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SPEECH ON OUR NEGRO RESOLUTION

By J. Meyer

Delivered to a New York City Membership Meeting, April 19, 1949

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It is now some nine months, ten months, since our last national convention. That convention, as you know, adopted a position on the Negro question. It was not exactly a new position, but at least it was a position sharpened, clarified, brought up to date; it opened up a particular perspective for the party, in relation to our experiences, and in relation to the general status to which the Negro struggle and the struggle of the proletariat have brought this particular question.

Now ten months have passed -- it is an unusually long time for the beginning of a discussion on a convention resolution. Nevertheless there were reasons and it gives us some advantages. We have had the opportunity of further reflection and, in this intensive period in which we live, we have had certain experiences by which we can judge our resolution. We can extend it. We can, if necessary, amend it. And we can develop further perspectives from the consideration that we have had of it, and from the events that have taken place. Corrections, emendations, additions, extensions, are all in order. None of a qualitative degree, because qualitative developments of political positions are matters for the Political Committee and the party itself extends them in a party convention.

But, nevertheless, over the past months we have seen what has happened in the country at large and we have been able to test our resolution by it.

First, now, to review briefly what the resolution states.

The most striking section of the resolution made it quite clear that for us the independent Negro struggle had a validity of its own, and was a constituent part of the struggle for socialism, not to be looked upon in any way as episodic. On the other hand, the resolution did not weaken but strengthened the basic position that only socialism can solve the humiliation and the degradation from which the Negro people suffer in the United States. Thirdly, we decided, after taking all this into consideration, that the NAACP is the most powerful, the best known, and in its way the most effective Negro organization and should be the Negro organization in which the party should concentrate that part of its work. And we decided also that in order to fight against the various problems and difficulties that the Negro question imposes upon us in the trade unions and in the party, it was necessary to build up a body of Marxist ideas, Marxist history, Marxist analysis, Marxist perspectives, in order to drive out all bourgeois ideas on the Negro question. We recognized that we had constantly to fight the powerful infiltration not only in crude but in subtle ways of American bourgeois race prejudice, not only into the labor movement but even into the ranks of the party.

And, finally, we came to the conclusion that in taking this position on the Negro question and in struggling for it, we were going beyond the Negro question. It is so important in the general life

and political life of the United States that fundamental and revolutionary positions taken on it inevitably go beyond. And the party, by making its position on the Negro question clear, its revolutionary position, would not only be coming forward as the leader of Negroes, it would be making clear not only to Negroes, but to the workers and the whole country our determination to do everything within our power to assist the proletariat in the overthrow of bourgeois society.

Now we are able this evening to do a few things. (1) To look and see how far the development of political events in the country have strengthened the position we took; (2) to take a glimpse, and no more than a glimpse, because we cannot do everything in one evening, at the milieu in which we decided to work -- the NAACP -- and the social and political forces that are playing on it. And finally, this evening, to place before you the results of discussions among those members of the Political Committee who are specifically interested, or rather who guide the Negro work, to give you some idea of some theoretical perspectives that we have for an ideological offensive against one of our main enemies on the Negro question -- the Stalinists.

These three are very closely related to the fundamental political position that we took at the convention. This, I hardly need remind you, is the beginning of a discussion on these points. Some are difficult and some not fully developed. We will attempt to clarify these in the discussion and then we can go on further.

Now, since the convention, we have had the elections and the civil rights program and the civil rights fiasco in Congress. One thing is perfectly clear: if the Negro question dominated the political life of the country in the pre-election period, if President Truman, the Democratic Party's Senator Humphrey and Chester Bowles and the rest of them mobilized the Democratic Party for the election on the Negro question, the Negro question has not subsided in any way. It has dominated the political scene from the beginning of the 81st Congress to the present date.

Every important bill, every important measure, the clash of the Republican and Democratic parties in Congress, have centered around the question of civil rights and the filibuster. It is perfectly clear, therefore, that what took place before the elections was no mere episodic matter, but that the Negro question is rooted deeply in the political life of the country in general and in the life of the capitalist parties, both outside and inside Congress.

Now the question of the filibuster goes, not only from the point of view of the working class but even from the point of view of the bourgeoisie, far beyond the Negro question. Is a minority in Congress to lose the right to speak, or rather I would put it this way -- is it to find itself in a situation where it can be cut off at any time by a majority? I don't think that that is a matter that we should treat lightly from the point of view of the bourgeois Congress. It isn't our business really, but from their point of view -- and we will have, I hope, quite a number of people in Congress before very long -- it is not an unimportant question. And the Congress has been faced with it. The answer to that from their point of view is very simple.

Keep your rules for the protection of minorities in Congress if you want to; just pass the civil rights bill. But that they will not do. And it becomes perfectly clear to everyone that the question of the rules of Congress and the procedures and the means by which minority rights in Congress are protected -- all this is done only at the expense of an infinitely greater, more important minority of the country at large -- the millions of Negro people.

If we take the Taft-Hartley Bill, we can see that this filibuster episode in Congress has been tied up, inextricably linked with the Taft-Hartley Law, because many have advanced the idea that it is better not to fight the Southerners upon this civil rights question because of the more important questions to come, e.g., the repeal of Taft-Hartley. They are going to find out, if they don't know it already, that the defeat which they have experienced upon the civil rights Bill and the question of the filibuster most certainly will not strengthen, but weaken the fight on Taft-Hartley. There has been a mobilization of reactionary forces, all the reactionary forces in Congress, precisely around civil rights and the filibuster, that is to say, around the Negro question, the question of Negro emancipation. And the various forces have seized this as a means whereby they can mobilize themselves to block the wishes of the people, which, whatever we may think of President Truman and his Democratic Party, were fairly clearly expressed in the pre-election campaign and in the campaign itself. I don't want to go into more detail, but it is perfectly clear that there is not the Negro question on one side and then, afterwards, other questions of the political life of the country. The Negro question is in the very heart of the general political struggle, and this is proved by what took place before the election, during the election, and now after the election.

