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# RESOLUTION OF THE MINORITY ON THE NEGRO QUESTION

by J. R. Johnson

The history of the Negro question and the American revolutionary movement in general, and the Trotskyist movement in particular, makes it imperative at this stage to outline in however brief a form the rôle of the Negroes in the political development of American society.

In 1776 the masses of the Negroes played no initiatory rôle and the revolution would have taken the general course it did if not one single Negro lived in the United States. However, as soon as the actual revolutionary struggle began, the Negroes compelled the revolutionary bourgeoisie to include the rights of Negroes among the rights of man. The Negroes themselves played a powerful part in the military struggle of the revolution.

Between 1800 and 1830 the Negroes, disappointed in the results of the revolution, staged a continuous series of revolts. By 1831 the petty-bourgeois democracy of the United States entered upon a period of widespread egalitarian and humanitarian agitation. Disappointed by their failures between 1800 and 1830, the Negro slaves in the South, aided by free Negroes in the North, sought their freedom by mass flight. Owing to this spontaneous action, the petty-bourgeois movement for the rights of the common man was soon dominated by the struggle for the abolition of slavery. The link between the Northern bourgeoisie and the Southern planters was far stronger by 1860 than the link between the colonial bourgeoisie and the British in 1776. The Northern bourgeoisie used all possible means to avoid the revolutionary clash. The most powerful subjective influence which forced the irrepressibility of the conflict upon the consciousness of the people was the agitation of the petty-bourgeoisie, stimulated, maintained and intensified over the years by the refusal of the masses of slaves to accept their position. In the course of the Civil War the revolutionary actions of the masses of the Negroes in the South played a decisive rôle in the winning of the Northern victory.

In the agrarian movement of the '90s in the South the Negro farmers and semi-proletarians, independently organized to the extent of a million and a quarter in the National Colored Farmers Alliance, were a militant and powerful wing of the Populist movement. They supported the break with the Republican Party and the proposal for a third party with social as well as economic aims.

The importance of the Negroes as a revolutionary force has grown with the development of the American economy. Conversely, however, racial prejudice against the Negroes has also grown. Between 1830 and 1860 the Southern planters cultivated the theory of Negro inferiority to a degree far exceeding that of earlier slavery days, being driven to do this by the increasing divergences between the developing bourgeois democracy in the United States and the needs of the slave economy. To conquer the formidable threat of white and Negro unity, particularly that represented by Populism, the Southern plantocracy elevated race consciousness to the position of a principle. The whole country was injected with this idea. Thus, side by side with his increasing integration into production which becomes more and more a social process, the Negro becomes more than ever conscious of his exclusion from democratic privileges as a separate racial group in the community. *This dual movement is the key to the Marxist analysis of the Negro question in the U. S. A.*

At the same time in the country as a whole, as in the world at large, the rights of democracy become more and more a burning political question in view of the widespread attack of declining bourgeois society upon the principles of democracy in general. Simultaneously, the rise of the labor movement brings increasing consciousness of labor as a social force in the reorganization of society. Thus the Negro in his century and a half old struggle for democratic rights is increasingly confronted with the subjective consciousness of himself as an oppressed racial minority and the objective consciousness of labor as the great bulwark of democracy in the country at large.

It is in the light of this contradiction that we must trace the development among Negroes of the sense of nationalistic oppression and the modern efforts to free themselves from it.

#### Negro Nationalism: First Phase

The first reaction of the masses of the Negroes to the consolidation of the Solid South was the policy of Booker T. Washington, who counselled submission, industrial training, and the develop-

ment of Negro business. For the moment the Negroes in the South seemed to acquiesce. But in reality there grew up a furious but suppressed hatred of whites at the oppression and particularly at the racial humiliation to which Negroes were now being subjected. *The appreciation of this is fundamental to any understanding of the Negro question.*

During World War I the needs of Northern industry brought a million Negroes to the North. The suppressed resentment burst out and was organized and misled as Garveyism. Thus this essentially nationalistic explosion took place immediately the Negroes gained some integration into American society which allowed them free expression. Its first significance was the indication that it gave of the powerful force of social protest which smouldered in the hearts of Negroes. Its second is the fact that it took place precisely because the Negro had made economic and social progress.

#### The Negro and Organized Labor

The Negroes, due to their place as the most oppressed section of the labor force and their sense of national oppression, have always shown themselves on the whole exceptionally ready to join the forces of organized labor. The exclusion of Negroes from the AFL corresponded to a period of class collaboration practiced by the AFL leadership. When the IWW raised the banner of militant trade unionism among the most oppressed and exploited sections of the working population, Negro labor responded both as rank and file and as good organizers. Moreover, the IWW gave the Negroes the sense of a social program for the regeneration of society to which also the Negroes have always been responsive.

In 1932 the Negroes, like the rest of the labor movement, followed the New Deal program with its vast promises of a new order in America. But the Roosevelt government, while of necessity including the Negroes in its social service program for the unemployed, did nothing to implement its vague promises for the amelioration of the national oppression of Negroes in the country.

The CIO, being mainly an organization of the heavy industries, was compelled to organize the Negroes in great industries like steel and auto or face the impossibility of any organization at all. The Negro masses, despite some hesitation, responded magnificently and today they constitute powerful and progressive groups in many unions of the CIO.

This entry into the militant trade-union movement is undoubtedly of great significance not only for organized labor as a whole but for the Negro people. Yet the main struggle of the Negro masses in the United States has been and until the achievement of socialism will continue to be their struggle for their democratic rights as a nationally oppressed minority. Their entry into the ranks of organized labor does not lessen their sense of national oppression. On the contrary, it increases it and, in full accordance with their rôle in past American revolutionary crisis and the developing antagonisms of American society, this independent action of the Negro masses is already playing a rôle in relation to the American proletariat which constitutes one of the most important elements in the struggle for socialism.

