

TOWARD A PROGRAM OF AGRARIAN REFORMS FOR THE BLACK BELT*

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PART II

Hoover "Primes the Credit Pump." Safeguarding the Wall Street credit structure and preserving the plantation were the essence of government policy during the worst years of the great economic crisis. To this end, the main bulk of Federal emergency funds for agriculture was directed. Between 1929 and 1933, 46 per cent of the total \$225,000,000 appropriated for agricultural credit went to the Southern states.** The raid on public funds by big financial interests deep in the cotton gamble was begun under Hoover and continued during the period of the A.A.A. The pattern was set by Hoover through the Regional Agricultural Corporation, launched by the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. The security demanded for loans under this policy was either a landlord lien waiver or

a first mortgage, which automatically put loan benefits beyond the reach of the masses of tenants and small owners, inasmuch as the landlord usually held the lien and the small owners were already mortgaged up to the hilt. Particularly was this so in the case of the Negro, whose inferior economic status served automatically to exclude him.

The Crisis. The collapse of agricultural prices following the 1929 stock market crash dealt a staggering blow to the South's cotton economy and marked the beginning of a decade of disaster for its people.

For years preceding this collapse, the South's economic condition had been deteriorating. Storm signals had been raised, forecasting the inevitable disaster. King Cotton, the sick man of American agriculture, had taken a turn for the worse. His ailment, a chronic case of "plantationitis" coupled with the "Boll Weevil Blues," had reached a critical stage, aggravated by the uninterrupted decline of world agriculture dating from the end of World War I. All nostrums of Dr. Hoover, and before him Harding and Coolidge, had proved of no avail. The patient failed to respond.

The catastrophic decline in the consumption of cotton was registered in the drop of the index number of gross cash income from cotton marketings from 100 in 1925-29 to 41 in 1939.*

Along with this decline, there was

* The first section of this article was published in the September, 1946, issue of *Political Affairs*.

** James Allen, *The Negro Question in the United States*, International Publishers, 1936.

* Gunnar Lange, *Trends in Southern Agriculture*, Unpublished MSS, prepared for the Myrdal Study.

an increase in the carry-over from 5,000,000 to 13,000,000 bales in the American cotton crop between 1929-30 and 1932-33. In the five years following 1929 the total farm returns from cotton and cotton seed fell by 70 per cent. The result was a sharp reduction in the average gross income of Southern farm families. The family income which had been \$735 in 1928 was only \$216 by 1932, in which year cotton averaged 4.6 cents per lb.*

The Agricultural Adjustment Program. The A.A.A. was instituted in May 1933. Its artificial pegging of cotton prices in the interest of the big planters and Northern credit institutions, served to aggravate the social aspects of the crisis, spurring the process of impoverishment and class polarization.

This sharpening of the agrarian crisis was most startlingly revealed in the absolute drop in the area of cultivated land. The harvested area of land declined from 43,000,000 acres in 1929 to 36,000,000 in 1932. In 1933, as a result of the A.A.A. acreage reduction program it declined to 29,000,000. There was a further decline to 22,000,000 in 1941.** On the other hand, the decline in rural population was relatively small. Between 1930-40, the Negro rural population declined by only 4.5 per cent. The decline was relatively smaller than during the decade 1920-30 (8.6 per cent).

But most illustrative of the desperate plight of the Negro during this period is the fact that his "flight" from the land could go on at all in the face of the lack of opportunities for work in industry in the cities.

The stark tragedy behind these figures, their meaning in terms of human suffering and destitution, beggars imagination. Although the census reveals a decrease of over 235,000 in the number of Negro and white share-cropping families, what happened to them still remains a mystery as far as census returns are concerned. But we may reasonably assume, given the prevalence of widespread unemployment in the cities at the time, that a large number remained in agriculture, reduced to the sub-tenant standards of casual wage laborers. But the plantation system was saved, as was Wall Street's credit structure.

The planter's interest was further safeguarded by his dominance of local agencies administering the A.A.A. program. This in turn was based on the Negro's political impotence. The planter's control of these local agencies enabled him to grab the lion's share of the benefits. Thus, the average benefit per plantation tenant family was reported in 1937 to be only \$27 a year, that is, about 10 per cent of the total cash income of the average tenant farmer.*

The Farm Security Administration. The F.S.A. programs of social

* Johnson, Embree and Alexander, *Collapse of Cotton Tenancy*, 1935.

** Bureau of Agricultural Economics, *The Agricultural Situation*, August, 1942.

* W. C. Holley, E. Winston, and T. J. Woolfer, Jr., *The Plantation South*, 1934-37, 1940.

reforms, purporting to bring relief to the "little man in the farm business," did, however, represent a progressive departure from the standard practices of American capitalism, and did bring some measure of relief to the most destitute of the South's agricultural population. But it brought no appreciable amelioration of the conditions of the masses of cotton producers.