You will notice that our friends, the labor leaders, have nothing to say. They have preferred to keep quiet on this issue. They have left it to the Negro leaders, and one or two of the official Democratic Party leaders. About that I don't want to speak very much this evening. It is a much broader question in the life of the party than the Negro question. I only wish to point out this. One of our comrades in Detroit, one of the leading comrades there, told some of us at the last Plenum that last summer he attended a week's school or holiday or camp -- something held by the Reuther forces of the UAW in Detroit, and he said that in the early part of this period of a week or two weeks or whatever it was, there was great demoralization because the workers on the whole were doubtful of the sincerity of the attempts that Truman was making to revitalize the Democratic Party. Then at the convention Senator Humphrey made a national reputation for himself, he and the Americans for Democratic Action, by forcing the civil rights plank into the political platform of the Democratic Party. And when the news came to Detroit, the Reuther forces got an argument at last by which they could go to the working class in order to give it courage and energy to struggle during the elections. This action on civil rights, they said, this was proof that Truman and the Democratic Party were serious about really giving some expression to the wishes of the workers, the Negroes, and those who were feeling the weight of Republican reaction.

Now that is not going to be forgotten. The Negro question was

used as the means of lifting the Democratic Party and mobilizing the proletariat to struggle during the elections. The labor leaders wish to forget that now and they keep quiet. But it is not going to be forgotten, as I see it. This betrayal, because a betrayal it is, upon the Negro question in Congress, is widely spread before the whole population. This must inevitably not only have subjective effects, but will have ultimately tremendous political influence upon the future development of the working class. We need have no doubt about that. It is an exemplification of the fundamental thesis that we put forward, one of the main points that we made at the last convention.

Now just to develop it more theoretically. At the present time, what is one of the questions that is shading the country as a whole? The question of civil rights, the civil rights of the whole country. So that civil rights for Negroes and the fate of civil rights for Negroes, is merely an exceptional, an intense exemplification, of the question of civil rights in the country as whole. All that we shall be able to develop in time. It will become increasingly clear. We who have a political line which embodies these ideas will be able to foresee, to point out, and to act in accordance. That is the value of a correct Marxist political position.

Now what has been the response of those sections of the population who are most vitally interested to what has taken place in Congress? We made it clear in the resolution, that the Negroes were not only thinking in a certain way but that by their own instinctive reactions, the oppression, their difficulties, they have also been acting instinctively, and we felt that they were receptive to the conclusions of Marxism from the objective situation in which they were involved in society.

Now it has been most gratifying to watch the response of the Negro press, the Negro publicists, to what has taken place in Congress. The best of them have not, on the whole, concentrated on the reactionary group of Southerners who have held up the processes which were initiated in the Democratic Party. Nothing of the sort. Their attitude has been on the whole plain and decisive. They say that those who are responsible are the Democratic Party and the Truman Administration. But not only that, they have gone further.

Lem Graves, the Washington correspondent of the Pittsburgh Courier has written an article in which from his own bourgeois, somewhat cynical point of view, he put his finger upon the central issue. He says that the struggle today is between reactionary capitalism and socialism. (I think he has some idea that socialism is totalitarian, that it means state ownership, and suppression of the people. It is not too clear, but I think that is the idea that he has.) But he says that the struggle today is between capitalism and socialism on a world-wide scale. He says this struggle for civil rights in Congress gave Congress the opportunity to show whether the American democratic system had in it the flexibility to deal with grave problems in such a way as to prevent the country going to the extremes of socialism. He said the behavior of the Southern Congressmen, the weakness of the leaders of the Democratic Party, the supineness and opportunism of the Republicans, have shown that the American democratic system in Congress is quite unable to handle a situation of this kind. He said: they

have had the test and they have failed. And that is his final conclusion from what has taken place in Congress on civil rights. With an extraordinary clarity, he says that nobody expects Congress to pass regulations which will abolish the humiliation and degradation of Negroes in the individual States. He said that nobody expected that. All that you could have expected was a statement of position by the Administration. But, he said, even that they couldn't do.

The Pittsburgh Courier goes further and says in a very powerfully written and dramatically presented leading article that it is clear that now Negroes have nothing to expect either from the Democrats or Republicans. We hear (said the editorial) that Reuther and other members of the labor movement are contemplating the formation of a Labor Party and we have to wait on them and hope that from them we will get some opportunity to gain what are our rights in the country.

Right through the best known elements of the Negro press, which I follow reasonably closely, there is this sentiment that the Democratic Party as a whole was responsible. As one writer said, for 75 years the Democratic Party has never passed one piece of legislation which assisted the Negro people in any way, why should we expect anything from them today? There is this clear recognition that it was not only the Negroes that have been deceived, but the American political system has been tried and found wanting. The Negro people, beginning on this particular issue and branching out into the others, have shown themselves right in the forefront of an understanding of what is taking place, not only in regard to those matters that touch them particularly, but in the way that they are forced to look beyond their immediate situation and civil rights on the Negro struggle, to the general political crisis today and the role of Congress in this crisis. I think that is very satisfactory for us, to those people to whom we are speaking, to those people who read our press, and for our own guidance. It is clear that we have a line. And a line which can help us to understand and to take action to correspond.