#### Negro Nationalism: Second Phase

The tumultuous world situation, the loud-voiced shrieking of democracy by Anglo-American imperialism and the increasing demands of organized labor in America for greater and greater extension of its democratic rights, stimulated in the Negro people by the beginning of World War I a more than usually intensive desire to struggle for equality. Driven by the necessities of war, the Roosevelt government called upon the people of America to make the great sacrifices necessary for war in the name of democracy. At the same time, however, the special needs and practices of Southern society and industry as a whole, fortified by the now deeply-entrenched race prejudice of American society, prohibited any extension of democracy to the Negro people. Instead the persecution and discrimination of World War I have been intensified. The violent attacks and humiliations to which the Negro people have been subjected, in the Army in particular, have raised the indignation of the Negro masses to a high pitch.

The Negroes have responded with a nation-wide offensive. This offensive, which specially sought the right of entry into industry and also into Jim Crow unions, has expressed itself not only in mass movements but in a growing determination to struggle in

an individual and often terroristic manner against any manifestation of white superiority. The younger Negroes in particular now walk the streets in many towns determined to assert themselves. And in states like Virginia, the Carolinas, and Tennessee their attitude in street cars, their resentful submission to the old Jim Crow laws have created a degree of social tension unknown in those parts for two generations. This has been one of the main contributing causes to the series of racial outbreaks which have taken place in various parts of the country. The Attorney General of the United States has made the fantastic and unprecedented proposal to prohibit the Negroes from coming into Northern cities and has publicly expressed his fears of imminent race riots. He thus typifies the bankruptcy of the bourgeoisie in the face of the mass offensive of the Negroes.

The character and high stage of development of the nation-wide Negro offensive is best typified by its expression in Harlem. Harlem is the largest urban concentration of Negroes in the country. It is the area in which Negroes feel safest, freest and therefore most able to express their resentment. It is therefore precisely in Harlem that appear most powerfully the nationalistic sentiments of the Negro and the deepest social protests. In 1935 the Negroes in Harlem carried out a spontaneous demonstration against their general social conditions and particularly against the non-employment of Negroes in Harlem stores. The demonstration initiated a movement which has made substantial corrections of this injustice. In 1941 the Harlem community organized and carried to success a demonstration against the non-employment of bus drivers. Similar actions or attempts at action have taken place all over the country, except in the very deep South.

The Negroes have not been satisfied with local or merely regional demonstrations. Highly significant is the organized expression of their boiling resentment. As far back as 1946, Councilman Powell, realizing the need for giving some national organized expression to this wide-spread resentment, tried to summon a national conference of Negro leaders in New York. The movement did not materialize, but by 1941 the pressure of the Negro masses had forced the formation of an organization aimed at marching on Washington and making a forcible protest to the state against the national oppression of the Negroes.

The Negro petty bourgeois leaders found their organizations of the NAACP and the Urban League rejected by the Negro masses as unsuitable for their militant purposes. They trembled before this powerful urge of the Negro masses to confront the capitalist state with a comprehensive protest against their grievances. In the persons of Randolph and White they rushed to head the movement and immediately turned it over to the Roosevelt Government which transformed itself into leader of the Negro people under the guise of the FEPC. The Negro masses waited patiently upon the FEPC to solve their problems in industry and upon the capitalist state to improve the situation of Negroes in the Army. With the failure of the Roosevelt government and the FEPC to ameliorate their grievances, the masses of the Negro people arrived at the decision that they must take matters into their own hands. The most outstanding expression of this sentiment was the Harlem demonstration, participated in by many thousands of people, viewed sympathetically by the large majority of the people of Harlem and Negroes all over the United States. When examined in its totality it will be seen as one of the most significant manifestations of independent social protest among Negroes that has taken place since the Garvey movement. This is no question merely of bad housing, insufficient playgrounds or increasing poverty.

The Harlem demonstration, like the miners' strike, represents a significant stage in the development of the struggle against capitalist society. The miners' strike was an indication not only of the immediate grievances of the miners but of the stage of development reached by the American proletariat as a whole. The miners did what millions of Americans wanted to do. The Harlem action is equally an indication of the sentiments of the great majority of Negroes in this country. Both of these manifestations in their length and in their weaknesses are the two most important indications of the developing mass resentment against the existing, i.e. the capitalist, society that have resulted from the strain of the war.

At the same time the petty-bourgeois leaders among the Negroes have issued a political manifesto which, despite all its weaknesses, show that the Negro people as a whole have reached the stage of taking a critical attitude, as Negroes, to both the Democratic and Republican parties. Both the Negroes protesting in the streets and the timid and vacillating petty-bourgeois have now reached a stage in their evolution where, as always in their past history, their next historic step is toward unity with the revolutionary class, in our day, the American proletariat. *To the degree that the Negroes are more integrated into industry and unions their consciousness of ra-*

*cial oppression and their resentment against it become greater, not less. This dual development of the Negro people during the last few years poses exceptional problems and exceptional opportunities for the American proletariat and therefore for the revolutionary party.*

**The American Proletariat and the Negro Question Today**

The American proletariat is the class whose objective rôle at the present stage is to solve the fundamental problems of American society. Any theoretical analysis of the contemporary Negro problem must therefore begin with the developing relation of the Negro struggle to the general struggles of the proletariat as the leader of the oppressed classes in American society.

i. In the present stage of American capitalism the great danger threatening the masses of the people is Fascism. Events in Detroit and elsewhere have shown that the fascistic elements will exploit to the limit the Negro problem in the United States to confuse, disorganize and divide the great masses of the people and to disrupt their natural leader in the struggle against Fascism, the organized force of labor.

ii. The American bourgeoisie, whether Democratic or Republican, is perfectly aware of the permanent nature of the agricultural crisis and has already shown its determination to bribe the farmers to support it against organized labor. However, the problems of the poor farmers, the tenant farmers, the sharecroppers and the agricultural proletariat are insoluble in capitalist society. The solution of the agrarian problem in the United States rests with the proletariat and any solution involves automatically the general social situation of millions of Negroes in the Southern states.

iii. The South presents the gravest problem of democracy in the United States. Economic remains of slavery, a large landless peasantry, the development of large-scale and, especially, the extractive industries, the transference of textile industry from the North, a developing labor movement—all these are permeated with a caste system comparable to nothing else in the modern world. Holding together these diverse and contradictory elements is a political superstructure with the external forms of bourgeois democracy. This extraordinary conglomeration of explosive forces is situated not as in India, thousands of miles away from the metropolis, but in the very heart of the most advanced political bourgeois democracy in the world.

