

EDITORIALS

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

America's national celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday offers all of us a valuable opportunity to reflect back on the achievements of the civil rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s. It also gives us an appropriate occasion to consider the challenges that remain and to ponder the serious obstacles that confront present-day proponents of equal rights and economic justice.

The King holiday, however, brings with it certain risks as well as substantial virtues. Two particular risks stand out. First, in celebrating the spirit and achievements of Martin Luther King, Jr., the man, it is crucial that we not forget or minimize the substance of his message. King's political agenda for changing and improving American society reached far beyond what the movement achieved during his own lifetime. Second, in commemorating King's courage and commitment, it is essential that we not focus too exclusively on the civil rights contributions of King alone, and thereby unjustly slight or ignore the vital roles played by thousands of others. Perhaps the greatest potential harm in an excessively individualistic celebration of King's birthday would be to give tens of thousands of younger Americans the idea that only through the presence of a charismatic symbolic leader can meaningful political change take place in America.

Nowadays some retrospectives of the 1960s portray King as a completely successful American reform leader whose dream was fulfilled by America's abolition of officially-sanctioned racial discrimination. In truth, such a portrayal of King is seriously inaccurate. In the last years of his life King thought of himself as something far more than a racial reformer, and his explicit political agenda reached far beyond such measures as the 1964 and 1965 Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts. They were years of deep and painful regret that America was unwilling to pursue economic justice at home or non-militaristic policies abroad,



plus personal anguish at his own inability to alter those self-destructive national priorities.

Too often today the Martin Luther King, Jr., whom most Americans see is only the remarkable orator of the 1963 March on Washington and the successful reform leader who desegregated public facilities and opened up the South's ballot boxes between 1955 and 1965. Rare indeed are the occasions when Americans are reminded of the later substance of King's life and message, a message that is challenging rather than reassuring, and profoundly discomforting for those who would prefer to make Martin Luther King, Jr. into a safely mythical American hero rather than struggle with the profound present-day implications of his unfulfilled political agenda.

— DAVID J. GARROW

A SCANDAL BY ANY NAME . . .

Many of my friends on the left are not enjoying Iranscam (or Iranagua, or Iranamok) as much as they could be. "It damages the very concept of government," says one DSA activist and friend. "The Democrats are in no shape to take advantage of it," says another.

But we do not get to choose the crisis of the moment, and when something like this comes along, we ought to make the most of it. We need a massive public education effort linking Iranscam to the larger scandal of Reaganism. And we need to focus on shifting public indignation away from the narrow question of what may or may not have been *illegal*, and onto the issue of what — in Iranscam and the policies it grew out of — was surely *immoral*.

First and most obviously, there couldn't be a better time for forums and teach-ins on Nicaragua and the intended beneficiaries of all this hanky-panky, the contras. The media and Congress will focus on the criminal aspects of the North/Secord contra-supply system. We ought to be talking up the criminal nature of the contras themselves, and just what it is about the Sandinistas' revolution that so enrages the far right around the world.

Then there's the issue of arms sales. So far all the indignation focuses, understandably, on the sale of weapons to people whose favorite chant is "Death to America." But what about the larger issue of the U.S. as a world-wide arms pusher? Morally, the sales of arms — especially to the military elites of hungry third world nations — has to rank somewhere below dealing crack to schoolchildren. Now's an ideal time to hammer away Socialist International president Willy Brandt's favorite theme: how the traffic in arms distorts the world economy and widens the gap between north and south.

This is also a good time (when isn't) to raise the larger issue of the militarization of our own economy. Why should the \$30 million or so hustled from Iran to arm the

continued on page 6