Now within the last few months something else has been taking place. We have had the advance, little by little, of what seems to be the beginnings -- I don't want to take any prophecies upon myself -- of a depression. Now the bourgeois press and the labor movement point out the statistics, and give indications. But those are nothing to what is apparent from the Negro press week after week. The various bureaus of the Negro press, particularly the Pittsburgh Courier, week after week, send in material and show what is happening to Negroes in industry after industry. And if there may be some doubt as to what is taking place in the organized labor movement as a whole, among the Negroes there is no question whatever that as far as they are concerned, the depression is here.

Now in the resolution we spoke of not losing sight of the fact that socialism is the only solution; the proletarian way, as opposed to "the American way." And I have noticed in the Negro press, and it has been going along side by side with the struggle over the civil rights program, a gradual realization during the last few months that the Negroes are up against problems to which they can see at the present time little solution. For them the question of unemployment is tied up with civil rights, and a peaceable life with whites in the communities in which they live.

From Chicago comes information that there is a bitter dispute going on there because thousands of Negroes continually come from the South into these neighborhoods. It is claimed that they are a burden to the city in the sense that they have to get relief. They are a burden to the hospitals. The police have a great deal of difficulty with them. And the city authorities find themselves in a situation where they themselves say if this goes on, that it is inevitable that racial disorders, conflicts of all kinds, are bound to result, particularly in a depression and social crisis of any sort. The conflict is going on now. The Negro press points out that the attitude now is that these Negroes who come from the South are foreigners. "They" come to "our" Chicago and make a lot of trouble here. Why don't they stay where they belong? And what is very striking in this information, and this discussion, is no one can see any way out. Nothing can be done.

Very closely related to this question of unemployment is the housing question. Congress can pass or not pass housing bills. And municipalities can propose and even carry out some projects. But the Negro petty-bourgeoisie knows what the Negro situation is and Congressman Powell himself has stated that Harlem is a place which was built for a quarter of a million people, but now has half a million people. That observation expresses the fundamental contradiction. How are you going to solve that? No kind of bill in Congress can solve it. And the Negro petty-bourgeoisie and the city authorities see that.

Now this has developed over the last few months very sharply. So that in addition to what has taken place in Congress, in addition to the fiasco over civil rights, in addition to the bankruptcy of Congress as a means of expressing the will of the people, we have here a general economic situation, the question of the depression and a general situation with regard to housing in the country that strike at the Negroes with extra sharpness. These are absolutely insoluble problems facing the Negroes. I think it is legitimate, not only abstractly but from what we see taking place, for us to conclude and be able to see, that there is developing with great rapidity among the Negro people at any rate, the opportunity for us to place before them, not only our basic point that we introduced so sharply as to the validity of the independent struggle for Negro rights, but also the question of the social revolution, the socialist transformation of society as the only solution to the problems that are facing them.

I think it is legitimate to say that. I'll put it this way. Among the Negro people from their objective conditions there is a growing feeling that they are up against a situation in which a blank wall faces them. All sorts of solutions that used to be placed upon them are useless today. Every opportunity is given to us to be able to put before them today, in their organizations, or wherever we meet them, the basic solution, the proletarian solution, the revolutionary solution, the socialist transformation of society, as the only solution to what faces them. There is no other. And it is fairly clear that they are beginning to feel, not that there is a socialist solution, but that they can see no solution satisfactory among all those that their leaders and bourgeois parties are putting before them. I think that over the last months, these ideas by which we live, which

we stand for, and which we have to push forward, these ideas have made great progress in the country at large, and offer very fine opportunities for us.

Now so far then on the two basic questions. First, the validity of the independent Negro struggle, its inter-relation with the political life of the country at large, the significance of the situation of Negroes which enables them to anticipate, to pose, to inject ideas, methods of struggle, perspectives, which, though beginning in relation to their own specific situation, branch out into the more general perspectives of the country. And, secondly, the slow grinding of the general economic crisis, with specific relation to unemployment and the housing crisis which places the Negroes in a situation where they can see no way out.

The next thing I want to take up is where we proposed to work. We have ideas and we can't just keep on telling them to one another. We have ideas and we decided that we would work in the NAACP, the organization which gathers together great bodies of Negroes, which offers us a medium where we can put forward our ideas, gain contacts, learn about the Negro struggle, and get ourselves known to groups, individuals, as a political organization, to great numbers of the Negro people.

Now during the last eight or nine months, the NAACP has been undergoing a change. I think I can go so far as to say a definite crisis.

Some of you may have noticed this hysteria, the frantic striking to right and to left by the distinguished Walter White, the leader of the NAACP, during the recent crisis. He actually wrote a letter of protest to The Militant. Now I respect The Militant as much as anybody else, but I was astonished that he should go out of his way to write to us. But he has been quarrelling with everybody. He has quarrelled with members of the National Committee of the Democratic Party; he has quarrelled with the Chairman of the Democratic Party; he has quarrelled with the leader of the House. He has said that the Democratic Party has again been defeated. He said another Appomattox has taken place. There is one especially bitter remark. He said, that to look at the conduct of Senator Lucas, Democratic leader in the Senate, it would seem as if Governor Thurmond the Dixiecrat, and not President Truman, had won the election.

Now White's individual idiosyncrasies do not concern us particularly, but I think his hysteria shows that the NAACP is at present in great difficulties. And I want to spend a few moments on this, not too much, because we have discussed this in articles in the weekly press and the F.I. will be taking up this question, and we need to get more detailed information from the comrades. But I will try to give you what seems to be happening to the NAACP at the present time.

That organization has over 500,000 members, and the most active part of the NAACP is in the South. And very important and very heroic actions are carried on under the banner of the NAACP in the South.