Armed with Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution, which we must apply at home as well as abroad, the Bolshevik party must be able to foresee the telescoping of the industrial, agricultural and social revolution in the South. These contradictions are developing at a time when Fascism, the enemy of democracy and the most outspoken of all proponents of racial domination, is experiencing signal defeats administered at the cost of great sacrifices to the American people. The gross hypocrisy involved has made deep penetration into the minds of Negroes in the South. Familiarity with that situation and the comparative acceptance by the masses, particularly the Negro masses, in the past, should not dull our comprehension of the potential dynamite which the situation represents.

It is possible that before the general economic and political forces in the South have reached the point of explosion, the Negro masses may by independent mass actions pose all questions purely in terms of equality of Negro rights. Whatever the pace of the general development or the forms that it may take, we must expect that in the course of the next period, the period of the social crisis in America, the American proletariat as a whole will be faced with this problem.

iv. Even today, in the day-to-day struggles for democratic rights, the Southern landlords and industrialists have proved themselves the unyielding enemies, not only of the working class but of the democratic rights of the whole American people. Large sections of American society, particularly organized labor and the great numbers of Negroes in the North are now fully aware of this and are aware also that the basis of Southern political power is the economic and social degradation of the Negroes in the South.

From the above four points, certain conclusions of extreme importance to the American proletariat can be drawn. In America as in every other country, the basic struggle is between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie for the control of the economic sources of social and political power. But in every country this struggle assumes special historical forms. It is the task of the revolutionary party first of all to clarify itself in order to be able to clarify the proletariat on the crucial rôle of the Negro problem in the defense of its own position and the socialist reconstruction of American society.

### The Negro Question as a National Question

The 14 million Negroes of the United States are subjected to every conceivable variety of economic oppression and social and political discrimination. These tortures are to a large degree sanctified by law and practiced without shame by all the organs of government. The Negroes, however, are and have been for many centuries in every sense of the word, Americans. They are not separated from their oppressors by differences of culture, difference of religion, difference of language, as the inhabitants of India or Africa. They are not even regionally separated from the rest of the community as national groups in Russia, Spain or Yugoslavia.

The Negroes are for the most part proletarian or semi-proletarian, and therefore the struggle of the Negroes is fundamentally a class question.

The Negroes do not constitute a nation, but, owing to their special situation, their segregation; economic, social and political oppression; the difference in color which singles them out so easily from the rest of the community, their problem becomes the problem of a national minority. The Negro question is a part of the national and not of the "national" question. This national minority is most easily distinguishable from the rest of the community by its racial characteristics. Thus the Negro question is a question of race and not of "race."

The contrast between their situation and the privileges enjoyed by those around them have always made the Negroes that section of American society most receptive to revolutionary ideas and radical solution of social problems. The white working class struggles against the objective rule of capital and for some subjective goal, which even on the very eve of revolution, is impossible to visualize fully in concrete and positive terms. The Negroes, on the other hand, struggle and will continue to struggle objectively against capital, but in contrast to the white workers, for the very concrete objective democratic rights that they see around them.

*But the whole history of the United States and the rôle of the Negroes in American economy and society are a constant proof and reminder of the fact that it is absolutely impossible for the Negroes to gain equality under American capitalism.*

Such is the development of American capitalist society and the rôle of Negroes in it that the Negroes' struggle for democratic rights brings the Negroes almost immediately face to face with capital and the state. *The Marxist support of the Negro struggle for democratic rights is not a concession that Marxists make to the Negroes. In the United States today this struggle is a direct part of the struggle for socialism.*

### National Struggle and the Struggle for Socialism

All serious problems arising from the Negro question revolve around the relationship of the independent mass actions of the Negroes for democratic rights to the working class struggle for socialism.

In the 2nd Congress of the Communist International, Lenin's theses singled out as examples of the national and colonial question the Irish question and the question of the Negroes in America. This Leninist approach was based upon close study of the economic situation of the Negroes in the United States and the Irish Rebellion in 1916. The whole historical development of the Negro struggle in the United States and its relations to the social struggles of the revolutionary classes show that the Leninist analysis of the Negro question as part of the national question is the correct method with which to approach this problem. It is necessary, therefore, to have a precise and clear conception of the application of this method. The most concentrated example of it is Lenin's treatment of the Irish Rebellion during World War I.

Lenin wishes to illustrate the specifically nationalist struggle of the Irish Rebellion in its relation to the socialist struggle of the British proletariat against British imperialism. He uses the example of the Russian Revolution in 1905 which took place exclusively within the national boundaries of Russia. He uses also, not the struggles of the nationally oppressed minorities, but the struggles of the petty-bourgeoisie, the peasants and other non-proletarian, non-class groups, in relation to the struggle of the Russian proletariat. We have therefore a very concrete illustration of the applicability of the method to environments and classes superficially diverse but organically similar.

(a) "The Russian Revolution of 1905 was a bourgeois-democratic revolution. It consisted of a series of battles in which all the discontented classes, groups and elements of the population participated. Among these were masses imbued with the crudest prejudices, with the vaguest and most fantastic aims of

struggle; there were small groups which accepted Japanese money, there were speculators and adventurers, etc. Objectively, the mass movement broke the back of tsarism and paved the way for democracy; for that reason the class conscious workers led it."

Within the United States the socialist revolution will ultimately consist of a series of battles in which the discontented classes, groups and elements of all types will participate in their own way and form a contributory force to the great culminating struggles which will be led by the proletariat.

(b) "The socialist revolution in Europe cannot be anything else than an outburst of mass struggle on the part of all and sundry of the oppressed and discontented elements. Sections of the petty bourgeoisie and of the backward workers will inevitably participate in it—without such participation, mass struggle is impossible, without it no revolution is possible—and just as inevitably will they bring into the movement their prejudices, their reactionary fantasies, their weaknesses and errors. But objectively they will attack capital, and the class conscious vanguard of the revolution, the advanced proletariat expressing this objective truth of a heterogeneous and discordant, motley and outwardly incohesive mass struggle will be able to unite and direct it, to capture power, to seize the banks, to expropriate the trusts, hated by all, though for different reasons...."