The glaring inadequacy of appropriations for these programs is shown in the fact that while \$5,300,000,000 was appropriated for A.A.A. policies during the period of 1934-41—a disproportionate share of which went to the big landlords—during the same period the outlay for F.S.A. amounted to only about one-fifth of this amount, \$1,122,000,000.*

Here again the discriminatory pattern was followed. The programs were made to conform with dominant planter interests. The local administration was mainly in the hands of local people. The F.S.A. clients, to be accepted, had to be passed upon by local farmers' committees, over which the Negro had practically no influence. This was the case with regard to the so-called rehabilitation programs, which included assistance of various kinds on an individual basis, and which took up the major part of the work and appropriations of the F.S.A. Differential treatment of the Negro in the operation of this program was

also shown in the fact that by December, 1939, there were in the South 154,000 white and 45,000 Negro "standard rehabilitation borrowers." Thus, while more than one-fourth of the Southern rural population is Negro, the number of Negroes on the program constituted a somewhat smaller proportion (23 per cent) of the total number of clients. Compared with the total estimated number of white and colored farm families which were either on relief or had an income of less than \$500, the participation in the program amounted to 22 per cent by the whites and 11 per cent by the Negroes. This shows that a low-income white family had about twice the chance of a Negro family in the same circumstances of being accepted on the program. Higher average amounts of loan advances for whites than Negroes were also shown, \$659 for whites and \$606 for colored.*

There are other F.S.A. programs such as Settlement and Rental Cooperatives. These programs, however, are insignificant as far as the Negro is concerned. By mid-1940 there were fewer than 2,000 Negro families on various types of F.S.A. Settlement and Rental Cooperatives, constituting about one-fourth of all such families in the South. About 1,900 Negro families were on the so-called tenant-purchase program, on which there were four times as many whites. Thus, there was about the

* Carl T. Schmidt, *American Farmers in the World Crisis*, 1941.

* Richard Sterner and Associates, *The Negro's Share* (prepared for the Myrdal Study), 1943.

same amount of discrimination in these cases as in the rehabilitation work. On the whole, the New Deal social reforms in Southern agriculture, while furnishing some relief to the totally destitute, proved woefully inadequate and did not begin to repair the original damages suffered by the masses of Negro and white soil tillers as a result of the A.A.A.

Raper's appraisal of New Deal reforms in the South's agriculture still holds good. Writing in 1936, *i.e.*, before the 1940 census, he nevertheless saw in his field studies the main facts later verified by census returns. He summarized them thus:

The New Deal with its cotton restriction program, its relief expenditures, and its loan services . . . has rejuvenated the decaying plantation economy. Those who control the plantations are now experiencing relative prosperity. On the other hand, the landless farmers . . . are not only failing to escape their chronic dependence but are actually losing status. Many tenants are being pushed off the land while many others are being pushed down the tenure ladder, especially from cropper to wage-hand status.*

Critique of Reformist Programs. The F.S.A. program foundered on the jagged rock of plantation landlordism, strengthened by the A.A.A. policies. Such must be the fate of all programs that have for their aim the benefit of the common man in the South's agriculture, *unless they are*

planned as part of a basic attack upon the plantation and the forces of big monopoly capital behind it. And that is the job of a militantly led mass movement of Southern toilers, Negro and white, supported by the labor movement in the North.

The failure fundamentally to formulate the land question is characteristic of bourgeois liberal and reformist "remedies." Liberal theorists point up the plantation evil, only to shy away from it and avoid drawing the obvious conclusions. Plainly, abolition of the plantation and land redivision among the "primary" soil tillers is basic to any genuine agrarian reform. The reason for their evasion of this inescapable conclusion is that a radical democratic formulation of the South's land question impinges upon that "holy of all holies," large-scale private property, around which the imperialist bourgeoisie has thrown an aura of sanctity. Thus, their efforts are reduced to pitiful attempts to carry through a peaceful, gradual conversion of semi-feudal land ownership into capitalist landlordism through a "painless" transformation, which does not challenge or even question the monopolist property rights of the big planters and their Wall Street backers.

The war witnessed a veritable flood of literature and propaganda from these sources, heralding the short-lived war prosperity and its industrial boom as the beginning of a "technical and industrial revolution," the opening up of a "new era" of in-

* Arthur F. Raper, *Preface to Peasantry*, 1936.

dustrial expansion and modernized farming for the South.

