger brother of the independence movements of the developing sector of the previous decade, set the moral standard for the decade to come. Shortly before his death, Dr. King examined those events in his essay "Pilgrimage to Non-Violence." "The past decade has been a most exciting one," he said. "In spite of the tensions and uncertainties of this period something profoundly meaningful is taking place. Old systems of exploitation and oppression are passing away, new systems of justice and equality are being born. In a real sense this is a great time to be alive. Therefore, I am not yet discouraged about the future. Granted that we face a world crisis which leaves us standing so often amid the surging murmur of life's restless sea. But every crisis has both its dangers and its