In the United States social revolution is impossible without the independent mass struggles of the Negroes, whatever the prejudices, the reactionary fantasies, the weaknesses and errors of these struggles. The proletarian composition of the Negro people and the developing labor movement offer great opportunities for a continuous reduction of the prejudices of the Negro people.

(c) "The struggle of the oppressed nations IN EUROPE, a struggle capable of going to the lengths of insurrection and street fighting, of breaking down the iron discipline in the army and martial law, will 'sharpen the revolutionary crisis in Europe' infinitely more than a much more developed rebellion in a remote colony. A blow delivered against the English imperialist bourgeoisie by a rebellion in Ireland is a hundred times more significant politically than a blow of equal weight delivered in Asia or Africa."

Blows delivered by an oppressed national minority so entangled in the social structure of the United States as the Negroes, possess a political significance of greater importance in this country than a blow delivered by any other section of the population except the organized proletariat itself.

(d) "The dialectics of history is such that small nations, powerless as an INDEPENDENT factor in the struggle against imperialism, play a part as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli, which help the REAL power against imperialism to come on the scene, namely, the SOCIALIST PROLETARIAT."

Within the United States, the Negroes are undoubtedly powerless to achieve their complete or even substantial emancipation as an independent factor in the struggle against American capital. But such is the historic rôle of the Negroes in the United States; such today is their proletarian composition and such is their interrelation with the American proletariat itself that their independent struggles form perhaps the most powerful stimulus in American society to the recognition by the organized proletariat of its real responsibilities to the national development as a whole and of its power against American imperialism.

The ideal situation is that the struggle of the minority group should be organized and led by the proletariat. But to make this a precondition of supporting the struggle of non-proletarian, semi-proletarian or non-class conscious groups is a repudiation of all Marxist theory and practice. *Thus it is utterly false to draw the conclusion that the independent struggle of the Negro masses for their democratic rights is to be looked upon merely as a preliminary stage to a recognition by the Negroes that the real struggle is the struggle for socialism.*

### The Marxist Movement and the Negro Question

The Marxist movement in the United States with little exception has failed to grasp the fact that the Negro question is part of the national question. This is not surprising because it has shown little interest in the Negroes except under the direct and insistent stimulus of the internationalist movement.

The socialist movement under Debs considered any special appeal to the Negro people as contrary to the spirit of socialism. Randolph appealed to Negroes to become socialists but proved quite incapable of dealing with the powerful nationalistic current of Garveyism that was prevalent at the time. The Communist Party up to 1938 was unable to understand either the significance of the

Negro question in the U. S. or the method of work required. It was only through the drastic intervention of the CI, whatever its purpose, that the Communist Party in 1929 began a serious approach to the Negro question. Despite many exaggerations, the turn to the Negro question was on the whole sound and effective, but it was seriously handicapped by the adoption of a policy of advocating self-determination for the Black Belt. In 1935 with the new turn of the CI toward social patriotism, the work of the Communist Party among Negroes began a process of rapid deterioration. The Trotskyist movement from its foundation in 1928 to 1938 took even less interest in the Negro question than the Communist Party, and once more it was only under the insistence of the international organization that the American Marxist movement took action on the Negro question.

**Trotsky and the Negro Question**

Trotsky began to take a special interest in the Negro question as soon as he applied himself to the problems of the United States from the point of view of building a Trotskyite revolutionary organization. From that time he never ceased to point out the importance of this question. Though scattered and to some degree incidental, his conversations and discussions are organized by a consistent approach and, altogether, constitute a remarkable example of Marxist penetration into the correct basis for any Negro work in the U. S. In any resolution on the Negro question at this stage, it is necessary to summarize briefly his ideas.

On the question of self-determination, Trotsky believed that the differences between the West Indies, Catalonia, Poland, etc., and the situation of the Negroes in the United States were not decisive. In other words, the Negro question was a part of the national question. He firmly opposed those in the Fourth International who rejected outright the principle of self-determination for Negroes in the U. S. In a discussion in 1939 he made it clear that he did not propose that the party advocate the slogan of self-determination for Negroes in the U. S. but he insisted that the party should declare its obligation to struggle with the Negroes for self-determination, should they at any time demand it. Trotsky insisted that if the Negroes should decide, under the stress of unforeseen historical events (e.g., a period of fascism in the U. S.), to struggle for self-determination, the struggle would under all circumstances be progressive, for the simple reason that it could not possibly be attained except through war against American capitalism.

Trotsky's views on the Negro question are most clearly, though not completely, contained in a discussion in 1939. (*Internal Bulletin*, SWP, No. 3, June, 1939.) In his approach to Negro work, Trotsky based his views on the sentiments of the genuine Negro masses in the U. S. and the fact that their oppression as Negroes was so strong that they feel it at every moment.

Of those suffering from oppression and discrimination, the Negroes were the most oppressed and the most discriminated against and therefore formed part of the most dynamic milieu of the working class. The party should say to the conscious elements among the Negroes that they have been convoked by the historical development to take their place in the very vanguard of the working class struggle for socialism. Trotsky considered that if the party was unable to find a road to this stratum of society, in which he gave the Negroes a very important place, then it would be a confession of revolutionary futility.

While conscious of the rôle of the Negro in the vanguard, however, Trotsky placed a heavy emphasis always on the consciousness of Negroes as being a nationally-oppressed minority. On every possible occasion he emphasized the political conclusions that were to be drawn from the special situation of the Negroes under American capitalism for 300 years. He warned repeatedly of the probability of violent racial outbreaks among the Negroes in which they would seek to revenge themselves for all the oppression and humiliations which they had suffered.

Trotsky took the greatest interest in the Garvey movement as the expression of the genuine sentiments of the Negro masses who were always his main concern. He constantly recommended to the party the study of the Negroes in the Civil War as a historical necessity for understanding the Negro question today. He recommended the study of Garvey's movement as an indispensable indication to the party of the road to the Negro masses. He welcomed the idea of an independent mass organization of the Negro people, formed through the instrumentality of the party. His general approach to the Negro question can best be indicated by the following fact: He recommended that under certain circumstances the revolutionary party could withdraw its own candidate for election to Congress and support a Negro democrat put forward by a Negro

community anxious to have its own Negro representative. In all these ideas Trotsky merely exemplified the application to the concrete struggle of the original principle embodied in the right to self-determination.