It is in these bourgeois-liberal theories that we must seek the well spring of Browder's thesis of the "progressive elimination" of the semi-feudal remnants in Southern agriculture and the peaceful solution of the Negro question under the aegis of a "benevolent" imperialism. These theories represent a rejection of the profound, agrarian, anti-imperialist content of the Negro question, whose roots are struck deep in the soil of plantation thralldom. These optimistic expectations were shattered on the granite rock of reality by the imperialist offensive unleashed after V-J Day.*

World War II. World War II witnessed a slackening of the trends outlined above. There ensued an interlude of relative stability based upon the extension of the market through increased consumption and hence the rise in cotton prices. The war industries furnished an outlet for agrarian migration out of the Black Belt, thus relieving to some degree the pressure on agriculture. But behind the flimsy façade of industrial boom and war prosperity lurked the fundamental forces of agrarian crisis which had by no means been solved by the war. Not only have the basic problems posed by the permanent agricultural crisis not been solved, but in some

cases they have become aggravated. And today all signs point to a resumption of basic trends. Already signs are in the wind, the warning signals of a new and even more devastating crisis are raised. Cotton has not recovered its place in the world market. It faces sharper competition than ever. In this context *Labor Fact Book No. 7** points out:

In general, the demand for . . . American cotton has been sharply cut by the development of rayon and other artificial fibers and by increased production of cotton in other countries. In the foreign markets, which have been important for American cotton, this can no longer compete successfully at American prices with cotton from less developed countries having lower standards of living and lower money costs.

The present cotton prices are inflated, artificially pegged up. The outlet for agrarian overcrowding is closing as a result of the shutdown of war industries following V-J Day.** As regards Negroes, the reversal of New Deal trends has resulted in the scuttling of the FEPC and the proposed return of the U.S.E.S. back to state control. The postwar months have been marked by a resumption of the war against the Negro at home. The widespread resurgence of Negro-baiting and lynching has reached new and more menacing proportions, as revealed by recent lynching of two Negro couples

* A factual refutation of these crass distortions is to be found in the special materials recently released by the National Negro Commission of the C.P.U.S.A. and in the article by Nat Ross, "The South Faces Today," *Political Affairs*, March 1946.

* International Publishers, New York, 1946.
** Nat Ross, Cited work.

in Monroe County, Georgia. The fascist-like pattern of this new wave of anti-Negro violence is evidenced by the fact that it is being carried out with the open participation of the armed forces of the State, as witnessed in Freeport, Long Island, and, particularly, Columbia, Tennessee.

The other side of the picture is the unprecedented political awakening of the Negro people and the growth of Negro and white labor unity, a process greatly stimulated by the victorious war against fascism. The leavening force in this new militancy is the Negro industrial worker, whose ranks have been tremendously augmented during the war. On the political scene, the Negro worker is rapidly coming into his own as the spark plug of the battle for Negro freedom. As an integral part of organized labor (the Negro constitutes one out of every fifteen organized trade unionists) he is the only force capable, under Communist guidance, of rallying the masses of Negro people for consistent and uncompromising struggle for liberation. This all adds up to the sharpening of the basic contradiction between the growing democratic impulses of the Negro people and the tightening yoke of oppressive imperialist policy. It presages ever-heightening struggles for Negro rights.

Social-Political Consequences of the Plantation System. Our analysis points up the Black Belt Plantation system as the root source of the Negro question in the U.S. In this ana-

chronistic pattern of slavery thrust into modern life lie the seed sprouts of modern Negro oppression. The plantation system is the generator continually reproducing Negro inequality and backwardness in all walks of life, condemning America's colored tenth to a poverty-ridden, Jim Crow existence in the North as well. The shadow of the plantation falls upon the Negro in the streets of Harlem and Chicago's South Side.

It is likewise on this soil that is to be found the breeding pen of the South's ruin and poverty. The social controls, originally devised to keep the Negro down, penalize the masses of Southern poor whites. Every measure passed to curb the Negro has also served to destroy the civil rights of the poor white. At the bottom of the cultural backwardness and poverty of the Southern white is the position of his Black neighbor. The Tobacco Roads are the "American Way" in the Black Belt.

Facts unearthed and widely publicized, including the report of the National Emergency Committee to the late President Roosevelt, have thrown new light on the "paradise" of racial bigotry below the Mason-Dixon Line. They show that the "White Supremacy" of the South is synonymous with the most outrageous poverty, misery and degradation of Southern white people. They show the staggering price of "white superiority" in terms of health, living and cultural standards of the great masses of Southern whites. They show that

"keeping the Negro down" means for the entire South the nation's lowest wage and living standards. (The average income for Southerners in 1937 was only \$314 as against \$606 in the country as a whole!) "White supremacy" means the nation's greatest proportion of tenants and sharecroppers, its highest rate of child labor, its most degrading and widespread exploitation of women, its poorest health and housing record, its highest illiteracy and lowest proportion of students in high schools and colleges, its highest death and disease rate, its lowest level of union organization and its least democracy. The unsolved Negro agrarian question in the South is the springboard for the fascist salient into the flank of our country's democracy, spear-headed by the Bourbon poll-taxers and their Tory Republican backers of the North.

