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N O T E

The "Resolution on The Little Rock Crisis" was submitted to the January 1958 Plenum of the National Committee.

- The Plenum adopted the following motion:

"That the document received from Kirk be referred to the Political Committee for study and any necessary action and that it be published in the bulletin as part of the continuing discussion on the Negro question."

At the meeting of the Political Committee of March 11, 1958, the following two motions were adopted on the Kirk resolution:

- (1) "To reject the Kirk resolution."

Gross abstained on the motion: "I agree with Kirk's basic approach to independent militant Negro action but disagree on analyses of immediate motivation of President in sending troops."

- (2) "Motion of PC together with statement by Roberts motivating PC motion to be included in Discussion Bulletin."

RESOLUTION ON THE LITTLE ROCK CRISIS

By R. Kirk

Submitted to the January 1958 Plenum of the National Committee

The struggle in the South during the past two years has provided the most important arena of the class struggle in the United States. One of the central episodes of this unfolding struggle of the southern Negroes was the Little Rock crisis. It is a primary responsibility of the National Committee to review the intervention of the P.C. in this outstanding struggle.

The first issue of the Militant to appear after Eisenhower sent federal troops illustrates very accurately the line of the P.C. The two items are the editorial "A New Stage in the Fight" and the main story by George Lavan under the headline "Outraged Public Forces President to Use Troops."

From the Editorial: "An important victory -- comparable to the Supreme Court's original decision against school segregation -- has been won in Little Rock. A reluctant President has been compelled by an outraged public here and abroad to enforce the Negro people's constitutional rights."

"...the use of federal troops in Little Rock constitutes a precedent for the Negro people that the capitalist politicians -- much as they will squirm and try to weasel out of -- will never be able to get away from. At each crucial stage in the fight for the enforcement of the rights they now possess on paper, the Negro people will be in a position to demand federal intervention if they need it...The resulting political pressure for effective federal action against the inhuman and unconstitutional structure of Jim Crow and the capitalist politicians resistance to such pressure can blow the Republican-Democrat political monopoly sky high."

From the main news story: "An outraged world public opinion finally compelled President Eisenhower to send federal troops to escort the nine Negro school children into the Little Rock High School."

Within the framework of the middle class program of complete dependence upon the government, Mrs. Bates led a courageous and heroic struggle. But the underlying reality is that under no circumstances do individuals -- particularly of the middle class, conduct such a consistent and sustained struggle of their own initiative. Such a struggle by a small group invariably signifies that they operate upon a groundswell of mass upsurge.

At least that is the assumption or hypothesis which Marxists are bound to consider as the most likely variant from the beginning. And at all times during the struggle there were indications of the validity of such a hypothesis. Mrs. Bates' constant admonition to the masses not to intervene, certainly indicated that there was some disposition of the masses along the line of intervention.

The heroism of the middle class in this situation bears a distinct element of desperation -- that they are being pushed by the workers, who are discontented with the limited program of selective, token integration -- in itself discriminatory and prejudicial; dissatisfied with the method of love, prayer and depend upon the government. The middle class leaders were acutely aware that

they had to produce something or abdicate and permit the workers to take over the leadership of the struggle. In this respect the militancy of the middle class is in direct proportion to the pressure of the mass movement.

The facts of the Little Rock struggle refute the line of the Militant and indicate the following propositions:

1. That the decisive and fundamental factor in the Little Rock crisis was not the vague "world public opinion" but that there was a first class social crisis in Little Rock, with which local authorities could not cope. A social crisis which threatened to develop into a national political crisis with international ramifications. The active force of both these crises were the Negro people.
2. That the act of sending troops to Little Rock, along with permitting the integration of the nine Negro students, also effectively cut off an insurgent movement of the Negro masses there which was beginning to erupt at the very time of the government intervention.
3. That the administration used its bold action to cover up a retreat in basic policy which foreshadows a further compromise on the question of integration and civil rights in general.
4. That however defeated the southern reaction was at Little Rock it salvaged important concessions of its own which are not even alluded to in the Militant.

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The Social Crisis at Little Rock

For the past few years there have been two main themes in the southern movement. One is "brotherly love;" the other is "fight back." The history of the southern struggle since the beginning of World War II demonstrates that the "fight back" tendency is the fundamental trend among the masses, a trend which found its first public organized and sustained form in the Montgomery Bus strike. That the program for peace and brotherly love is designed as an antidote to the desire of the masses to fight back and an attempt to dissuade them from the course of mass action.

The middle class leaders attempted to super-impose this program upon the Montgomery movement under the label of "passive resistance." Thus, the two extremes faced each other within the movement: but there was now drawn battle between them, and they operated apparently with contradiction.

And because this contradiction did not break out into the open at Montgomery, the P.C. argued at the recent National Convention, that it didn't exist at all -- that Rev. King's "passive resistance" and mass struggle are the same thing. But the events at Little Rock demonstrate that there is an essential conflict between the middle class program and the mass movement which will eventually reveal itself.