In one of the states there the other day the veterans, after a favorable decision of the Supreme Court about elections, brought down the Negro people to where they had to sign, and they stood there with their coats open and guns in their pockets. The Supreme Court makes decisions. They are printed in the press. The N.Y. Times says that this is evidence of progress; we are getting on fine, if a little slow. But it is the Negro veterans, and the Negro militants in the South who carry out these decisions.

But in the West, and in the East, and in the North, the NAACP with a large book membership is doing nothing. And I think White has realized, and some of the others too -- I have some information -- that the NAACP cannot continue in the course that it is in at the present time. It cannot continue to play with reactionary, conservative elements as it has done in the past. The Urban League has taken that over for itself.

You noticed in the last article in the F.I. that the Urban League has gone to American Tel. & Tel., General Motors, and a whole bunch of big capitalistic organizations in this country, and has arranged with them privately to employ a certain number of white-collar Negroes, technicians, scientists, etc. -- a certain number -- in their offices. That has been arranged.

Furthermore, you will remember seeing in Life the other day that the Urban League gave, I think, the Beaux Arts Ball in Harlem. And Winthrop Rockefeller and a whole bunch of his friends were there. And I am informed that Rockefeller went to Life who didn't want to send a reporter and he said, "You have to." He got their best reporter and took him up there and had all their pictures taken and they appeared in Life. He wants to be Mayor of New York, I am told, and the Negro vote is important. The Urban League is moving in that sphere.

Rockefeller isn't going to have it as easily as he thinks. I noticed last week, or ten days ago, the Urban League -- the Negro is very cynical, very sophisticated -- they had Mayor O'Dwyer give a party at his private home for the Urban League for some other fund they are having. So they are playing both sides.

And there was a Mrs. Cowles, I think, who is a co-editor of the magazine Look. She gave an interview to the press in which she said that the Negro question is now of great importance and she is going to bring a whole body of professional women to help in the solution of this question, under the auspices of the Urban League.

As you may have noticed in the article in Life it was carefully stated that the Urban League was a "conservative" Negro organization. Absolutely correct. No Communism there at all. The Urban League is moving in those circles and the NAACP has been pushed out of them.

The NAACP used to be run by a bunch of lawyers, doctors, parsons, and the rest of them. But these people today are all out of the movement of things. The decisive elements in any Negro community today are the working class elements. They are reasonably well-educated. Politically and socially they are more sophisticated than the Negro petty-bourgeoisie. After some Negroes have been through the UAW,

and pro-Stalinist, and anti-Stalinist caucuses, they more or less understand some politics, much more than these Negro petty-bourgeois do. They are energetic, they understand organization. It is obvious that those are the elements of the future.

Now some sort of a struggle is going on in the leadership of the NAACP. Some of them even say that when something is formed by labor we will join. But it is my opinion that they, like the labor leadership, are scared stiff of the Negro working class. However, they cannot stay where they are indefinitely, they have to move. Furthermore, they took the lead in mobilizing a great deal of support for the Democratic majority and for Truman. The result has been a fiasco, a complete fiasco. What to do next?

They are pressed on one side by the Urban League. Their organizations are doing nothing at all. The elements who have led in the past are bankrupt. They are very scared of going to the Negro masses, really, and basing their organization upon them. There is a great deal of talk about it. They may even pass a resolution to that effect at the next convention but it will mean nothing. There are 40,000 Negroes in the Detroit organization and many of them are workers. They can take the organization away from the Negro fakers entirely. In great important centers where there are great numbers of Negro workers, they are in great difficulty as to what to do. And that is the situation at the present time.

There are certain other advantageous tendencies in the country as a whole which we will have to examine very closely. You will notice first of all that on the campuses, the Negro question is vital. There is a wave of sentiment whose origins go very far back into the history of the United States. On the question of civil rights for Negroes, there is a powerful feeling among students on campuses, not only among students, but among teachers. The President of Vassar recently said that she wanted Negroes to come there, they would be welcome. The Bryn Mawr students said they would like to have some Negroes there. Yale and Smith and Howard exchange 20-25 students, men and women, over weekends, the visits are on a basis of social equality and are very successful. There is an ideological and idealistic need on the part of many of the students to do what is right in regard to Negroes, and many professors are assisting them. But not only on campuses. If you watch the press, you will see that organizations for the assisting of Negroes to gain all sorts of rights, are almost as numerous as the number of wrongs the Negroes suffer from. In every part of the country, every section of society, these organizations have been formed. And they go running to local mayors, they go down to Washington. Many of these are political fakers. There is Herbert Bayard Seope. There is for example Patterson, Secretary of War. Right at the top leading, in every group that you can find, is the Catholic church. Today it pushes itself forward as among the most militant fighters for Negro rights. And among all these protesting groups you will always find a member of the CIO and even sometimes of the AFL, but he usually stays behind, he doesn't say much, he doesn't want to get himself into too much trouble, because he knows the dynamite that is involved. But they all go together. And, therefore, you find among the petty-bourgeoisie and these elements tremendous activity on the Negro question, but also some very clever petty-bourgeois politicians who run to the lead to prevent this movement getting out of hand.

In the article in the F.I. also, I pointed out that the Administration is making an attempt to incorporate certain petty-bourgeois Negroes, social equality and all, in order to be able to gain some sort of strength, some sort of support. They cannot allow the working class movement to be in absolute control of the struggle for Negro rights.