These incontestable facts, which give the lie to the Bourbon racist myth of "white superiority," show clearly that the South can progress only by breaking the oppression of the Negro. A nation which oppresses another forges its own chains, said Karl Marx. In colloquial language, as put by Booker T. Washington, "You can't keep a man in the gutter without getting down there with him."

TOWARDS FUNDAMENTAL AGRARIAN REFORM

Clearly, far-reaching changes are essential if the Negro is to be free,

if the South is to rise out of its slough of grinding poverty to equality with the rest of the country. Radical agrarian reform, long overdue, is the prime need of the South's people.

The plantation system, a relic of chattel slavery surviving into the modern age, *must go*. It is this system which traps millions in the Black Belt prison under the oligarchic heel of a caste of white landlords, local merchants, and bankers; and it is its attendant evils of share-cropping, peonage, outmoded and wasteful methods of soil usage, and its single-crop system which the world over spells slavery and which, in the South, leaves the mass of agricultural poor the prey of every speculative fluctuation of the world cotton market.

There is no room in modern life for such a system. A fundamental reorganization of the whole existing land system of the South is glaringly necessary. *The breaking up of the large plantations and the redistribution of the land in favor of the poor cultivators, Negro and white, who till it* becomes indispensable for the solution of this question. Such a radical overhauling of the South's system of land ownership and its agrarian relations would result in the following:

1. It would create the condition for the establishment of a system of small independent farming, bringing immediate relief to the masses of Negro and white soil tillers. Thus the social base for political democracy

would be formed. It would destroy the most important material base of the imperialist-Bourbon oppression of the Negro people, springing the whole system of color caste which dictates inequality for the Negro in all walks of life and which condemns him to Jim Crow poverty even in the North.

2. It would break the backbone of Bourbon Junkerism whose representatives in Congress are bent on assaying a role in American politics similar to that played by their dethroned counterparts in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. It would shake loose the putrid soil which nourishes the whole foul breed of fascist Negro-phobes of the stripe of the Rankins, Talmadges, Bilbos, *et al.*

Land redivision, the agrarian revolution, is incontestably the *pivotal* demand of Negro liberation; its realization is a prerequisite for any genuine democracy or equality in the South. This primacy of basic agrarian reform in the fight for political democracy in backward or semi-feudal areas is borne out by all historical experience and in recent times by the examples of the liberated countries of Eastern Europe and the Balkans. In these countries the breaking up of the big feudal estates proved fundamental to democratic political transformation.

In the South, this task, left undone by Reconstruction, is on the order of the day for labor and the democratic people.

Imperialism — the main enemy.

The achievement of fundamental agricultural reorganization in the deep South is inextricably bound up with the question of political power.

Today the fight for land takes place in the new social setting of imperialism. The big monopolies and trusts are in the saddle. The Morgans, Rockefellers, du Ponts, etc., are the real owners of the South. They are the exploiters supreme. It is they who dominate the commanding heights of Southern economic life, its steel, coal, railroads, utilities, etc.* It is their banks that control the credit structure without which the plantation could not live. Big Business, resident in the North, is the real power behind the throne of the Bourbon landlords. It has underwritten the plantation system and its odious color-caste system.

The "front men" in the South, the junior partners in plunder, are merely the riding bosses of the absentee Yankee overlords. In this sinister tie-up between the parasitic and predatory sections of Northern Big Business and the feudal-agrarian Junker interests of the South are merged the two main pro-fascist currents in the country today. Its political expression is the Congressional coalition of poll-tax Democrats and Tory Republicans.

Self-government for the Black Belt. Plainly, a fundamental solution of the land question in the Black Belt

* See The National Emergency Council's Report to the President on Economic Conditions of the South, July, 1938.

is inconceivable within the framework of the existing Bourbon-imperialistic political setup.

Our analysis has shown that the fight for even the most elementary demands in the sphere of agrarian reform immediately runs afoul of the entrenched political power of the landlord based upon the plantation and its anti-Negro social and legal sanctions. This emphasizes the indissoluble connection between political and economic reform in the South. Here, as nowhere else in the country, the fight for the smallest demand to relieve the sufferings of the people assumes almost immediately a political character. The highly political nature of the struggle in this region is attested by all experiences. It has been emphasized in all mass movements of the agricultural toilers, from the Elaine, Arkansas, massacres in 1919, up through the Camp Hill and Tuscaloosa battles of the Alabama share-croppers (1931-34), to the anti-eviction demonstrations of Arkansas and Oklahoma tenants in 1936.