In the days preceding the Little Rock crisis the incipient conflict is clearly revealed in the account by "Jet," September 19th, of "Terror in Alabama: Minister Routs Night Riders; Klansmen Castrate Negro."

"Down in Alabama, where a part-time minister was being hailed as a hero after routing three carloads of night riders with his shotgun, Negroes had hardly begun to celebrate when whites set off a new reign of terror. Crosses were burned at Birmingham, and Bessemer; a Negro was sexually mutilated at Tarrant..."

The article tells the whole story of the shotgun victory, summarizing it in these words: "Benson's blasting that cracker (his arm was later amputated) did as much good as Rev. M.S. King's love and prayer movement." (emphasis added.)

Next it details the mutilation of Judge Aaron, concluding: "...for the thousands of Negroes who planned to stay, in the South many were taking comfort in the fact that Nathaniel Benson's shot-gun blast had been ruled justifiable by Marion police, and were planning similar action if klansmen came to call. For a while no one would upset the King plan of prayer and love, but it seemed to those hearing of Benson's bravery that guts and guns might win a temporary truce in the black belt." (emphasis added.)

This significant story, carefully works on the contrast between "Nate" Benson and Judge Aaron and it is quite apparent that its author is attempting to show in it the contrast between two programs: prayer and love -- he identifies with the castration of Aaron; fight back -- ("guts and guns") is symbolized by Benson's victory.

Then the Little Rock crisis erupted. The radical and capitalist press generally agree that the struggle was limited to a small handful of Negroes: Mrs. Bates, the nine children, a handful of courageous newspapermen, backed by the "small but staunch NAACP branch at Little Rock" as it is described in the Militant.

This silence on the actions of the masses is quite understandable in the capitalist press. However, it is inexcusable in the Militant in light of the publicity given it in the Negro press which, in spite of a general bias in favor of the traditional official NAACP leadership and method of legalistic struggle and its hostility to mass action, nevertheless gives strong hints as to the real state of affairs: there was civil war in Little Rock. A civil war in which the white supremacists could not hold their own. A civil war which if left to continue would have probably resulted in an overwhelming victory for the Negroes, in spite of the fact that all action was opposed by the middle class leadership.

The Amsterdam News, September 28th, in its main story by James L. Hicks, one of the victims of the Monday mob at Central High School sub-headlines it: "IKE MOVES AS NEGROES HIT BACK." -- a more truthful headline than the Militant's "Outraged Public Forces President to Use Troops."

The Arkansas National Guard was removed from Central High School for the Monday morning riot. Tuesday night Eisenhower sent the troops in. What happened during this time? The contention of the Militant (and in this respect there is virtual unanimity in both the radical and capitalist press) was the "public opinion" world wide, national, etc. intervened with its pressure, forcing Eisenhower to act.

To be sure, the U.S. government was in a bad position in world wide public opinion, but the imperative necessity for drastic action came from the civil war in Little Rock of that Monday night in which the Negroes fought back.

Hicks again: "The President's statement (ordering the troops) came as the city of Little Rock had taken on the appearance of a runaway express train driven by a half-witted engineer who was acting as if he didn't give a tinker's damn where he was going and cared a(s) little as to how he would get there.

"It came eight hours after Little Rock police had broken up a 100 car motorcade of white people who had advanced within a block and a half of the Bates..home...

"It followed a night which showed the Negroes beginning to fight back in Little Rock, and a night in which a carload of Negroes trying to run down a state trooper, caused him to fire a hail of bullets...."

The reporter for "Jet" saw this: "as tension in the city soared, an already-fatigued police force found an unwanted ally to stave off 'occupation' by the mob: Little Rock Negroes." Everyone agrees that there was a considerable amount of police activity that night. But the scarcely disguised pride of the Negro press in how many of their number were arrested and for what, its glowing accounts of the violent defensive actions of the Negro community are indications of the upsurge.

Jet: "An estimated 150 persons, white and colored, were booked on assault and disorderly charges. One Negro minister admitted carrying a gun to a nighttime church meeting. At the white-owned Gem Theatre the booth girl reported selling only one ticket during the usually heavy two-hour stretch from six to eight P.M.

"A.C. Lamb, director of the Dunbar Recreation Center, closed his doors at 7:30 instead of 10 on Monday evening of the rioting. 'Negro youngsters were congregating around the water fountains, then going out in gangs' he said. 'They were willing to fight...they can't be stepped on.'said Rev. T. C. Hug, of the nearly month-long tempest: 'I can't condone violence, but while we're not bullies, we're not cowards either.'"

What did the "gangs" congregating at the water fountain do? Mr. Hicks describes the actions of one such gang: "a group of about 60 Negro boys went downtown to the edge of the white area where they held a pitched battle with about 40 whites. The Negroes came out on top before police broke up the affair, but this one had the makings of a full scale race riot.

"After the fight was broken up, the word was spread on Ninth Street in the Negro district that the whites were coming back to 'blow up the whole street.'