No task is more urgent than the collation and publication of Trotsky's writings and ideas on the Negro question in the U. S., their close study by all members of the party, and their dissemination in an organized form among the proletariat and the Negro masses.

**PART II—THE WORKERS PARTY AND THE NEGRO QUESTION**

The problem of the party therefore divides itself into two parts: (1) the struggles of the American proletariat for socialism and its relation to the Negro struggle for democratic rights; and (2) the independent struggles of the Negroes for democratic rights and its relation to the proletarian struggle for socialism. Under no circumstances are these separate elements to be confused or treated as one.

**THE WORKERS PARTY AND NEGRO WORK IN THE ORGANIZED LABOR MOVEMENT**

The Workers Party approaches Negro work in the organized labor movement from the basis of the approaching social crisis, and the preparation of the proletariat for the socialist revolution. Today one of the greatest subjective weaknesses of the American proletariat is the absence of consciousness that labor is opposed to capital for leadership of the nation. This being so, it follows that the other oppressed and discontented classes, elements and groups have not yet learned to look to labor for a partial or even a "reformist" solution to their problem. Classes learn such lessons only by massive experiences on a national scale; only in the very last stages of the revolution did the Russian peasantry learn that the proletariat was its leader. Already independent action by the Negro masses in the North is at last awakening organized labor to the fact that it must approach the Negro problem not merely as a trade union, but a social and national problem. This new development helps to clarify and define the tasks of the party.

The party continues, as it has done in the past, to agitate for equal rights and abolition of Jim Crow in all aspects of industrial and union life. The party views with great satisfaction the remarkable progress made by the CIO in its appreciation of the Negro problem as a union problem. The party fights against the Klan and other Negro-baiting elements in the unions but does not allow the outbreaks against Negroes which have taken place in Detroit, Mobile and elsewhere to obscure the steady progress in this field.

The party, however, goes beyond mere progressive trade-unionism. It places before the union movement the grave danger that the very existence of a Negro question in the country poses for the union movement and the country as a whole.

The party warns the labor movement that the fascists and pro-fascist elements in their efforts to batter down organized labor, will not fail to use the growing racial tension in the country as the Nazis used anti-semitism in Germany.

The party warns the labor movement that the coming unemployment will create grave dangers for the labor movement, particularly in developing antagonisms between white and Negro labor. The party points out the dangerous situation in the South and the continuous reactionary and anti-labor activity of the Southern democrats and its basis in the social degradation of the Negroes. The party, therefore, proposes to the labor movement the adoption of its transitional program for a Labor Party as the chief means in the present stage of checking this threat to its very existence. The party boldly poses to the labor movement the necessity of showing the Negroes that labor recognizes its responsibility for solving their problems by radical measures. Labor will thus draw to itself the militant power of the vast majority of oppressed Negroes and will enormously increase its social and political power in the country.

Such a sponsoring of the Negro cause will draw the attention of all the other oppressed groups in society to labor's rôle. It will give enormous confidence and pride to labor itself. It will create a powerful sentiment of good will and respect for the American proletariat among the great masses in Europe, Africa and Asia. The propaganda of the party in this respect must be bold, comprehensive and powerful in its insistence on the dangers to society and the continuing shame of the Negro problem, the necessity of proletarian solution, and the gains, direct and indirect, which will fol-

low even the first decisive steps taken by labor.

The party in its daily agitation draws attention of the union movement to the concrete danger represented by the outbreaks which have occurred in recent months and which sooner or later will recur with probably greater violence. The party emphatically urges the union movement to place the responsibility unequivocally upon the enemies of the Negro people. It urges the unions to recognize that the aggressive spirit of the Negro people is the result of their unending oppression. *Organized labor must not discourage, but must stimulate this militancy as one of the surest defenses of democracy not only for Negroes but for organized labor itself and of the oppressed classes.*

The party urges the labor movement to take the lead in organizing this militancy and linking it to the struggle for the reconstruction of society. To white workers complaining of Negro "excesses" the party points out, with restraint yet inflexibly, the great importance of the Negro mass struggle and delegates these complaints to their proper subordinate sphere. Above all, it points out that in conflicts between Negroes and whites in the Negro community, the labor movement must avoid appearing in any light which may be interpreted as a "guardian of the peace," merely anxious to restore the *status quo*. Only by assisting the Negro movement to express its militancy in effective channels and by militantly advocating both an immediate and a general program for the Negroes as a whole, will the labor movement be able to act effectively in times of crisis and yet avoid the multiple dangers of merely acting as peace-maker. In all Negro manifestations of resistance the organized labor movement must play a leading and active part. The party must unceasingly teach labor that the way to ensure that the resistance of Negroes is directed against capital and its allies is for labor to encourage, organize and support them to its fullest capacity.

The party will remember that propaganda and agitation of this scope is of special importance for it is being carried out by no other political groups. In the present critical period when many are being more and more impelled to think beyond their immediate interests, the Negro question forms a particularly valuable means of educating the advanced workers in the general principles of socialism and mass revolutionary struggle. The party will point out that because the Negroes have insisted on struggle, and owing to the sympathetic attitude of labor due to the large number of Negroes in its ranks, the Negro struggle in Detroit has developed a logic of its own. This has resulted in a political alliance at the recent elections between organized labor and the Negro community as a whole. Despite the loss of the election, this combination is one of the most significant stages yet reached in the struggle of labor and the Negro masses for emancipation from the ills and injustices of capitalist society. It is along these lines with militant effort on both sides complementing each other that the party must seek, according to its strength, to direct the developing struggle. *Organized labor must learn to turn to its own advantage the increasing racial consciousness and organization which accompanies the integration of the Negro into the social functions of capitalist society.*

#### THE WORKERS PARTY AND NEGRO WORK AMONG NEGROES

##### The Negroes Struggle for Democratic Rights and Socialism

The party makes a powerful and insistent propaganda to the Negroes that the leadership of organized labor is necessary and indispensable to their successful struggle for democratic rights. Particularly in this time of crisis, it poses to them socialism as the only solution of their problem. It analyzes the economic roots of racial oppression. It emphasizes, above all, the rôle of competition between members of the working class in destroying white and Negro solidarity. It stresses the national leadership of labor without which the achievement of democratic rights is impossible. It emphasizes the fundamentally class nature of racial oppression and the objective unity of the oppressed in the struggle for socialism.