This essentially revolutionary character of the demands of the Negro soil cultivator arises from the semi-slave economic and political setup in that region. There, every democratic demand becomes at once a challenge to the feudal rights and privileges of the Bourbon ruling caste and is immediately countered by terror and the wildest racist provocation. This is underlined in the heightening lynch wave now engulfing the South. The observation of Lenin re-

garding the struggles of the Russian peasantry against feudal Czarism applies fully to the fight of his modern Negro-American counterpart—the share-cropper. Their demands, he observed, are more revolutionary than the partial demands of the city industrial workers, because they represent the belated and unfinished struggle against serfdom and feudalism.

The implication of these conditions in regard to the fight for the land in the Black Belt is clear. Any program looking forward to the ultimate solution of the land question in that region must project as its long range objective the breaking of the class rule of the Wall Street-supported Bourbon oligarchy and the destruction of the vicious system of caste by which it is maintained. This means that the corrupt rule of monopoly capitalism and its cronies must be supplanted by the democratic rule of the majority, that is, the Negro people. Without governmental and administrative control in the hands of this most oppressed section of the people, fundamental agrarian reform is impossible. Only a government representing the interests of the preponderant Negro population, expressing its special interests and enjoying its confidence, can effectuate the radical change in the structure of Southern landownership so urgently needed by the masses of the Black Belt's people:

Obviously, the recasting of the agricultural setup of this region along democratic lines involves parallel

changes in its political and governmental structure. Therefore, along with the demand for land redistribution, and integrally tied in with it, must be placed demands for corresponding political reforms, *i.e.*, reforms in the realm of government which will enable the democratic majority to achieve political power.

What then should be the central political demand? The mass movement of Negro share-croppers and poor farmers for land and freedom, if properly organized and militantly led, must take the direction of struggle for some form of local or *regional self-government* as the absolute minimum political requirement for any serious tackling of the land question. This demand means simply the establishment of the jurisdiction of the Negro majority over all questions local and regional in character. Its achievement would necessarily involve the revision of the present state and county boundaries in the Black Belt. The continuity of this region is arbitrarily broken up by a maze of governmental, administrative, judicial and electoral sub-divisions. These divisions, which in no way correspond to the economic and political needs of the oppressed majority, are artificially maintained and gerrymandered by the South's rulers with the avowed purpose of perpetuating the political impotence of the region's predominant Negro population. Regional self-government implies the redrawing of these boundaries in conformity with the needs and demands

of the oppressed majority. This can by no means be construed as separation. Quite the contrary, it is a prerequisite for genuine democratic unity; for the Black Belt represents an historically-formed economic and ethnic unity distinguished by the special economic and living conditions as well as by the national or racial composition of its majority Negro population.

Plainly, the realization of regional self-government would pave the way for the abolition of the most despicable forms of slave bondage and for the free democratic development of the Negro people. It would create the conditions for the full unleashing of self-initiative, stifled by the degrading restrictions of a color caste system designed to blur the underlying issues of the class struggle. It is the unassailable demand of the Negro people of the Black Belt.

This demand likewise represents the basic interests of the impoverished white minority in the Black Belt. The masses of poor and landless whites in that region can only win land and freedom on the basis of full support of the rights of the Negro who, by virtue of his special oppression, represents the decisive force for democratic change in the South. The historical confirmation of this truth is contained in any objective evaluation of the Reconstruction period.

It was in that period, when the newly emancipated Negroes, in alliance with the Southern poor whites and supported by Northern democ-

racy, stepped forward to take their place in government, that the South had the only democratic rule it has ever known. The unity of Negro and white achieved in that period, which held forth the promise for rapid development of the South out of its morass of reaction and backwardness, was crushed by the victory of the counter-revolution, sealed in the Hayes-Tilden "Gentlemen's Agreement" between Northern capitalism and Southern reaction in 1877.* A key task of the Party and the working class is to rescue the liberating truth implicit in the lesson of that period for present-day democracy from the heap of distortions and misrepresentations under which contemporary bourgeoisie "scholarship" has sought to bury it. The popularization of the real lessons of the Reconstruction period is an essential part of the fight for Negro-white unity in the South, for a *new* democratic reconstruction of that region.

This direction of the struggle for Negro rights in the Black Belt is already implicit in the elementary stages of the fight for political democracy in the South. In the Black Belt, the fight for electoral reforms, such as the right to vote, to hold office, and against all restrictions on the freedom of the ballot, indicate the next stage to be a struggle for regional self-government.

Already the fight for these imme-

diately political demands is reflected in the all-round sharpening of social antagonisms in the South and in evoking the most desperate fascist reprisals on the part of the Bourbon overlords and their K.K.K. myrmidons. The organization of the fight for the economic and social needs of the Negro masses and white toilers on the land and the establishment of close links between that movement and Southern organized labor is the next task of the Party and militant labor in the South.

In the development of the movement for the land under condition of sharpened terror and lynch incitement, the Negro people will be brought more and more to the realization of the necessity for local *self-rule* as an essential safeguard for the protection of their common interests and for their free and unhampered economic and political development.