"Six Negro policemen were armed with riot guns in the Negro area and they spent half the night trying to break up, hold down and disperse a mob of Negro men who congregated on Ninth Street and virtually prayed that the whites would come to the area.

"In this cold war of nerves Monday night someone apparently got the idea that if they could frighten Negroes they would stay in their homes and hold down trouble.

"Thus the Fire Department at intervals sent two fire engines racing down parallel streets in the Negro area with their sirens wailing as loudly as they could.

"Instead of making Negroes stay in their homes, however, the sirens served only to awaken and alert what few had gone to bed. And after the third run of the fire engines the entire Negro community was up and either on the streets or lurking with whatever weapons they possessed behind raised windows and drawn shades.

"This reporter and another newsman made a check of one such area and found it alerted like a military battalion. We saw no guns -- but it is my experience that people do not make such preparations empty-handed."

The Jet reporter interviewed a porter on 9th Street during the rioting who summed it up: "The great thing about this struggle is that Negroes refused to run inside their houses and hide. They came out on the streets and fought."

At this moment Rev. King was confirming the policy of the leadership in his urgent telegram to Mrs. Bates: "I urge the people of Little Rock to adhere rigorously to the way of non-violence at this time...You must meet physical force with soul force." This was a fitting complement to Mrs. Bates' constant admonition to Little Rock Negroes to do nothing: wait for the government to act.

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The National Political Crises

The principal factor in the national picture was not the general and amorphous "public indignation" as the editors of the Militant expressed it, but something far more serious. The temper of the Negro community is best revealed in the political H-bomb set off by Louis Armstrong: "The way they treat my people down there, the government can go to Hell."

Interviewed by a Pittsburg Courier reporter the following day his wife, admitting to being surprised said: "Louis expressed himself in 1921 style, New Orleans. He doesn't want to leave any room for misunderstanding. He doesn't say things to blow off steam, .. he must have been thinking about it for a long time."

The Armstrong action is significant because it represents an explosion from the most conservative of the popular figures of the entertainment world. Armstrong, reputed to be an Uncle Tom, sharply criticized for his concessions to white supremacy, never known to have lent his name to a progressive cause, even musically boycotted because of his political and racial conservatism, who always considered himself above politics, this Armstrong, surmounting a crystallized tradition of nearly half a century, became a hero overnight.

The way that virtually all spokesmen from left to right in the Negro community solidarized themselves with Louis revealed the threat of Negro explosion.

Front page headline of "The Call," Kansas City, September 27th: "Satch Sounds Off on U.S." Every Negro newspaper carries front page articles of all

the celebrities supporting him: "Eartha Kitt says Bias Makes her Feel 'Not Human' -- Jackie Robinson, Lena Horne Laud Trumpeters Jab" (The Call).

Virtually every Negro editor and even the gossip columnist must have something to say about Louis: Alice A. Dunningan, columnist in the Pittsburgh Courier, October 5th: "He is no. 1 in my book Without making any special effort, Louis (Satchmo) Armstrong has won for himself a place in the sun ... By speaking his mind on the Arkansas situation, Satchmo has suddenly become the most respected spokesman among Negro Americans."

New York City Councilman Earl Brown in the Amsterdam News: "Satchmo Blows Hot ... Our government has been employing Negro intellectuals, entertainers, ministers and many others to play the role of Ambassadorial Uncle Toms for years. They are supposed to show their well-fed, well groomed faces behind the Iron Curtain as living proof that everyone is free and equal in the U.S. and the color bar is myth.

"But it took Satchmo to blow the whistle and let the world know that he doesn't go for this kind of stuff."

Nat D. Williams in the Courier: "MEMPHIS....Beal Street jumped with the jitters when Satchmo said 'Solid'It's 'solid' because on Beal St. and around, it expresses clearly the feelings of a lot of Negroes who haven't been previously beating their gums about desegregation-integration tussel.

"It expresses the feeling of the peace loving, law abiding, compromise seeking Negroes who have been driven to the point of recklessness and desperation by the foul-mouthed, venom-spitting, hate infested, fiendishly unreasoning selfishness and ignorance of white folk who have not and never will accept American concepts of liberty, equality and justice and the dignity of the individual.

"To Beal Streeters, Armstrong's dramatic emotional outcry, as a well placed voice in the wilderness of white America's conscience...and there were sounds like the preview music Gabriel might blow for Judgement day. Selah!"

Judgement Day Music: The Government can go to hell! No reader had to study very long to recognize what judgement day he was referring to.

The Amsterdam News Editorializes: "A Satchelmouthful.... Many of us might not have been as blunt and pointed as Louis was but now that he has said it we might as well be honest about it and admit that no matter how crude he was in saying it he did a darn good job of summing up the way most of us feel...

