

## CHAPTER XVI

# THE NEGRO PEOPLE AND LABOR

AMONG the most important allies of the American working class are the Negro people. There can be no proletarian revolution unless it is accompanied by the liberation of the Negro people who, more than any other section of the population, are doubly oppressed and exploited by capitalism. The forces of reaction that ride the country today center some of their hardest blows at the Negro toilers. They seek to throttle the rising tide of Negro unrest by increasing Jim-Crow terrorism, by tightening up on segregation and intensifying discrimination in every form. We Communists have always had as one of our main jobs the fight against discrimination in the trade unions and elsewhere, against Jim-Crow lynching and brutality and against every kind of oppression by the white ruling class of this country. We have tried to the best of our ability to carry out the maxim laid down by Marx many decades ago, that labor with a white skin cannot free itself until labor with a black skin is free.

Even our enemies admit the pioneer character of our work for the Negro people, of our fight against Jim-Crow laws and against lynchings, and the organization of Negro sharecroppers and workers for better conditions, for relief and for economic and political equality. The Scottsboro case and the case of Angelo Herndon are proof of our sincere efforts to fight for Negro equality and Negro rights. We are proud that Angelo Herndon, one of the best and most heroic rep-

representatives of the American working class, is a member of our Party. This shows both the results of our work and the immeasurable help that the Negro people have been to us in contributing some of our most loyal and able leaders and rank-and-file members.

The Negro people today are faced with great dangers. They suffer the worst blows during the crisis. The percentage of unemployment is highest in their ranks. The whole Negro people is being pauperized and degraded. They must be won to a program of struggle that will win them equality in the trade unions, improve their miserable lot in the semi-feudal regions of the deep South, and secure for them economic, political and social equality.

The Negro people are in movement. The workers are trying to break down the walls of discrimination raised by the A. F. of L. bureaucracy who drew the color line in the unions. We will not be able to build a strong labor movement unless we win the right for the Negro workers to join any trade union and participate fully in its activities. If the unions keep out Negro workers, it will split the unity of the working class against the bosses. There can be no discrimination against Negro workers in any union if we are to fight successfully against reaction and exploitation. We must demand that they be given equal access to all jobs. Then we will find the Negro worker in the vanguard of the struggle for economic betterment and against fascism. It is important to push the present fight of Negro workers in the A. F. of L. to force the bureaucracy to admit them into all unions. This is one of the most important jobs that must be carried through by the American labor movement.

The Negro farmers and sharecroppers are also participating in this upswing of mass struggles. The recent strikes of sharecroppers, led by the Sharecroppers' Union, which was organ-

ized by Communists, and the success of the Tenant Farmers' Union, a Socialist-organized union of croppers and tenants, have opened up perspectives of large successes for this most exploited section of the Negro population. These struggles have shown that it is possible and necessary for Negro and white tenant farmers and sharecroppers to fight shoulder to shoulder against the white landlords. It is significant that these two fighting unions have carried out united front actions. Their economic struggles have already won some small concessions and are leading to further and greater united actions between Negro and white toilers in the South. These struggles are but the forerunners of far bigger ones for economic and political equality for the Negro people in the reactionary South.

The Negro people have no such thing as civil rights. In the South, they are treated by law and practice as inferior beings having no rights that the white ruling class must respect. The right of the Negro to sit on juries, to vote, to run for office, to equal relief, to equal opportunity for education, must be won, if we are to make progress toward the only true liberation and hope that lies in socialism. We must convince them that their path to freedom is through the militant struggle and through the mobilization of every form of mass pressure. If the Scottsboro boys were not the victims of a legal lynching, if Angelo Herndon is not now rotting on a Georgia chain-gang, it is because the Communists organized mass actions involving hundreds of thousands of Negro and white people, who through their protests and actions have so far saved these victims of the cruelty of the Southern ruling class.

It is evident to everyone that the Negro people are waiting for the message of organization and struggle. Their actions in behalf of Herndon and the Scottsboro boys, in defense

of the independence of Ethiopia, their bravery in a thousand picket lines and demonstrations show that they have not forgotten the militant traditions of Nat Turner, and the many other Negro heroes who fought and died for their people. Their fight for equality and justice is supported by the advanced sections of the working class.