It should be clear that without the recognition of the Negroes' right to self-government, the slogan of social equality, or full citizenship rights, in the South and the Black Belt is but a misleading signboard, divested of all revolutionary content, behind which bourgeois humanitarians and pacifists, as well as the Social-Democrats and Trotskyites, can hide their sabotage of any genuine struggle for Negro rights and democracy.

In this context it should be pointed out that the demand for local self-government does not replace the slogan of the right to self-determination of the Negro people in the Black

* See James S. Allen, *Reconstruction: The Basis for Democracy*, International Publishers, 1937.

Belt. On the contrary, it is a *transitional slogan* in relation to the right to self-determination, which remains the ultimate programmatic demand for the solution of the Negro question. Local self-government constitutes the concrete application of our full program for Negro emancipation to the present stage of the development of the Negro people's movement. It is, of course, by no means excluded that higher demands within the general context of the right to self-determination will not at some future date be raised by the Negro people. Such an eventuality is contingent upon the development of the Negro liberation movement and the course of the class struggle in the country as a whole.

The demand for self-government is based upon the conception of the Negro people in the Black Belt as a nation, with all the essential characteristics of nationhood present among them, as outlined by Stalin, that is, they are "a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up, manifested in a community of culture."

It is necessary, however, to guard against the schematic and undialectical interpretation placed upon this correct definition by Comrade Francis Franklin. Comrade Franklin, particularly, seems to think that the economic base for the formation of the Negro nation in the Black Belt is the fight of the bourgeoisie for markets. He says: "Forced to pro-

duce for a separate Negro market, there has thus developed a slight Negro capitalism. *It is this separate Negro capitalism which has formed the economic base for the emergence among the Negro people of the Black Belt of separate national characteristics of their own.*"* (My emphasis, H.H.)

Quite the contrary! The most important economic factor behind the "emergence among the Negro people of the Black Belt of separate national characteristics of their own" is precisely the semi-feudal plantation economy peculiar to that region. Involved in this difference of approach is the question of the peasantry—the agrarian base of the Negro national liberation movement. Failure to bring this out means distortion of Leninism.

It is precisely against this sort of distortion of the national question that Stalin warned. According to Stalin, the national question in the present period is in "essence a peasant question," one in which the "competitive struggles between the bourgeoisie" have "not a decisive significance," "and in certain cases not even a serious significance." ". . . the chief point here," he points out is "*that the imperialist group of the ruling nationality is exploiting and oppressing the greater mass, and above all the peasant mass, of the colonies and dependent nationalities, and that by oppressing and exploiting*

* "The Status of the Negro People in the Black Belt," *Political Affairs*, May, 1946, p. 443.

them it is drawing them into the struggle against imperialism and making them allies of the proletarian revolution."* (Emphasis mine, H.H.)

Failure to understand the "peasant essence" of the Negro national question, is to divest the Negro movement of its profoundly revolutionary, anti-imperialist character, to reduce it to a feeble struggle for Constitutional reforms. In practice, it means to trail after the bourgeois reformists and liberals.

The Negroes are a young nation whose maturity is being artificially and forcibly retarded by imperialism which has shrouded its policy of ferocious national oppression of the Negro Americans in the form of racial persecution. We must assume that the national consciousness of the Negro people will develop to higher levels in the course of the sharp class and Negro liberation battles bulking on the horizon in the South. In the course of these battles the Negroes will inevitably be brought to a clearer understanding of their status as an oppressed nation and will put forward corresponding demands, *i.e.*, self-government, including the full right of self-determination as part of the world-wide awakening of subject and colonial nations and peoples for realization of the Four Freedoms and the Atlantic Charter, against the status quo of Messrs. Byrnes and Churchill.

It is, therefore, the duty of the

Communists, as pointed out by Comrade Foster*, to give all possible aid to that development as a means of unleashing the full anti-imperialist potential of the Negro people, thereby strengthening the fight of the American working class for democracy and socialism. For the liberation of the Negro people can be brought about only through their alliance with labor and all other democratic forces.

The demand for self-government and the land can be realized only under conditions of an advanced stage of the class struggle of the white and Negro workers against monopoly capitalism. This fight for national liberation is directed at the heart of imperialism and is therefore an important phase of the working-class struggle for socialism, although its realization is not contingent upon the attainment of socialism, as, for example, the postwar people's democracy of Yugoslavia shows. Only socialism, however, can *permanently* solve the land question in favor of the Negro majority and overwhelming masses of poor whites in the Black Belt. For a living confirmation of this truth, we have only to look at the successful solution of the agrarian and national questions in the Soviet Union.

Our analysis has sought to bring out the long range needs of the Negro people, which, when realized, will spell freedom—the solution of

* Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*, International Publishers, p. 225.