"Rev. King, who is a much more tactful orator than Louis Armstrong puts it this way: 'There comes a time when people get tired of being pushed out of the glittering sunlight of life's July and left standing in the piercing chill of an Alpine November'.....anyone who is willing to read between the lines of Dr. King's fine oratory could see that he was saying that Negroes get tired of being treated like dogs just like other people do.

"But apparently not too many people were willing to read between the lines of Rev. King's statement so now we have Louis Armstrong putting it down for them in Seventh Avenue talk.

"And we suggest that any white person who happened to have been confused by what Martin Luther King said can now clear up all the confusion by listening to Louis Armstrong."

The conservative Chicago Defender runs the following editorial comment: "Ole Satchmo shook the world...His words had both the timing and the explosive effect of an H-bomb. They reverberated around the world. It wasn't long after he had dropped the verbal explosives that swift military action brought on a change in the Little Rock crises....."

"While our high-powered leaders recoiled into their shells, ole Satchmo stepped into the breach to battle the enemy. He may not have been grammatical, but he was eloquent; he may not have been rhetorical, but he was sincere. For his courage, sincerity and vision we recommend him for the NAACP's Spingarn medal."

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The editors of the Militant could not fail to get an inkling of opinions expressed so strongly and openly, and gave the following recognition of the sentiments of the Negro community: "The pressure compelling Eisenhower's about face was both national and international. In this country the Negro people were aroused to an anger surpassing even that caused by the lynching of 14 year old Emmett Till two years ago. Backing this up was the mass indignation of the white workers and middle class in all sections of the country save sections of the Deep South."

But the Militant doesn't see the origin and mainspring of the Negro mass movement: the Little Rock Negro masses, who, against injunctions of their leaders and without organization, nevertheless, fought back, creating a social crisis in Arkansas. Nor does it see the magnitude of the incipient national political crisis threatened by the unification of the Negro community around the slogan of: "The Government can go to hell!" It did not seem to realize that when the conservative Negroes start talking about the Judgement day of white supremacy in the context of Armstrong's blast it means look out Uncle Sam. The ruling class of the U.S. faced a political crisis of the first magnitude which threatened serious immediate disruption of the two party system.

These are the essential reasons for the government action:

1. The crisis in Little Rock had gone beyond the power of the local authorities. 25,000 Negroes were poised and ready for action -- many of them did act. They held a strong strategic position in that the overwhelming public opinion of Little Rock whites was either apathetic or sympathetic to the Negroes. The largest mob that all the agencies of reaction, including the official apparatus of the State government, could muster after a month of organization under the protection of the National Guard was a thousand white supremacists -- many if not most of them "country people."

This relationship of forces was born out in all of the incidents of that Monday night before the Federal troops were called ... the fire engine trick was an obvious expression of the desperation of the local authorities.

2. The national political crises created by the Negro people.
3. "Outraged world public opinion."

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International Aspects

It would be foolish to claim that international pressure upon American capitalism was not a factor in the Little Rock situation, and taken in its entirely subordinate role it is correct to demonstrate how it operates in support of the Negro struggle in the U.S.

This is shown quite well in a vicious attack upon Armstrong by Hearst columnist Bishop in the papers of December 31st: "I was in Europe when this mess began. It was a big story here. It was bigger over there. Mr. Louis Armstrong's picture was plastered on the front pages in England, in France, in Italy, in Germany."

He illustrates the fact that it was precisely the political crisis in the U.S. originating among the Little Rock Negroes, who created the atmosphere for the brave acts of 9 school children, the political crisis triggered by Armstrong which threatened to infect the international relations of the government.

However, there is an uncomfortable unanimity of opinion on the primary role of international politics in the concessions made by the government to the Negro people. It should have been a warning to the P.C. that the Republicans, Democrats and Stalinists all agree. And the P.C. tends toward this construction of the situation, if only by ignoring the real motive forces and failing to analyze the claims of our enemies for the primary role of international pressures.

Why is this "international" analysis so acceptable to Eisenhower, for instance. Because this is the formula by which he retains fraternal and bipartisan relations with the southern bourbons. It mitigates the "betrayal" of white supremacy to refuse to recognize that the concessions were granted to the Negroes on their demand. To recognize the Negro movement to the extent of openly admitting giving concessions to it would be a violation of Jim Crow etiquette.

With the "international" theory, Eisenhower and the southern governors can approach the race question from the same position of principle: that white supremacy is right and good. But Eisenhower points out that the international situation just won't let them act according to the principles of the thing because the Communists distort the question all over the world. Even in the name of white supremacy he can plead for toleration by the Bourbons of his moves.

The Communist Party, too, is devoted to the "international" interpretation of these concessions, and theirs forms the other side of Eisenhower's policy. The Stalinist version is a shabby attempt to restore the prestige of the Soviet Bureaucracy at the expense of the Negro people in the U.S.: it is the pressure of the Soviet government, rather than the action of the Negro masses which is responsible for these gains.