Now these are all the forces that are moving at the present time. Everything is in a sort of turmoil. Nobody knows exactly what is going to happen. The civil rights fiasco has put the problem of civil rights back on to the public mind. And in the center of this is the NAACP. Because naturally, as all the petty-bourgeois whites in these various organizations begin to move to the Negro and the Negro question, some of them go towards the Urban League and others to the NAACP. This is a means of showing friendliness and so forth to the Negroes. Some of these politicians are very impertinent by the way. That Roosevelt, Junior, who is trying to become a member of Congress for some district in New York, actually gives an interview to the Post. He is interested in politics -- No. 1, and No. 2, he says that he is interested in particular on the question of civil rights for Negroes. All of them are nowadays, always. He said what is needed is to teach the workers. He related how "we" had a meeting the other day in Park Lane and there were Negro members of the committee. (I dare say they were some members of the Urban League or the NAACP.) And he said that "naturally" they came to the house. But it was the elevator boy and the maid and the rest of the servants who objected to their coming. It was Roosevelt's view that some education on equality for Negroes was needed among the workers. If only the workers would accept the high ideals of himself and his friends in Park Lane, everything would be O.K. on the civil rights question. We are going to remind him of that, I hope, during this campaign.

That is the general situation. A lot of new forces, of a general social and political nature, are taking shape. And the NAACP naturally forms the center of this. And it doesn't know exactly which way to go and exactly what to do.

Now for us who are to go in there and who are in there working, this offers great opportunities. We in the NAACP represent the proletariat. We must remember that all this agitation about civil rights, and the situation in Congress, and the great activity among the American people as a whole in regard to giving Negroes their rights, all has been made possible by the working class. It began in the CIO. And organizers and rank and file proletarians went out to win over Negroes to solidarity -- it is told in one of the finest books ever written on the CIO, a book by Cayton and Mitchell called "Black Workers in the New Unions." And page after page there you will see example after example of ordinary rank and file workers going to Negroes and breaking the prejudices down, in a social way, in a friendly way, winning them over and inviting them to their houses, talking to them, making the Negroes feel at home in meetings and in private houses, in order to help build the CIO. When the question of Negro rights as a necessity became CIO policy, and long before the Democratic Party and the rest of them, the proletariat, despite the treachery of the labor leadership, posed this question, worked at it, established it, and began pushing it forward.

Now at the present time, owing to the bankruptcy and the fears of the leadership, the proletariat is practically out of the struggle on the national scene. The Truman Administration, these petty-bourgeois organizations, every political faker who wants to get on the band wagon and pose as a liberal, the Catholic church, and the rest of them, they are the ones who are in the limelight on the Negro question, and all of them are running here and there, protesting, sending telegrams, while the working class movement stays quiet because the labor leadership stays quiet.

Now the question of the labor leadership is not our business here today. But the question of the petty-bourgeois leadership, the NAACP petty-bourgeois leadership, is our business as far as the Negro question is concerned. And we in the press, in discussions, and so forth, are going to do our best to follow these developments closely so that our comrades in the NAACP will be armed and ready there to represent Marxism in general and the working class in particular.

I think I am entitled to say -- I am speaking with a certain amount of caution because things haven't crystallized as yet -- but I am entitled to say that the forces at work are reasonably clear. We have got better opportunities than we had at the time of the convention to make a real political intervention in the actions of the NAACP, and in the general activities of that organization. It is in crisis. Social forces of all types are in movement in and around it. The leaders -- this I know for a fact -- feel that the next step for them is to base themselves upon the working class. They don't want to do it. We will help them, with their consent or without, with their assistance or without. But that is our task. And what we have seen in the last few months is bound to increase and intensify over the next period.

I am not taking up here at all actual party work in the NAACP, not at all, that is not our business this evening, although it will come up in time. We are observing political trends. And whether the labor leaders say it or not, it is perfectly obvious to any thinking person that what has happened so far on the civil rights question in Congress is bound to have tremendous effects upon what is going to happen to the repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act. And I think it is correct to say that over the last few months, and particularly since the activities of the 81st Congress, the Negro question and the labor question have grown much closer together. That is going to appear more and more clearly as time goes on.

I think it is along those lines that our discussion should take place. First of all, what we said about the validity of the independent Negro struggle, nothing has happened during the last nine months to weaken that; in regard to the question of socialism as the only solution to the Negro question, nothing has happened to weaken that either. Then in regard to where we should work. I think it is clear now that we have infinitely greater opportunities from the fact of the crisis in the NAACP, the necessity for some change, the forces that are playing upon it, the necessity of the intervention of the proletariat, with ourselves as representatives of the proletariat, and our capacity to explain and analyze and give a political direction inside that organization. That is why I say we have gained definitively over the last few months.

We also have to look to our rivals. In the NAACP at the present time we have seen a revival, a recrudescence I should say, of the Stalinists. In September 1947, the Stalinists held a Plenum in which the Negro question occupied a central place. They have published a mass of material, they have started to reorganize themselves. I am going to show you some of what they are saying. And they have entered into the NAACP with great force over recent months, so much so that the NAACP has had to publish in its journal an editorial which has been reprinted and broadcast all over the country, warning their membership and warning the public as a whole of their past activities and infiltration of the Stalinists into the NAACP.

You may have seen what happened in the press recently in which a Negro grouping which went to protest about housing found itself under the control of the Stalinists. It was challenged as Stalinist and there was a serious crisis in what was intended to be a move to assist the Negro people in protesting against discriminatory housing regulations. Now the Stalinists have forces that we have not got. I have been hearing how they act in one of a series of areas in the suburbs and up-state. Someone who was connected with the movement for many years goes over to an NAACP meeting. He says he goes in and he sees his old friend -- I do not want to call real names, Jack Thomas, who was secretary of the YCL ten years ago, who represents the so-and-so Tenants League. He sees another friend, Willie Thompson, over there who was secretary of the CP ten years ago. He represents the Negro Housing Defense Association. He says by the time you have elected, it does not matter how you try, a bunch of Stalinists are in that committee and they go right ahead with their policies. They begin by protesting against Negro housing, and the next thing you find you are passing resolutions and demonstrating in front of the Australian Embassy against something happening in China.