* "On Self-Determination for the Negro People," *Political Affairs*, June, 1946.

the Negro problem. In short, these needs are full economic, social and political equality throughout the country. This, in terms of the concrete economic and historical conditions of the struggle in the Black Belt, can only mean the completion of the agrarian revolution, that is, redivision of the land in favor of the masses of Negro and white tillers of the soil.

This struggle, taking place under conditions of shameless, open, and bestial national oppression, is a fight of the Negro people in the Black Belt for political power. Here it can mean only regional self-government, including the full right to self-determination of the subject Negro nation as a sovereign people.

These fundamental demands of Negro liberation are objectively tied in with the needs of the overwhelming majority of the American people who are striving for a decent world in which to live.

The fight for Negro freedom is an integral part of the struggle of the entire American working class for socialism, which alone can permanently solve the Negro agrarian and national questions in the South.

From this flows the urgent need for the formation of a fighting alliance between militant class-conscious labor and the Negro people, without which neither the victory of the working class nor the freedom of the Negro people from the imperialist yoke can be achieved.

This emphasizes the pressing task

of the Party—the education of the workers, Negro and white, in the spirit of international solidarity. It means the waging of a relentless fight within our own ranks and among the workers generally against the poison of white chauvinism, *i.e.*, the idea of “white superiority,” of “white supremacy,” the chief instrument of the ruling imperialist bourgeoisie and its Bourbon cohorts for mobilizing the masses of American white people in active support, or at least condonance, of the policy of Negro oppression.

The corrupting influence of white chauvinism has operated to maintain the most harmful division in the ranks of American labor, acting continuously as a brake upon the class struggle. It is a mainstay of capitalist domination over the working class and the masses of American people, a major obstacle to labor unity. The fight against this imperialist and essentially fascist ideology must be waged in conjunction with the task of mobilizing white labor, *i.e.*, the working class of the oppressing nation, for energetic, uncompromising, and all-out support of the full demands of the Negro people. Herein lies the road to the formation of the solid, unbreakable front of labor and the Negro people so urgently needed to beat off the growing offensive of fascist monopoly capitalism. It is the only path that will enable the class-conscious Negro contingent of American labor to assume the offensive against the racial or national narrow-

ness, suspicion and distrust fostered by its own bourgeoisie against all whites. It will enable it to win leadership and hegemony in the Negro liberation movement—in the interest of that movement and of the American labor movement as a whole.

Lenin pointed out that the center of gravity in the education of the workers of the oppressing nation must inevitably consist in the propaganda and defense by these workers of the right of self-determination for the oppressed nation. "It is our right and duty," he said, "to treat every Social-Democrat of an oppressing nation who fails to conduct such propaganda as an imperialist and a scoundrel."

In this article we make no pretense to a complete and definitive treatment of the Negro agrarian-national problem. We have attempted to set forth only the broad outlines of its solution. Many aspects still remain to be examined. The answer to many questions can be gained, not alone through study, but through the actual experience of organizing the struggle of the Negro and white agrarian masses of the South against landlord-imperialist oppression.

MINIMUM PROGRAM

An agrarian program must chart the main road toward the liberation of the masses of Negro and white soil tillers in the Black Belt from the yoke of imperialist-Bourbon landlord exploitation and oppression.

The program must proceed from a

precise estimation of the line-up of the various classes, strata, and groups, Negro and white, in relation to this goal, defining the role of each in the struggle for the above-outlined fundamental demands. In other words it must answer the questions: What groups and classes among the Negro and white population of this region would benefit from these reforms and could thus be moved into struggle for them. Which strata among them, by virtue of economic and social conditions, are the most consistent fighters for this program? Around what immediate issues can the struggle be organized and developed? Through what types and forms of organization should this struggle be channelized and developed?

We make no attempt here to answer these questions fully. However, our analysis makes clear that the entire Negro people of the Black Belt urgently need these reforms and that, as a whole, they constitute a decisive force in the struggle for their achievement. The most consistent fighters for radical change must be those lowest on the agricultural ladder, the most exploited, *i.e.*, the sharecropper and the farm laborer. Among the white minority, our analysis brings out that the masses of farm hands and croppers, as well as the small owners and renters (those not employing labor), are penalized by Negro oppression, and that their only road to freedom and the land is through the freedom of the Negroes.

These are, therefore, potential allies of the Negro people.

Around what immediate issues can joint struggle of the Negro people and the exploited sections of the white minority be organized and built?

Sharply differentiating ourselves from bourgeois-liberal, reformist programs, the line of the Communist Party in the formulation of a partial program for agrarian reforms must have as its objective the bringing of the basic masses of Negro and white land cultivators into position for the frontal assault upon the enemy's main bastion, the plantation system and its semi-feudal social and legal controls.