At the same time the party, with the fullest consciousness of the significance of the mass independent struggles of the Negroes, considers that its main agitational work among Negroes is the stimulation and encouragement of these mass struggles. Using itself upon one of the most fundamental principles of Marxism, the party recognizes that it is only on the basis of the continual deepening and broadening of their independent mass struggles that the Negro people will ultimately be brought to recognize that organized labor is their only genuine ally in their struggle and that their struggle is part of the struggle for socialism.

The party, in stimulating the independent struggles of the Negro people, teaches Marxism to them in the only terms in which they will learn it, the terms of their own desires and experiences. Thus at the present stage of capitalist development in America, the party seeks wherever possible and feasible to concentrate the attention of the Negro masses upon the responsibility of the government for their oppressed condition. It therefore teaches to the Negroes continuously that the state is the executive committee of the ruling class and on this basis seeks to mobilize them in their own way and according to their own instinctive desires, against the capitalist state and its dominating rôle in contemporary society.

The party brings Marxism to the Negroes by emphasizing to them that the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself. It emphasizes to the Negroes that Negro emancipation cannot take place without the vigorous and self-sacrificing struggle of the Negroes themselves. It sharply condemns that distortion of Marxist truth which states or implies that the Negroes by their independent struggles cannot get to first base without the leadership of organized labor.

The party is on the alert to stimulate and encourage every instinctive tendency to independent organization and militant struggle of the Negro masses objectively directed against American capitalism. The history of the Negro people has shown them fertile in the creation and organization of such struggles. And it is on the basis of analysis and criticism of these creative efforts that the party seeks to exercise its special guiding and correcting influence. It is only by this means that it can help direct the efforts of the Negro masses into channels most powerful and fruitful for their own aims and for this very reason most valuable in developing the general struggle for socialism.

The party encourages the masses of the Negro people to seek the assistance of the organized labor movement in the organization of their own defense and in all stages of their battle for democratic rights. But in its agitation it encourages them to do so for the specific purpose, first of all, of gaining their own democratic demands. *Under no circumstances does it submerge the specific purpose of this alliance in the minds of the Negro people under any general terms of the fight for socialism.* The recognition by the masses of the Negro people that organized labor is their ally in their struggle for their democratic rights can prove a far more powerful step toward socialism than the acceptance by a few Negroes of the theoretic principles of Marxism. It is from the general recognition by the masses of the alliance between the Negro struggle for democratic rights and organized labor that the possibility arises of winning not one or two but dozens of Negro militants for the revolutionary party.

##### The Negro Proletariat

The rôle of the Negro proletariat belongs mainly to the general development of the union and organized labor movement as a whole. The party must be on its guard to scrutinize all policies which may deflect the Negro proletariat in the labor movement from considering itself first and foremost as an integral part of the struggle of organized labor for the rights of labor and for socialism. The oppression of the Negroes as a national minority specially prepares the Negro proletariat in the organized labor movement for a place in the very vanguard of the struggle for socialism.

The Negro proletariat, however, has a special rôle to play in the struggle of the Negro community for its democratic rights. The party will stimulate the Negro proletariat within the Negro communities to take the lead in the struggle for Negro democratic rights in accordance with the rôle of labor in modern society. The Negro community and Negro organizations must be stimulated to use the Negro proletariat as its representative to the organized labor movement in its demand for assistance and organization of the struggle for Negro democratic rights. The link in the struggle for Negro democratic rights is between the Negro community as a whole and organized labor and not between the Negro proletariat alone and the white proletariat.

In the present stage the party must conduct, to the extent of its resources, a vigorous and unflinching propaganda and agitation along the above lines. The present situation offers a fertile field for such work among the Negro masses. The experience of the party with its agitation on the Harlem demonstration has already shown how receptive the Negro masses and Negro proletarian elements would be to agitation of this kind.

*The party is certain to reap concrete results because there is not at the present time a single labor or radical organization which looks upon the militant Negro demonstration as anything less except at best justifiable because of unfortunate necessities. This*

means the party will be listened to eagerly by the Negro masses. The party needs to analyze carefully and draw the lessons of such outbreaks as that in Harlem. Only thus will it be able to offer guidance to the Negroes and to the proletariat, jointly with them to prepare for future outbreaks, and jointly study the revolutionary development of the American masses. Every "minor" crisis, in a capitalist state, says Lenin, discloses to us in miniature the elements and germs of the battles which must inevitably take place on a large scale during a big crisis.

The Harlem demonstration was no "minor" strike. It was, as has been shown, an organized demonstration, a Negro nationalist protest, on a stage far higher than Garveyism, involving actively and sympathetically, tens of thousands of people. On the day of the demonstration could be seen on one side the masses of the people and on the other, "keeping order," the local municipality (La Guardia), the Social-Democracy (Crosswaithe), the Stalinists (Max Yergan and Hope Stevens), the Negro petty bourgeois (Walter White and Lester Granger). Dewey announced that he held in reserve the armed forces of the state. These formed one united group while the masses in the streets booted at them.

The party must resolutely take its place with the protesting masses and expose continuously the unity of those arrayed against them. The party will not adopt merely the attitude of explaining why the masses take such steps. It corrects the exaggerations and mistakes of the masses but as one of them, taking part in the struggle with them, and seeking to increase and to direct their justified anger into more constructive channels. In the Marxist tradition it subordinates all to the fact that the masses have refused passively to endure injustice and have violently expressed their hatred. The party propagates these ideas and condemns the judicial or explanatory or social-worker attitude. It is only on this basis that the party, which is then more certain to get the ear of the masses, can help them to realize their mistakes, and help them to organize greater, more powerful and more effective demonstrations which can in turn become nation-wide militant movements.

#### The Party and the Negro Nationalist Movements

The party wages a merciless war against the Negro nationalist movements such as the Garveyites, the pro-Japanese organizations, etc. It demonstrates their fantastic and reactionary proposals for Negro emancipation. It explains in detail the utter impossibility of their realization and, furthermore, takes the trouble to explain that even if these were realized, it would not in any way benefit the great masses of the Negro people. The party seizes this opportunity to analyze and denounce the imperialism of the Japanese and the oppression of the Japanese masses. Thus in terms of the Negro's own life and interests it builds a sentiment of solidarity of the oppressed on an international scale.