But nevertheless, they have the forces. And they have their eyes set on the NAACP and in this crisis they propose to capture as much as they can. And the NAACP is fighting them, but they can't fight them properly because they have not got the basis.

So that while the opportunities in the NAACP are enormous, we have direct enemies. The Stalinists are working very hard to recover from the difficulties they forced upon themselves by their course during the last few years.

Now among those of us who are responsible for the Negro work, we have been discussing this question and we are well on the way towards opening a serious theoretical offensive against the Stalinists.

There are two aspects on this: The question of the Stalinists on the Negro question, the shifts and changes which corresponded to the shifts and changes of the general Moscow line. We have a pamphlet on that question coming. We hope we will get it out soon. But this is something else. This is a direct attack upon the Stalinist line and their whole attitude on the Negro question, which has been laid

down over the years, and we believe that we will be able to attack them here and give them some blows on this question such as they have not had before. And the opportunity is ripe not only in regard to the Stalinists but also in regard to the Negro people as a whole.

Now this is not going to be so easy. I am going to have to read a certain number of extracts. I don't like to do this, but it will help you to get some general conceptions of what we are going to try to do.

Now I will begin by pointing out that the Stalinist party has made a significant change in its attitude to the Negro question and to the life of their party as a whole. I am going to read you some extracts from some of their recent publications, particularly the September 1948 Political Affairs, the convention issue. They say: "In 1856 it was the issue of slavery that brought into being the new Anti-Slavery Republican Party. In 1948, an entirely different period of history, it is the Negro question again, which is helping to hasten the doom of the present decadent two-party monopoly."

Now you see that sounds very much like what we are saying. When we attempt to deal with Negro intellectuals and maybe some Stalinists, and some not Stalinists but who follow the Stalinist thinking, this sort of thing doesn't seem on the surface so very different from the kind of position we are putting forward. They, the Stalinists, say that the Negroes are sparking the fight for democracy against Wall Street's drive toward fascism. Again, as so often with the Stalinists, it does not sound so very different from the position that we are putting forward. In fact, it seems more in advance. We don't say, for instance, that the Negroes are sparking the fight against Wall Street's drive toward fascism. The Stalinists say: "They (the Negroes) are sparking the fight for democracy and against Wall Street's drive towards fascism. The high point reached by the Negro people in their anti-fascist liberation struggles is a positive factor of outstanding significance to the entire labor and democratic movements."

Here is another extract: "One of the outstanding examples of the Negro peoples' fight for unity within their own ranks and with their white allies was the historic June 2 mass lobby in Washington where the Independent Non-Partisan Committee for the Passage of Civil Rights, joined with the committee, (etc., etc.). And it was this, perhaps more than any other factor, that broke the committee's back and contributed to the defeat of the Hitlerite Mundt Bill."

Now I don't know but I haven't seen in the past -- I haven't paid so much attention, perhaps -- this particular note in Stalinist politics about the Negro question. They say again:

"The most fundamental and historic contribution of our Party in the recent period was the hammering out of a Marxist-Leninist position on the Negro question in the December 1946 Plenum."

This means something when they say that the most important theoretical work of their party in the last two or three years was a hammering out of a position on the Negro question.

That same extract says finally: "...the adoption of this position is beginning to improve the work of our party, the lag being due primarily to the inadequate grasp among large numbers of our white cadres of the conclusions flowing from this position." You see, it sounds very much like Marxism.

They say it is also to the credit of our party that it alone has pointed out the decisive and inter-dependent relation between the struggle for Negro rights and the peoples' resistance to the drive of the big monopolies toward world domination, war and fascism.

Then there is another aspect. They speak quite openly about what has been taking place inside their party. They say that self-criticism is necessary. But they add, "At the same time discontent alone, wholly negative 'beefing', self-annihilation, and merciless belaboring of our Party, falsely ascribing to it the principal responsibility for the present unprecedented assaults upon Negro rights, is not constructive criticism and self-criticism." It is clear from the other excerpts that there have been serious attacks upon the party leadership, upon what has been taking place upon the Negro question inside the CP.

They say also the right-opportunist danger has been the main danger in their party's work. "Particularly has this been reflected among certain white trade-union cadres, with harmful consequences." You remember, we dealt with that also in our resolution.

On the question of racial prejudice they say:

"Accompanying this revitalization of the militant and crusading spirit of our party must be a tremendous increase in our party's sensitivity on this question, particularly in the ability of our white comrades to detect the many subtle forms of anti-Negro discrimination, and to react to them quickly without hesitation." And they say again "Above all, the struggle against the penetration of this poison (chauvinism) even into our party's ranks has been badly neglected." And they go into it at great length.

Now it is perfectly clear that many a Stalinist will take these documents seriously. There are the actual members -- and they have a certain periphery who follow their ideas. Thus the ideas that we put forward with great force and care, and in fundamental terms, can easily be made to sound like nothing special. The Stalinist leaders can say that they make mistakes but can recognize them. They can say: "We have put them forward at our convention. We have printed them openly for the public to see. Our party is doing its best to correct them." And they can make a case for the point of view that the SWP has had nothing special to say on the Negro question.

These are only a few highlights. There is a mass of information directed to their party members and internal discussion, etc., in which it is clear that with their usual skill they have made a certain reorientation upon the Negro question and not to the NAACP merely, in general. This is part of a planned Stalinist attack upon the Negro people.

It is perfectly clear that if we wish to win over Negroes, both intellectuals and advanced workers, we have to make very clear the differences between ourselves and the Stalinists.