According to this version the Negroes in the U.S. owe everything they have to the Stalinist bureaucracy. But they are too ignorant to recognize it and constantly bite the hand that feeds them. An evidence of the extreme backwardness of the

Negroes is that many of the Negro militants who are the best and most advanced of the lot, identify themselves with the Freedom Fighters of Hungary. What better evidence of ignorance and backwardness of the masses is this?

We must expose the phoney "internationalism" of both Eisenhower and the Stalinists.

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The Retreat of the Administration and the Positive Gains of the Southern Reaction.

It is necessary to assess carefully the position of the Little Rock crisis in the total relationship of forces in the South. The Militant sees only the victory of the Negroes and how they can use this precedent to go on to bigger things. This approach ignores the positive gains made by the southern reaction as a result of having taken the initiative and been bailed out by the administration before their weakness became revealed.

Two months after the event the Militant finds out that "Racists in Little Rock Grow Stronger as Government Retreats." The November 25th Militant gives a belated account of secondary aspects of the Government "retreat."

The formulation of George Lavan is this: "The Eisenhower administration, jarred out of its no-enforcement attitude on school desegregation by the worldwide storm of anger over Little Rock, sent federal troops. Instead of following through, the administration, once the pressure of public opinion on it ceased, slumped back into appeasing the southern white-supremacists."

Comrade Lavan is too charitable to the Eisenhower administration as is the editorial on the front page of the same issue on "Labor's Duty in the Fight for Integration.:" "It [the government] is attempting to retreat from the scene as hastily as possible."

The truth, obvious from the first moment of presidential intervention is that the calling of federal troops was to be used by the administration as a smoke screen to hide a calculated retreat on the question of integration and civil rights in general in the Deep South. That is, the retreat began months before the Militant saw it, simultaneously with the action itself.

The P.C. should have asked itself the following question: How did Eisenhower remain on terms of negotiation with the southern governors all during the period of crisis at the moment when he was refusing even an audience to the Negro leaders? These governors, while putting up a facade of Honest John Law and Order demagoguery are generally in the camp of "massive resistance" to integration.

Under conditions of this crisis Eisenhower patently had to offer them something substantial to continue the negotiations. To begin with he acceded to a few of the key demands placed upon him by Faubus and the others: 1) He agreed to remove the troops and place the situation back in Faubus' hands under conditions originally agreed to but upon which Faubus reneged.

2. He immediately removed Judge Davis, the "Northern" Federal Judge at Little Rock, the target of a great deal of southern condemnation, and replaced him with a southerner, as demanded by Faubus.

3. Within a few days he "accepted the resignation" of Attorney General Brownell, the other target of the Bourbons, credited by insiders as the one in the administration who was responsible for the troops policy.

These are moves which show a direction of motion rather clearly: to further compromise the present plans for elementary and secondary school integration in the Deep South.

These concessions were followed by others: integration in Texas public schools indefinitely delayed by Federal Court order: 3 (out of a total of 6) southern democrats appointed to the Civil Rights Commission.

What was the goal of the Southern Reaction at Little Rock? The Little Rock crisis was precipitated by the extremist Bourbon politicians of the Deep South. It was instigated and organized from the beginning by Roy V. Harris of Augusta, Ga., publisher, politician, banker, businessman, utilities owner, executive director of the States Rights Councils of Georgia, Inc., and "man behind the throne" of many southern governors, including Gov. Griffin of Georgia. This was adequately proved and exposed by an excellent series in the Pittsburg Courier. The Arkansas fight was to be a trial balloon -- a guinea pig for his "Georgia Plan" to fight integration.

It was not the "liberal" Faubus that the Negroes were in struggle with the political heart of white supremacy. After a struggle in which the main adversaries have committed themselves to the extent that these have, it is necessary to make a sober overall analysis of the results.

The Militant has been content to hail the great victory and then to bemoan the backsliding of an administration policy which was never nearly as far advanced as the Militant editors thought in the first place.

There is no question that the white supremacists were licked at Little Rock. How much worse they would have been beaten if the Federal Government had not stepped in, preventing a mass action by 25,000 Negroes will not be known until such a struggle actually takes place. But it was a definite tactical defeat for the Bourbons.

But when evaluating their goals it is well to keep in mind an important tradition: for 150 years the routine manner in which southern rulers have advanced their "peculiar" interests even in the face of a nation with its majority hostile to the southern system has been the following formula: put up a struggle in order to force a compromise.

It is difficult, if not impossible as yet to know the full extent of the compromise which the southern reaction won at Little Rock. We do know that the removal of Judge Davis and his replacement by a southerner tends to set a new pattern for implementation of Federal laws dealing with the race question: that they shall be under the jurisdiction of southern Federal judges. This was one of the primary demands put forward by Faubus in his demagogic defense of the white south.

Obviously delay is an important element in the plans of the Bourbons. During last summer the Negro leadership was preparing for a showdown fight for integration in Georgia. The struggle at Little Rock forced the Negro leadership to abandon its plans in Georgia. Thus, regardless of the outcome of the Little Rock struggle, it served the Bourbons as a means of keeping the struggle out of the deep South -- and this may have been their principal objective.