At the same time, however, the party must study these movements carefully, to differentiate between the Negro nationalist leaders and their sincere but misguided followers. It explains to the masses that the desire for the success of Japan is in reality a desire for the destruction of the apparently unbreakable power of their own oppressor, American imperialism, and the humbling of its pride. The impending defeat of Japan will strike a heavy blow at any hopes of assistance, direct or indirect, to the "colored peoples" from a Japanese victory. The national movements, however, even before the defeat of Japan, used Garveyism and pro-Japanese sentiment merely as an ideological basis for a policy directed towards strengthening Negro nationalism in the United States. The movements which seek "to drive the Jew out of Harlem or the South Side" have a valid class base. They are the reactions of the resentful Negro seeking economic relief and some salve for his humiliated racial pride. That these sentiments can be exploited by fanatical idiots, Negro anti-Semites, or self-seeking Negro business men, does not alter their fundamentally progressive basis. This progressiveness is in no way to be confused with the dissatisfaction of the demoralized white petty-bourgeoisie which seeks refuge in fascism.

African reaction can and probably will finance or encourage some of these movements (Bilbo and Back to Africa) in order to feed ill-will. But the Negroes are overwhelmingly proletarian, semi-proletarian and peasant in their class composition. Such is the whole course of American history that any nation-wide Fascist movement (however disguised) will be compelled to attack the Negro struggle for equality. But the struggle for equality is the main driving force of the Negro mass movement.

The party, therefore, while boldly attacking the nationalist movement, does not in any way treat these movements in the same category as it would a fascist movement. It attacks them on the basis of a program for Negro struggle as outlined above. It is the absence of a comprehensive program and action for Negro rights and Negro struggle advanced by organized labor; it is the sec-

tarian presentation of the doctrine of the Negro struggle as class struggle which gives strength to the nationalists. Such is the obvious bankruptcy of the Nationalists' magic-carpet programs for salvation in all parts of the world that their chief strength, in Harlem for instance, is due not to their programs but to their active rôle in protests and demonstrations designed to improve the conditions of the Negroes here in America.

#### The Party and the Negro Petty Bourgeoisie

An economic examination of the American scene will demonstrate how slight is the economic basis of the Negro petty-bourgeoisie. The Negro petty bourgeoisie is for the most part a woefully disproportionate group of intelligentsia, well-paid personal domestics, stage performers, etc. Bourgeois society has rigidly excluded them not only from social contact with the whites but also from these positions and opportunities of sharing in the surplus value, and gaining distinction, which binds so many of the white petty-bourgeoisie functionaries to bourgeois society. They can do harm as in the March On Washington Committee, but their impotence to restrain the masses of the Negroes when these are anxious to move has been demonstrated during the past period. Such influence, as for instance, the Indian nationalist bourgeoisie has exercised over the Indian masses, the Negro petty-bourgeoisie can never exercise over the Negroes. The party observes that the instinct for direct action of the Negro masses ignored the NAACP or the Urban League, as circumstances dictated. But the party is on the alert to support those Negroes who are today in such profusion, if even sometimes for only limited purposes.

The party keeps up an unceasing attack on the Negro petty-bourgeois leaders, but is careful to do so, not on general grounds, but because they do not carry on a militant struggle for democratic rights and betray the struggle at every opportunity. In this respect the party attacks the petty-bourgeois leaders of the Negroes in a manner approximating its attacks on the labor leadership of the social democracy.

#### The Negroes and the Labor Party

The party must carry on a militant agitation among the Negroes on behalf of an Independent Labor Party. It is a sign of their special rôle in American society and the maturing social consciousness of the Negro people that as a body they have made within the last few years a rapid change in their attitude toward organized labor. Should organized labor put forward a militant program for an Independent Labor Party the past history of Negroes and present indications show that the movement of the Negroes in its favor will be strong and perhaps overwhelming. The Negroes in all probability will play a rôle in the left wing of the organization, but here also the Negroes' situation as a specially oppressed minority, though not necessarily obtruded, must be taken into consideration. An Independent Labor Party in the United States as in many European countries will probably consist of a federation of various groups, with the union movement providing the base, the driving force and the leadership.

The Independent Labor Party will not tolerate any distinction of color within its ranks. Local non-union organizations of all types will seek affiliation. Negroes should be encouraged to join such local affiliations. But the party must carry on a vigorous agitation among militant Negro organizations struggling for Negro democratic rights not only to join the agitation for an Independent Labor Party but also to take an active part in its formation.

At the present stage of capitalist crisis in the U. S. this particular work by the party offers exceptional means of forming a bridge between the independent struggle of the Negro masses and the general problem of the reconstruction of society.

The Negro organizations should be encouraged themselves to formulate demands for their own democratic rights and the party must insist that neither the Democratic nor the Republican Party is the type of organization which will be able to give the Negroes an opportunity to struggle for these rights within a broader framework. At the same time, even to the most nationalistic of the Negro organizations, the party should pose the question of themselves forming a program not only for Negro democratic rights but for the country as a whole. They must look, not to European imperialism in Africa nor to Japanese imperialism, but to potential allies in this country and make their own contribution to the elaboration of that type of social order in which the Negroes will at last find equality. This must be presented to the Negro organizations as an imperative duty for Negro organizations to perform. It is by this means that the Negroes, on the basis of their own nationalistic preoccupations, are brought to consider their own problems in relation

to the fundamental problem of the whole social order. The party will seize this opportunity to present its own transitional program to Negroes, for them to consider in the light of their intensive desire for some solution, not only immediate but general, to the degradation from which they have suffered for so many centuries. Such is the proletarian composition of the Negro people, so hostile are they to the existing social order because of the special degradation to which it subjects them, that the political organization which knows how to utilize their preoccupation with their democratic rights can find ample ways and means for carrying on that socialistic propaganda which must always be the climax of revolutionary effort, particularly in this period. Starting from and never ignoring the basis of the independent struggles for democratic rights, the party will find in the increasing contradictions in the social order the possibility of uniting in ever higher stages of development the objective movement of the American proletariat toward leadership of the nation and the movement of the masses of Negro people toward the American proletariat.