The Stalinists have a great advantage here. It is not only in the party line and internal party life on the Negro question that they have reorganized themselves. For years now they have dominated the field of the Civil War with special reference to Negro history. Look at what they have published:

Negro Slave Revolts in the U.S.
The Negro in the American Revolution.
The Negro in the Abolitionist Movement.
The Negro in the Civil War.

All by Herbert Aptheker.

They have published pamphlets on Wendell Phillips, Harriet Tubman, Thaddeus Stevens, Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln.

They have published two pamphlets for the Wallace campaign: Lincoln's Third Party and War Elections, 1862-1864.

Gunnar Myrdal's famous book The American Dilemma, has been attacked by Aptheker in a special pamphlet, The Negro People in America.

Aptheker, besides these pamphlets, has published large volumes which are quoted in many lists of books on Negroes and Negro history. He writes in the Journal of Negro History.

The bourgeois historians today are extremely reactionary -- some of them have even lost the small gains that were made some years ago. Today the only work in this field is divided between the Stalinists and the Negro writers. You can see the immense advantage the Stalinists hold. Along with their maneuvers on policy they have this solid basis of constantly growing material. They use it in the Jefferson School and in all their education. It is widely spread among the Negro intellectuals.

But the Negro intellectuals are not satisfied with Stalinism today. First of all they are affected by the red-baiting barrage. And secondly they are dissatisfied with the Stalinist theory. But they cannot see a way out. Only revolutionary Marxism can show them a way. But to them it seems that there are only two positions, the Marxism of Aptheker and the idealism of Myrdal. The conflict is known as the Aptheker-Myrdal controversy. In Phylon, the magazine of Atlanta University, Stalinists and Gunnar Myrdal write.

The dissatisfaction of the Negro intellectuals with the Stalinists had recently burst into the open in a very significant manner. E. Kaiser, a Negro intellectual, works at the Schomburg Collection of works on the Negro. He seems to have Stalinist tendencies, but in a recent article in Phylon (Fourth Quarter, 1948) he launches an attack against Aptheker, as a representative of the whole Stalinist school. He says:

"Aptheker describes the Negro people generally as the beautiful people -- as little angels even under terrific oppression. His characterization is similar in some respects to that in Wright's 12 Million Black Voices -- a book quite different from Wright's other books. But Negroes are human, all too human. They are maimed by oppression both materially and psychologically. All of them do not run amuck, for they fall into various patterns of partial adjustment to segregation and suppression. They become religious, belligerent, servile or just militant. But if all whites are psychologically sick on the race question, having been driven into this racial sickness as the psychiatrists Erich Fromm and Karen Horney have shown, by the competitiveness, contradictions, isolation and insecurity of American capitalist society, all Negroes are surely neurotic and frustrated no end under their double oppression as exploited workers and farmers under capitalism and as Negroes jim-crowed and segregated. If this is not true, then Negroes are not really human beings. They are real slaves. Of course, the other alternative is that the oppression of Negroes isn't as bad as it has been described. But running like a thread through all of Aptheker's writings is the idea that the common people, both Negro and white are psychologically simple. Only the upper class and the highly educated are psychologically complex. Here are both an idealization of the common people and a condescension to them -- attitudes typical of middle class liberals.

"Historically, Aptheker is also superficial and liberalistic when he states that Negro slaves revolted merely because they were human beings with 'developed reasoning faculties' and 'the glorious urge to improve themselves and their environment.' This is un-Marxian and liberal in tone. It doesn't explain the system of slavery as a Marxist should. The Negro slaves' fight for life was a class struggle waged by them against their masters. The slaves were forced to struggle against the intolerable, inhuman conditions in which slavery kept them.

"Aptheker is not unique in failing to deal adequately with psychology. Some Negro leftist and Communist writers ignore and refuse to deal with Negro psychology thus revealing their middle-class hangovers."

This writer has got hold of the problem. He is trying hard to resolve it as a Marxist. His article ends:

"Myrdal and his disciples may offer idealistic, moral, psychological theses on the Negro question in America; and Aptheker, Wilkerson and other near-Marxists may offer socio-economic antitheses in rebuttal. But a real Marxist or dialectical materialist who attempts to deal with the American Negro question must try to see the problem in all of its ramifications and complexities. He must see the whole configuration of the Negro problem in the United States -- the socio-economic basis and the superstructural rationalizations -- psychological and ideological. In a word, the real Marxist must strive to achieve a synthesis of all of the facets and factors of the American Negro problem giving each its proper importance.

"This exploratory article may be considered as notes toward such an integration."

Now, it seems to some of us that Kaiser expresses something that is highly significant and characteristic of Stalinist writing on the Negro question. Aptheker consistently refers to the heroic qualities of the Negroes, their struggles for freedom, their great deeds; but all of it is general. Despite reservations here and there, his attitude is that of showing that the Negroes were human because, look, they fought heroically for freedom. But that the Negroes were a class, in production, at a certain specific stage; that they made special contributions to the struggle, conditioned by their social role -- these things are absent from Aptheker's work. This is what we shall emphasize.

This is a vital question for the Negro historians. They are trying to find out what exactly was the cause of the historic quarrels between Negro abolitionist and white. It is obvious that the Negro writers are seeking guidance on the problems of Negroes today. The Stalinists not only cannot help them. Their recent pamphlets for the Wallace campaign take untenable positions on the whole Civil War.