On every occasion, the Administration has indicated its desire to find a compromise formula which would meet the requirements of the Bourbons in practice if not in principle. Eisenhower's extreme interest in the "Louisville Plan" of voluntary segregation (never mentioned by the Militant) was one warning. His original proposal to Faubus for a "cooling off" period, another.

It was an elementary duty for the Militant to sound a warning at the very beginning of Eisenhower's move with the troops. The P.C. should recall Jackson's militant stand against the nullificationists on the tariff question. All the sword rattling against South Carolina was only a ruse to disguise Jackson's compromise on the tariff in which he substantially satisfied Calhoun.

The Federal integration at Little Rock bears a number of similarities to the Jackson-Calhoun controversy. This tends to modify considerably its character as a "victory comparable to the Supreme Court ruling on segregation in the public schools" as the Militant puts it. The decision in Texas throws light upon the possible nature of the compromise sought by the Bourbons and the administration: a coup de grace to the already badly mutilated Supreme Court decision -- substitute "indefinite delay" for "all deliberate speed."

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The Plenum acts to correct the failure of the Militant in the Little Rock crisis as follows:

1. The substance of this resolution including the facts and basic analysis shall be published in the Militant as the official Party evaluation of the Little Rock situation as a whole.
2. This resolution and all other documents pertaining to the subject which have not yet been made available to the party membership shall be published in the internal bulletin.

January 1958

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Remarks on Kirk Resolution

"ON THE LITTLE ROCK CRISIS"

-- By Dan Roberts

I am opposed to Kirk's resolution on Little Rock. I do not believe that the events bear out his appraisal of the Little Rock crisis nor warrant abandoning the line of the resolution on the Negro question today adopted by the convention in favor of the line of his convention resolution. For that is the purpose of Kirk's resolution on Little Rock. He seeks to show by means of an interpretation of the events there that his convention resolution has been borne out.

Kirk maintains, in opposition to the convention resolution, that the present impetus for the Negro struggle and the cause for civil-rights gains comes in the first place from the Negro masses' own, spontaneous rebellion against Jim Crow. The Militant analyzed Eisenhower's troop intervention in Little Rock as stemming above all from the pressure of international public opinion. The Negroes took the first step with their determination to send the children to school. But it was the world-wide outcry against the racists which forced Eisenhower to act, including the anger and pressure of Negroes and whites in the U.S. -- especially where the whites were concerned, in the North and West.

There are actually three points of view in the party on what has brought the civil-rights issue to crisis proportions in the U.S. The point of view embodied in the last convention resolution holds that, while the Negro struggle was well under way in its own right, its advances do not explain the Supreme Court school decision and other legal victories scored in recent years by the Negro people. The Negro struggle has progressed still further emboldened by the legal victories, but in our opinion, the Negro struggle at home was not yet the principal determinant even at the time of the Little Rock events. Rather, we believe that what has made the civil rights issue such a paramount domestic concern in the past years has been the black eye that the Jim-Crow system gives U.S. imperialism abroad and especially in the colonial world.

A second viewpoint is the one advanced by Lois Saunders in an article in the ISR and by Arne Swaback in the Militant. They see the main impetus to a sharpening of the civil-rights question in Northern Big Business finding the Southern race system an obstacle to the free investment of their capital in the South.

Finally Kirk holds that the acuteness of the civil-rights issue is an accurate measure of the strength and revolutionary drive of the Negro people themselves and is caused directly by it.

Now there is nothing wrong in principle with any of the three analyses. The only question is which one is factually correct. But that is not Kirk's approach. He puts his interpretation forward, virtually as a matter of principle. Any other approach he denounces as "paternalistic," as he did with our resolution at the last convention, or as an outlook that stems from capitalist politicians or Stalinists, whose aim is to deceive the Negro masses. Kirk holds that if we don't credit the Negro people at every given moment for civil-rights progress, then we are implying somehow, that the Negroes are not capable of revolutionary

Roberts

effort. But that is an arbitrary construction. I don't know of a single struggle by any people anywhere that does not owe its impulsion to some outside force -- either the contradictions within the ruling class or ruling nations or the inspiration of a revolution in another country.

We never contended that the Negroes would win equality at the hands of the colonial revolution. But we are trying to assess what stage of development the Negro struggle has reached and what it can achieve on its own at any given stage. At the time of the U.S. Supreme Court school decision, and before that when Eisenhower issued a decree abolishing Jim Crow in the armed forces, the PC could not explain these concessions as stemming primarily from the activities of the Negroes here, and had to look for causes elsewhere. And although the Negro movement has gone forward rapidly since then, and has started to organize on a significant scale to press home its advantages, we still could not find the explanation for Eisenhower's sending the troops to Little Rock in the level of struggle reached by the Negro community itself.

But as I said, Kirk demands that the explanation be found there in the first place and nowhere else.