Proceeding from this premise, the following are some of the key issues toward which immediate struggle should be directed:

1. *Share-croppers*: Abolition of the share-cropping system, its economic and legal supports. Reduction of land rentals; lower percentage of crop yield for rentals; abolition of crop lien laws; for the legal right of the tenant to the crop, his right to sell it on the open market at his own will; for written contracts between landlord and tenant, abolition of usurious credit rates, the right of the tenant to buy where he pleases, abolition of all laws and practices supporting peonage; allocation of adequate acreage to each tenant for the raising of essential food crops.

2. *All Tenants and Small Farmers*: Reduction of land rents, the placing

of land purchasing services within the reach of small owners and of tenants. Extension of the Farm Security Program, and its rehabilitation, settlement and rental cooperative programs; increased Federal appropriations for the F.S.A., liberalization of loan services by reduction of collateral and interest rates so as to bring these loans within the reach of the masses of small farmers and tenants. A democratic reorganization of all F.S.A. local administrations, with proportional representation of Negroes on all local F.S.A. Boards. The use of idle land for settlement of displaced farm families; extension of social security to include small farmers. Free access to the land, and the removal of all privileges protecting the planters' land monopoly.

3. *Farm Laborers*: The removal of all semi-feudal proscriptions, for a living cash wage, and application of the Federal Wages and Hours Law; extension of Federal Unemployment Insurance to compensate for the seasonal character of the work; abolition of all vagrancy laws and all practices enforcing peonage; application and enforcement of the National Labor Relations Act, *i.e.*, the establishment of the right to organize, bargain collectively, and strike.

4. *Housing, Education and Health*: Federal and State support for adequate educational, housing, and health programs; equal allocation of the educational funds, equal facilities, and abolition of the Jim Crow school system.

5. *Public Works Programs*: The launching by the Federal, State and local governments of widespread public works programs, including the Missouri Valley Authority and other river valley power, flood control, and irrigation projects; rural electrification, highways, schools, hospitals, etc.

6. *Modernization of Farm Methods*: For a rational system of farming, and abolition of the single crop system; crop rotation and diversification of farming, the introduction of dairying, fruits, vegetables and new industrial crops, full production and effective farm price program.

7. *Political Democracy*: Abolition of the Jim-Crow caste system, and the establishment of full equality for Negroes in all spheres; for electoral reforms, the right to vote, hold office, abolition of white primaries, the immediate passage of Federal and State anti-poll tax legislation. The enactment of the Federal anti-lynching bill, Federal prosecution of lynchers, death penalty for lynching, the banning of the KKK and other such extra-legal terroristic organizations, The organization of joint defense, Negro and white, for active resistance to lynch terror, as an imperative task of the moment. Enforcement of the freedoms of speech, press and assembly, and the right of all farming people to organize.

The carrying out of this program means that the Party and organized labor must proceed at once to build their organizations among the agri-

cultural toilers of the Black Belt. It means the building of organization among the primary soil tillers, Negro and white. Unions of share-croppers and poor tenants must be revived and extended throughout this region. Such a program calls for the extension of the C.I.O. drive, "Operation Dixie," to embrace the masses of agricultural workers. Our line must be the building of joint organizations of Negro and white. But under circumstances should this objective be made a condition for the actual organization of the people. Experience, as in the case of the share-croppers union in the Alabama Black Belt, shows that as a result of terroristic national oppression the Negroes may desire their own separate organization. This, in some cases, may be necessary as a stage toward joint organization. Our organizational line, however, must include the building of all sorts of committees of action, uniting the agricultural masses, Negro and white, around immediate and specific issues. It must include the establishment of firm organizational links between the exploited masses in agriculture and the city industrial working class.

The carrying out of this program, in terms of our immediate tasks, means the orientation of the Party, organized labor and the National Negro Congress to the South. *It means all-out support politically, as well as concrete and practical aid, to the development of the struggle of the Negro Black Belt population for*

land and national freedom. It means a final and decisive break with the Browder revisionist negation of the revolutionary, anti-imperialist role of the Negro people.

The vast potential of the Negro Americans for anti-fascist democratic struggle has not been really tapped. Their full resources can be brought to bear in the cause of labor and American democracy only to the extent that white American labor understands and uncompromisingly supports their full and just demands. It is the job of militant labor and the

Communists to break down all barriers to the full unleashing of the struggle for Negro liberation.

It is their job to destroy the tank traps, set by the imperialist rulers and their wily agents, which block the bringing up of these strategic reserves of democracy and socialism. It is incumbent upon organized labor and, above all, its Communist vanguard, to knock from the hands of the enemy its secret weapon—the unsolved Negro question—and thus lay bare the Achilles heel of American imperialism.

On page 859 of the September issue of *Political Affairs*, the end of the first paragraph of the second column should be corrected to read: "they comprise only one-fourth of the cash tenants."