That then is, in outline, the dispute. We propose to enter into it, in our press, and in the Negro press too. We propose to show how the reactionary Popular Front line of the Stalinists, their bureaucratic attempts to manipulate all workers for their own purposes, has affected their historical conceptions. A good bit of work has been done upon this and we are pretty much agreed on the general line of attack. There are great points here to be worked up. For example, I think we shall be able to show that if you do not adopt a strictly Marxist position on the Negroes in the Civil War, you fall not only into idealism, but into white chauvinism. You cannot play with the Negro question. Even the Negro historians do not escape this. We propose to expose the Stalinists and show to those Negro intellectuals who are striving to find a road that revolutionary Marxism, Trotskyism, can show them the way. It is a great task in all its ramifications and we believe we can have an effect not only with Negro intellectuals and advanced Negro workers but far beyond.

Now I have only given you a little outline. There are other points that are to be made.

For example: The Stalinists continue with their position on self-determination. A black belt for the Negroes. Why do they?

Now until the Marxist movement there was not one wave or section of revolutionary thought in United States history which saw the Negroes taking part, an equal part, in American life and society. Abraham Lincoln wanted to send them away to Africa. (And personally Abraham Lincoln had no race prejudices at all. Frederic Douglass said so.) But he wanted to send the Negroes to Africa. They pointed out to him that by the time you got enough ships and boats, etc. to send them off, by the time you got all that were here there, you would have as many as you began with, it would take so long.

Jefferson (one of the great figures of the 18th Century, not only of the United States but in general) Jefferson believed that Negro intelligence was not equal to that of the whites. He did a lot of fakery on the question, but his correspondence is there to show.

That tradition is very powerful in the United States. Garrison, for instance, didn't know what to do about the Negroes. He wanted secession. Let the whites in the South secede and go away. Get rid of the problem that way.

I think the Stalinists should be made to answer this question: Why are we not to think that this insistence on your part of a Negro Black Belt in the South, which you make by cutting and pasting together all sorts of scraps of territory, why are we not to believe that this is in the full American chauvinistic tradition? Marxism and Leninism? This has nothing to do with Marxism and Leninism. Do they object to that? Then they have to answer this: How can you propose to masses of Negroes in the South and Negroes elsewhere the establishment of a Negro state in the South which means a revolutionary struggle of the most desperate kind against the bourgeoisie, and at the same time do not make clear that that is only possible by the means of the struggle of the revolutionary proletariat against bourgeois society on the whole?

To urge self-determination of the Black Belt along with Popular Frontism, and all their tricks and dodges and maneuvers and Wallaceism for American society as a whole, that is not only a betrayal, it is an attempt to take advantage of the instinctive racial feelings of the Negroes and hurl them against American bourgeois society by themselves, without the proletariat as a whole, in order to serve Stalinist purposes.

These questions they will have to answer. Those and many others.

And I think we will be able to prove also that at the back of this is their fundamentally, reactionary, bureaucratic, opportunistic, treacherous attitude toward the proletariat as a whole, which reflects itself in their attitude toward the Negroes. This leads them to chauvinism, adventurism on the Negro question, thus ruination of the fine work done by Negro historians like Du Bois on the Negro question. It is one more or less connected piece and development. And as far as I am concerned Aptheker is marked down for the slaughter, so to speak. He has had a long run, ten years. And if I know the average petty-bourgeois intellectual well and I know from what I have heard of him, I don't think he will be able to keep quiet. He may venture to reply, and then he is lost.

So I believe that here, as far as the party leadership is concerned, we who are responsible for Negro work, we think that over the next period, we can develop a powerful, theoretical attack upon them. Naturally the party as a whole, and the press as a whole and general Negro propaganda will deal with their shifts and their changes. They did this before June. They did this after June. But we want to go here a little further more specifically, and expose their history, their theory, their politics, and open up a new road for people who think that the Stalinists alone represent Marxism.

I am pretty certain that among the Negro intellectuals, the Negro petty-bourgeoisie, and those workers who take an interest in these questions, if we do it well we are certain of a great reception. They are waiting and looking for something.

Now I just have one more point to emphasize to you in regard to this matter. It is this, that if we open up this whole question, the Civil War, the Stalinist attitude to the Civil War, what they do to the Civil War in regard to Lincoln, or the question of the elections and Wallace and the rest -- some of the things they do are unbelievable -- then this will go far beyond the Negro question. Far beyond. Because if there is one question that the petty-bourgeoisie, the whites, the intellectuals, and the rest of them are interested in, all the campuses, it is this question: What can they do about the war? They can't do anything. Taft-Hartley -- they don't know exactly what to do. But on the Negro question, they are very very interested, anxious to learn, anxious to do something. We can go a long way, not only with the Negroes and that particular periphery, but in general. Not long ago I saw in the N.Y. Times an editorial on Negro History Week. It says that Negro History Week is very good, it says we must study, we must learn, it is clear that race and similar questions have been used as a basis for oppression and tyranny. We even have to study the history of Africa to find out what happened. It's a bit late, isn't it? But, they said, we have to be careful with this question. Do you know why? Because on the Negro question there is a lot of Marxism and class struggle and similar propaganda. The Stalinists rule this roost, but wide circles are interested.

I think we have the opportunity here to do a good solid piece of work. And there for the time being I will stop. As I say, there are many other points. Maybe one of our leading comrades who travelled around recently will take some time to tell you about the active work that is being done. Many of the branches have gone into -- not gone into, but are right in all sorts of Negro activity. But from the point of view of a discussion and the opening of a discussion, I have thought it best, after consultation, to treat it along these lines -- how far our ideas have been proved, what new possibilities are open for us and the party as a whole in the NAACP, what are the perspectives of our theoretical work to be done more or less from the center. To open up new ideas, etc., is part of the ideological offensive, to strike at the Stalinists, to win over some young Negro intellectuals and the advanced Negro workers, and also to make a penetration of our ideas into those wider circles who are more and more becoming interested in the Negro question as the most immediate question among the many that demand solutions; this is what lies before us.