He cites a series of happenings in Little Rock on the Monday night after Faubus withdrew the National Guard and the nine children went to school with Mrs. Bates under police escort. They stayed in school until noon and were forced out again. Kirk says that then the Negroes and racist gangs engaged in partial encounters, and came to the verge of pitched battle. He maintains that the Negroes were holding their own and that victory was in their grasp. The Negro community stood poised for action the next day, he contends. The Federal Troops then intervened to prevent from scoring their victory -- by which, I take it, he means doing the job themselves of insuring that the nine and perhaps more than nine would attend school.

True the Militant did not deal with the engagements that took place between white and Negro in Little Rock. We didn't have Jet, which carried the most significant accounts. But Jet's account makes no difference as to what conclusions we ought to reach as to the real march of events.

From the quotations that Kirk provides, it is clear that the Negroes were organizing to defend themselves in their community against invasion by the white hoodlums. The whites sought to extend their victory at the Central High School into a terrorization campaign against the Negroes, and the latter mobilized to rout them. Readiness for self-defense of the Negro community is a condition that obtains, I believe, in all the major cities in the South. White gangs are not able to march into the Negro communities and get out with their hides. In all major Negro communities, and especially wherever there is a challenge on against some aspect of Jim Crow, the Negroes are more or less organized to meet invasions by white hoodlums. That was true in Montgomery, where all acts of violence by whites against Negroes were in the form of bombings in the middle of the night. Whites would speed in a car to the house of the intended victim, throw the bomb in a hurry and speed away. They knew it wasn't healthy to stick around. The Militant has carried accounts from time to time reporting this readiness of the Negroes to defend their communities. Judging by Kirk's quotations from Jet, this happened in Little Rock, too.

Roberts

But this readiness to defend themselves only aggravates the contradiction that the Negroes face: They can defend themselves in their ghettos, but how are they to tear down the ghetto walls? Kirk implies that it will happen by the community passing over from defense to offense. He implies further that this was about to happen in Little Rock. The majority of whites are either apathetic or sympathetic to the Negroes. The white racists can no longer command imposing forces. A Negro push outward, not fearing to collide against the white hoodlums, would have brought victory. This type of action represents the next great step in the Negro struggle. Because of its far-reaching revolutionary effect, Eisenhower moved to thwart it at Little Rock. That is Kirk's appraisal in substance.

Consequently he sees two main obstacles to the Negroes taking what he believes is the next indicated step. One is turning to the Federal Government for aid. The other is the Ghandi-type "passive resistance" line preached by M.L. King and others, which in the name of turning the other cheek would bar the kind of action that might force Negroes to engage in physical combat. The main task of revolutionary socialists he sees as exposing a policy of appealing to the Federal Government and exposing "passive resistance."

I believe the road of struggle that Kirk indicates is adventuristic and is not the one the Negro masses have adopted or will adopt. They are up against a very tough problem of tactics. They want to capitalize on the support they are getting abroad. But they are also an isolated force in the South itself. They are probing every way they know of to begin scoring victories against Jim Crow despite the odds against them in the South. Passive resistance when wed to mass organization and when taking the form of economic boycott gave them such a tactic in Montgomery. The masses were not addicted to Ghandism -- only the preachers were. The masses were ready to use violence in self-defense in the community. But they made use of a "Ghandist" method -- in reality, an elementary weapon of mass action -- to break down one of the hated features of Jim Crow. Similarly, they continue to seek to get the federal government to act on their side. Currently, they are trying to organize their voting power. I believe, however, that despite the impetus their struggle has received from the intervention of the colonial revolution, the Negro struggle in the South has been slowed down by the magnitude of the odds against them. The racists have the upper hand in the South at present and we should not deceive ourselves about that.

What prospects do the Negroes have for victory in the South? I believe their prospects lie along one of two roads: either through a labor-controlled federal government coming in from the North to aid the Negro people; or through an insurgent working-class movement in the South that unites whites and Negroes. I believe -- and this is the line of the convention resolution -- that the second variant is the one that will come to pass. However, the actual situation in the South today is at almost 180-degree variance from the white-Negro unity we predict and work for. Racism has the upper hand in the working class, too. Under those conditions, the significance of every act of Negro struggle -- and especially of those actions, whether legal or "mass passive" that challenge the Jim Crow system -- is that it hits at the white consciousness. The fact that the Negro issue is a major national and international question, and that every act of Negro resistance to Jim Crow, has such great repercussions cannot help but shake up white workers' consciousness, even if in many cases it initially stiffens the racist feeling.

Roberts

Consequently, I don't see the need for a course that shuns appeals to the Federal government or for making our central polemic in the Negro struggle an attack on Ghandism. I see the need for attacks on any policy of reliance on the capitalist parties and the capitalist state, but not of demands that it go into action on behalf of the Negro people.

Demands on the government for federal action or defensive "passive resistance" slogans will act as a brake on the struggle only when a united white and Negro working class movement emerges in the South and challenges the ruling class for power.