At the present time while this is being written the greatest expression of this developing movement among the Negro people is the historic National Negro Congress which meets on the anniversary of Frederick Douglass in Chicago on February 14, 1936. This represents the broadest united front of individuals and organizations, working out a common program and beginning a collective effort to win Negro rights.

A. Philip Randolph, the well-known Negro trade unionist, National President of the International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, put it very well when he called the National Negro Congress an expression of "the struggle of the Negro on all fronts, such as civil and political liberties, labor, social service, politics, fraternal and church interests". The National Sponsoring Committee for the Congress has proposed the following tentative program as a course of action for the Negro people:

"1. For the right of the Negroes to jobs at decent living wages and against discrimination in trade unions and elsewhere where Negroes are kept from getting work at equal wages and under equal labor conditions with other workers, for the organization of Negro workers with their white fellow workers into democratically controlled trade unions.

"2. For relief and social security for every needy Negro family, and for genuine social and unemployment insurance.

"3. For aid to the Negro farm population, to ease the burden

of debts and taxation, for the right of poor farmers, tenants and sharecroppers to organize and bargain collectively.

"4. For fight against mob-violence, lynching and police brutality; for the right to vote, serve on juries and enjoy complete civil liberties.

"5. For complete equality for Negro women; for the right of Negro youth to equal opportunity.

"6. To oppose war and fascism, the attempted subjugation of Negro people in Ethiopia, the oppression of colonial nations throughout the world; for the independence of Ethiopia."

We Communists fully endorse this program for the Negro people and will do our utmost to make it a success that will lead to important victories for the Negro people.

Some people seem to think because we do not insist that the issue of self-determination be adopted by the Negro Congress, that therefore our Party is abandoning this demand. Nothing is further from the truth. The complete liberation of the Negro people in the Black Belt will only be accomplished by the revolutionary overthrow of the white landlords and capitalists. The oppressed Negro nation must be liberated from the semi-feudal agricultural relations in the South which are the basis of lynching, segregation and double exploitation. The real test as to whether the Negro people will have real freedom lies in their right to self-determination. They must be allowed to choose freely what their relationship will be to the rest of the United States. It is only if they are given this choice that they will be truly free. We are confident that the Negro people will of their own free choice decide to join the United Soviet States of America. But our program demands that they be given this choice, that they should not be denied the right of self-determination in the name of a mythical oneness which subjects them to Jim-Crow terror.

We must protest against slanderous interpretations of the principle of self-determination which tell the Negro people that we wish to segregate them. This is a nonsensical distortion of our position. It would be applying the spirit of segregation if we deny to the Negro people the right of free choice, to present them with an established set-up in which they had no part, and force it upon them. The way to break down segregation and all the evils that it stands for is to guarantee to the Negro people complete equality—economic, political, social, and that means giving them the right of self-determination. This is a basic point of the bourgeois democratic revolution, which has never yet extended to the Negro people. Our position on this question has been molded not only by Communist theory but by the experiences of the Russian Revolution. The Soviet Government immediately granted the right of self-determination to all of the oppressed nationalities of the old Czarist empire. In no case did the Soviet Union attempt to coerce any people. As a result the Soviet Union today is composed of more than 100 different nations and national minorities. They live in harmony, and mutually aid each others' development. The small nationalities are progressing equally with the whole country. This practical experience proves the correctness and necessity of our program for self-determination of nationalities; it indicates what success will be achieved here.

We will always continue to fight for this fundamental right of the Negro people. But at this stage of development it is clear that the Negro masses are not yet ready to carry through those struggles which would make possible the right of self-determination in the Black Belt. They are ready to fight against segregation, against Jim-Crow practices and on other economic and political issues. We will not merely wait until the Negro toilers are ready for the revolution. We will

join with them now to strengthen their position economically and politically, to cement the bonds between the white and Negro toilers, and in this way clear the path for the struggle which will make possible the realization of the right to self-determination.