

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF SELMA'S 'BLOODY SUNDAY'

LaRouche Youth Join Amelia Boynton Robinson

by Bonnie James and Katherine Notley

On the 40th anniversary of the historic crossing of Edmund Pettus Bridge in the Selma-to-Montgomery march for voting rights, one of the movement's great heroines, Amelia Boynton Robinson, invited four representatives of the LaRouche Youth Movement to join her in Selma, Alabama to participate. The annual "Bridge Crossing Jubilee" to commemorate "Bloody Sunday" on March 7, 1965, when state troopers attacked the demonstrators attempting to march from Selma to the state capital in Montgomery, giving the date its infamous name, was hosted on March 3-6 by the National Voting Rights Museum in Selma, and culminated on Sunday, March 6, with a re-enactment of the bridge crossing.

In 1965, the Selma-to-Montgomery march was able to take place two weeks after the attack, attracting activists from all over the country, and international media attention from start to finish. Galvanized by the determination of people like Selma business owners Samuel W. Boynton and his wife Amelia Boynton to secure voter registration for every African-American in Dallas County, Alabama, and to win economic justice for especially the poor, rural sharecroppers, President Lyndon Johnson later that year signed the Voting Rights Act.

The LaRouche Youth described their participation in the Jubilee as seeking to encourage participants not to simply be nostalgic, but to elevate the crucial contributions that came to a turning point on that Sunday in 1965, and ask, at this time of crisis, "Where do we go from here?" and "How do we do it?"

The LYM delegation arrived in Selma on March 3, a day which was dedicated to the late Samuel William Boynton, by whose side Amelia Boynton fought for 30 years before the

1965 Voting Rights Act was signed. Mr. Boynton died on May 13, 1963, after suffering a series of strokes brought on by the relentless threats to his and his family's lives, to stop him from organizing, as Mrs. Robinson describes in the interview below, "for the ballot and the buck"—to secure voting rights and economic independence for the county's black citizens, many of them sharecroppers kept in a condition of virtual slavery. His last words to his wife Amelia, were to ensure that every African-American in Dallas County was registered to vote.

The LYM organizers joined Mrs. Robinson for a TV interview, in which she recounted her experiences in the voting rights fight, as well as describing how she met the LaRouche movement in New York City some 20 years later. Soon after, she became vice chairwoman of the newly founded Schiller Institute, launched in 1984 by Helga Zepp-LaRouche and her husband Lyndon LaRouche.

That evening, a tribute to Samuel W. Boynton was held at the historic Tabernacle Baptist Church, where the first voting rights meeting in Selma took place. The event, attended by 400 people, including elected officials and civil rights veterans, turned into an impromptu book-signing of Mrs. Robinson's autobiography, *Bridge Across Jordan*, recently re-released by the Schiller Institute. The speakers included Mrs. Robinson and her son, Bruce Carver Boynton, Dr. Joseph Lowery, Dr. F.D. Reese, and Dr. Charles Steele. Bruce Boynton recalled the courage of his parents in organizing the impoverished black population to register to vote, despite threats against their lives, in a South where the atmosphere of terror was maintained by lynchings.

The morning of March 4, the LaRouche Youth attended the "Invisible Giants Conference" at Selma High School,



Amelia Boynton Robinson, veteran leader of the civil rights movement, who was beaten unconscious on Bloody Sunday in Selma 40 years ago, was interviewed by reporters during the commemoration ceremonies in March 2005.

where California Democrat Rep. Maxine Waters spoke. Waters said that many members of Congress would make the pilgrimage to Selma to march and sing, and be seen marching and singing . . . and then they would go back to Washington and vote up the Bush Administration's austerity budget. She challenged the students to organize a rally aimed at making sure that members of Congress participating in the Selma commemoration take up the fight against the Bush Administration.

Among the events later that day, the National Voting Rights Museum in Selma, which sponsored the Jubilee events and hosted Mrs. Robinson's trip, held a reception in honor of Amelia and Samuel W. Boynton. Mrs. Robinson's speech was warmly received. After she spoke, the LYM organizers engaged in discussion with her and others about the speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King. LYM leader Michelle Lerner noted that, in reading Dr. King's speeches, it is possible to trace Dr. King's own growing understanding of the concept of economic justice.

Awards Dinner

The LaRouche Youth were the special guests of Amelia Robinson at a black-tie event, the "Freedom Flame Awards" in the evening on March 5, where the dignitaries included civil rights veterans JL Chestnut, C.T. Vivian, Harry Belafonte, Rev. Jesse Jackson, and Democratic Representatives Cynthia McKinney (Ga.) and Maxine Waters (Calif.). Among those also remembered were Classical singers Marian Anderson and Paul Robeson.

Harry Belafonte, who had served in World War II, gave the last speech of the evening. He described how, returning from overseas duty at the war's end, he noticed a shift in the mood of the population—a demoralization similar to Lyndon

LaRouche's description of life under Trumanism and the escape to suburbia. Belafonte himself was blacklisted during that period. Belafonte gave a spirited defense of his well-known calypso song "Day-O," which he explained was not a trivial pop song, but rather had been passed down from his mother and grandmother, a slave Spiritual from Jamaica and Cuba about surviving on the banana and sugar plantations. He also noted that his friend, former South African President Nelson Mandela, when he was imprisoned in solitary confinement, used this song to communicate with other inmates, because the guards did not realize that it was a metaphor.

Belafonte also talked about his role in the civil rights movement and the many times he marched with Dr. King. He said that many of the artists of his time, such as singer Tony Bennett, came to Selma after the outrage of March 7, to complete the Selma to Montgomery march, two weeks later. The artists back then were held to a higher standard than today's performers, he said, who have no respect for anything except making money.

There was a sense in the audience of the movement coming back to life, as especially Belafonte, Amelia Robinson, and Dr. Lowery, a founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), attempted to inspire people to rise above their smallness. Many speeches unfortunately reinforced that smallness by basking in nostalgia. Two of the LaRouche youths spoke to Belafonte, describing their work and asked for his help with Classical drama. Belafonte said that he had some of LaRouche's literature and was "working through it," and added that he had seen the movement in Berlin, Germany.

Crossing the Bridge to the Future

The culmination of the ceremonies took place on March 6 with the annual re-enactment of the march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. At the far side of the bridge is a small commemorative park; at the entrance of that park, the National Voting Rights Museum unveiled busts of two women who fought, unrecognized, for voting rights for three decades, before the events of 1965 exploded before the eyes of the world. Those two women were Amelia Boynton Robinson and the late Marie Foster.

The LYM pricked the conscience of marchers—including Congress members, who were there to be seen and perhaps get a "stamp of approval" for showing up, by carrying two polemical signs. One was crafted with the help of Rep. Maxine Waters, attacking the Bush Administration cuts in the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), block grants, and housing assistance for the poor: "Say 'no' to Bush's fascist budget cuts; save HUD, CDBG; Save Section 8." The second sign was, "LaRouche PAC: Lift every voice for economic justice. Join LaRouche to fight Social Security privatization." Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R) of Tennessee joined the marchers, but was greeted by the LYM with signs held high and singing "Ain't gonna let Bill Frist turn us around."