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ANSWER TO DAN ROBERTS

-- by Lois Saunders

In an article entitled "Remarks on Kirk Resolution on the Little Rock Crisis," Dan Roberts throws in the following paragraph:

"A second viewpoint is the one advanced by Lois Saunders in an article in the ISR and by Arne Swaback in the Militant. They see the main impetus to a sharpening of the civil rights question in Northern Big Business finding the Southern race system an obstacle to the free investment of their capital in the South."

This bare, unsupported summation is a misrepresentation of my views as expressed in the article referred to, "Congress Bows to the South," in the Fall 1957 issue of the International Socialist Review. The article did not deal with Little Rock, but with the Civil Rights debate in Congress.

I find it difficult to understand why, in discussing Little Rock, Comrade Roberts should have brought in an article analyzing another event. Especially so, since he mentioned it only to dismiss it curtly in a brief sentence. I am also puzzled as to why he coupled my position with that of Arne Swaback who expressed a quite different viewpoint in an article in the Militant.

I would welcome a discussion with Comrade Roberts on the views I expressed in my article. But first, I think, he should find out what those views are.

To set the basis for such a discussion and to clear up incorrect impressions, I want to emphasize that I reject any analysis of race relations which singles out one causative factor, to the virtual exclusion of all others. Marxist analysis is all-sided, not one-sided. An analysis based on economics, which ignores political factors is false. An analysis which sees only the attempts of Negroes to batter down race restrictions is false. An analysis which interprets altered race relations on the basis of revolutionary convulsions in the colonies, the needs of U.S. diplomacy or the political maneuverings of the Republican or the Democratic parties is false.

There is an action and interaction of criss-crossing interests and forces in race relations just as there is in all other spheres of life. The efforts of Negroes to break through the crippling restraints placed upon them have been a continuing factor in American life, reaching back into the days of slavery. Under certain circumstances, these efforts, aided by other factors on the national and international scene, lead to partial successes. In the 1930's Negroes made significant gains on the job front due to the depression-spurred activity of the white workers which gave rise to the CIO. In the early 1940's they made further gains due to the war needs of American capitalism, plus the March-on-Washington movement, which goaded President Roosevelt into issuing his war-time FEPC order.

Negroes are a minority in the United States, a suppressed minority. Until the victory of socialism, when the oppression of a segment of the population on the basis of skin color will no longer serve any special interests, Negroes will make gains only when their demands find support in a segment of the white population of this country or in revolutionary developments abroad. Such revolutionary developments act as a pressure upon the American ruling class, while at the same time they encourage and reinforce the determination of the Negroes to reach out for their democratic rights.

The fortunes of the Negroes are affected by the economic and political needs of Big Business and the contradictions within the American bourgeoisie, just as they are also affected by the combativity of the working class, the rise of revolutionary forces abroad, the militancy of the socialist forces in this country, economic depressions, witch hunts, wars and Negro leadership and unity.

These generalized views formed the basis of my article on the passage by Congress of the first Civil Rights law since Reconstruction. It dealt with the complex factors, economic and political, national and international, which resulted in the break-up of the Republican-Dixiecrat coalition which had existed since 1876. I attempted to analyze the reversal in the position of a wing of the Republican Party. I pointed to the importance of the Negro vote. I stressed the present economic needs of Big Business. Then I stated (ISR Fall 1957, p. 120):

"If economic factors today favor a modification in the Jim Crow pattern, political pressures point even more powerfully in the same direction. These stem from the revolutionary ferment and upheavals American imperialism faces abroad in its drive for world power and from the mounting insistence of the Negro people at home for equality.

"Southern treatment of the Negro has become a liability in the carrying out of American foreign policy. The people of Africa and Asia are keenly sensitive to capitalist America's treatment of the Negro minority. The State Department finds it increasingly difficult to explain away such incidents as the kidnaping and lynching of 14-year-old Emmett Till in Mississippi, the barring of Autherine Lucy, to the accompaniment of violence, from the University of Alabama, or the refusal of a Texas airport cafe manager to serve an Indian Ambassador except on a segregated basis ...

"At home the South's stiff repressive laws and its anti-Negro violence add fuel to an already explosive situation. Despite the peculiar Southern methods and the spreading aggressions of the White Citizens Councils, the Negro is no longer docile. He is demanding his rights. He took those demands directly to Washington in the Prayer Pilgrimage May 17. The rise of a new national political consciousness on the part of the Negro, as signified by that demonstration, was noted by the Administration and by Wall Street. Faced with pressure from the Negro, Big Business recognizes the need for timely concessions to lessen the danger of serious political convulsions."

This certainly does not add up to a position in which the desire of Big Business for a larger field of investment in the South becomes the "main impetus to a sharpening of the civil rights question," as Comrade Roberts states. It was one factor, and an important one, in bringing about the passage of the Civil Rights law in the summer of 1957. Other factors were in the forefront of the battle of Little Rock.