**Negro Chauvinism**

The history of the Negro in the U. S. is a history of his increasing race consciousness, a constantly increasing desire to vindicate his past and the achievements and qualifications of the Negro race as a race. This is an inevitable result of his position in American society, of the development of this society itself, and is not only a powerful but a familiar concomitant everywhere of the struggles of nationally oppressed groups. It does not grow less with the social development of the oppressed and the oppressing groups. On the contrary, it increases in direct ratio with the development of capitalism and the possibilities of liberation. This was recognized by the SWP in its 1939 convention when it adopted a resolution which stated in part: "...the awakening political consciousness of the Negro not unnaturally takes the form of a desire for independent action uncontrolled by whites. The Negroes have long felt and more than ever feel today the urge to create their own organizations under their own leaders and thus assert, not only in theory but in action, their claim to complete equality with other American citizens. Such a desire is legitimate and even when it takes the form of a rather aggressive chauvinism it is to be welcomed. Black chauvinism in America today is merely the natural excess of the desire for equality while white American chauvinism, the expression of racial domination, is essentially reactionary.

So clear is this development that today even the bourgeoisie is recognizing it. In *An American Dilemma* by Gunnar Myrdal, despite its petty-bourgeois humanitarian attitude, there has at last appeared a serious, comprehensive and, in many respects, authoritative study of the Negro question. One of its final conclusions is that: "Negroes are beginning to form a self-conscious nation within the nation," defining ever more clearly their fundamental grievances against white America." Such a movement with such deep historical roots must inevitably bring exaggerations, excesses, and ideological trends for which the only possible name is chauvinism. This trend undoubtedly has dangers. Marxism both in theory and in practice has demonstrated that the only way to overcome them is to recognize its fundamentally progressive tendency and to distinguish sharply between the chauvinism of the oppressed and the chauvinism of the oppressor. The duty of the party is not only to lead the legitimate aspirations of the Negro masses but also to educate organized labor as a whole as to the legitimacy of the feelings of the great masses of the Negro people and the great contribution which this can become to the struggle for socialism. Despite all apparent difficulties, a bold and confident policy on the part of our party has every possibility of success. The reason for this is simple. Whereas in Europe the national movements have usually aimed at a separation from the oppressing power, in the U. S. the race consciousness and chauvinism of the Negro represent fundamentally a consolidation of his forces for the purpose of integration into American society.

**e Negro Question as an International Question**

The Negro question, i.e., the question of slavery, in the U. S. during the nineteenth century excited amazing interest and action among the international proletariat. The emancipation of the Negro slaves and the Civil War are indissolubly connected with the foundation of the First International. The Third International recognized this aspect of the Negro question when in its Resolution on the Negro Question at the Fourth Congress it not only reiterated the support of the Comintern for revolutionary Negro struggles but devoted a special section to the importance of the rôle which the Negroes in the U. S. could play in the emancipation of Negroes all over the world and particularly in Africa. Today the process

of historical development and capitalist disintegration have carried the Negro question in the U. S. a stage further in its international relations. Not only among the British masses does the Negro question occupy a foremost place as a test of American democracy but all over the world and particularly in the Oriental countries the situation and struggle of the Negro people in the United States has become one of the criteria by which oppressed nationalities test the possibilities of their own emancipation. Among the American Negroes themselves the rôle and fate of India, of China and of Burma in their struggles for emancipation is recognized as being connected with their own struggles. The Negro press has consistently devoted many pages to the struggles of the Oriental peoples, and the *Pittsburgh Courier* has two regular weekly columns, one by an Indian and one by a Chinese. Negro organizations, in their common manifesto to both the Republican and Democratic conventions of 1944, made "the equality of China" with all the Allied nations, one of their fundamental demands. It is the function of the Fourth International to develop and to clarify these instinctive strivings of the peoples toward internationalism. With the utmost seriousness the party must recognize and expound the historic roots of this development and direct it toward the education and organization of the international proletariat and its present allies in their struggles for world socialism.

**Program of Action**

1. The first requisite is the systematic education of the party on the Negro question. In the period which we are entering, the period of world upheaval and social crises in America, the party members must above all on this difficult and complicated question have a clear theoretical orientation. In *The New International* and in internal bulletins there must be a series of informed studies and discussions on the Marxist interpretation of the development of the Negro in the history of the United States. Such studies do not exist in the U. S. at all except for some beginnings by the Stalinists. It is impossible for the party to make any serious and continued progress in Negro work without some such preparation. For the time being we merely outline a few of the topics which can be immediately considered: (a) The Negroes in the Civil War. The Civil War is as much the theoretical axis of American analysis as the French Revolution is for modern Europe. And central to the Civil War is slavery, i.e., the Negro question. (b) The Negroes in the organized labor movement, their historical development in this movement and the interrelation of the Negro community to these struggles. (c) Negro organizations in the recent past and in the present, particularly the Garvey movement as the greatest Negro mass movement which U. S. history can show. (d) The Negro in Southern agriculture. (e) Negro social development and political struggles in Africa and the West Indies. (f) The concrete experiences of the WP in Negro work.

These studies, for the most part, are, first of all, matters of fact, but are also matters of interpretation. It is practically a virgin field not only for the party but for all Marxists in the U. S. They are therefore and for a long time must be mainly matters of discussion. It is through attention to these questions that the party will educate its members and enable them to represent Marxism among the Negroes and within the ranks of organized labor. It is by this means also that the party will be able to influence and to direct the always alert interest of a nationally oppressed people to whatever deals with its national oppression, however unpopular or distasteful the general ideas of a revolutionary group might otherwise be. As a first prerequisite it is necessary to publish the notes and observations of Trotsky on the Negro question.

2. The National Committee must, in accordance with the practice and tradition of the Bolshevik movement, organize a special Negro department to deal with the general work among Negroes. This work must in no way be subordinated to the work among Negroes in the organized labor movement, which is more specifically the work of the trade union department. The work of both departments must be coordinated.

The Negro department should be responsible for a special column in the newspaper on the Negro question and should invite the participation of non-party sympathizers in its theoretical work.

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