

COMMENTS ON THE SOUTH FOLLOWING THE RECENT TOUR

By Derrick Morrison

A fairly good picture of what took place on the Southern campaign tour made by Paul Boutelle can be obtained from the reports that were printed in The Militant and Young Socialist during September and October. Following are a few generalizations about the nature of the black struggle and the student radicalization in the South.

The black struggle is of a qualitatively different character in the South than in the North. While in the North there have been numerous and significant uprisings on the part of the urban black masses, there have been no significant uprisings in the South of a similar nature. The only possible exception is Atlanta, but even that was not on a par with Watts, Newark or Detroit. The reason is that in the North a hypocritical state of freedom, justice and equality is allowed to prevail. The masses are given a taste, but never the real thing. They are given anti-poverty programs, but never programs that actually attack the source of the problem. In a situation like this, rising expectations are quick to turn into unbearable frustrations. The masses, not satisfied with the crack in the door, attempt to break the door down. The bigger the crack in the door, the more forceful will be the explosion. This explains Detroit.

However this is not so in the South. There are no cracks in the door, only unremitting repression. Every black man, woman and child knows where his place is at in the South. Black people in the South are not confused about where their place is. Since the early 60s the black man's place in the South has only changed quantitatively, not qualitatively. Four hundred years of brutal treatment have burned themselves into the Southern black consciousness. Knowing the enemy so well, the black masses in the South will not move out so spontaneously as the Northern masses have done. The actions of the Southern masses will be more thought out, more concretely considered, and will be carried out in a more methodical and determined fashion. There will be no fooling around, no dilly-dallying -- only cold, hard action.

Of course what I am discussing now is the type of action that will be undertaken by the black masses in the South -- that is, the sharecroppers, the poorly paid workers, the super-exploited farmers and the pauperized petty bourgeoisie. A little taste of that type of action is exhibited in the Deacons for Defense and Justice in Louisiana and the Lowndes County Freedom Party in Alabama. These two organizations are expressions of the black lower classes. But they are only harbingers of what is to come. They are unlike the organizational expressions of the Southern black petty bourgeoisie.

Besides the obstacle of the oppressive Southern regimes, there is the obstacle of the black petty bourgeoisie in the South. This petty bourgeoisie consists for the most part of shopkeepers, store owners, rich farmers, doctors, lawyers, real estate dealers, morticians and similar occupations. It should be stressed that a large part of this petty bourgeoisie are store owners, preachers, rich farmers, wellt-to-do shop owners and real estate dealers. This petty bourgeoisie is different from the Northern variety. While the Southern petty bourgeoisie owns a lot more property, the Northern type is built more out of doctors, lawyers and blacks who have high-paying jobs. Because the Northern petty bourgeoisie is newer, more metropolitan in outlook and has more freedom to move around in, it assumes a more radical stance than the Southern black petty bourgeoisie.

The Southern petty bourgeoisie has a strongly rooted tradition stretching back 400 years. Its whole history has been one of accommodation and conciliation with the forces of racism and oppression in the South. Its historical threads run through the house slaves who sold out their brothers in the field, on up to Booker T. Washington, and now finds itself personfied in the 20th century Uncle Toms like Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young and Martin Luther King. The organizational expressions of the Southern black petty bourgeoisie are the NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Urban League and the various church organizations.

With the backdrop of an oppressive racist regime and a tamed and trained petty bourgeoisie, one can better understand and appreciate the radicalism that is shaking the black campuses in the South today. This radicalization is the result of a whole combination of social forces: The Northern ghetto rebellions, the deepening of the colonial revolution, the campus protests at white colleges and universities, and the attendance at Southern colleges of black youth from the Northern ghettos. Thus, in a sense, the big factors in the radicalization of the Southern black campuses are from outside of the South.

Because the black communities in the South lag behind the campus, there are inherent limitations on the black student radicalism. This is seen most clearly in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and Oklahoma. Black nationalism is more of a mood on the campuses in the South than anything else. Those who want to get active while in the South during the summer might work with SNCC. Otherwise, they come North, where the action is. Very seldom does one find on Southern campuses organized black nationalist groups, such as exist at Northern campuses which have significant numbers of black students. The only exceptions to this situation exist at Tougaloo College in Jackson, Miss., at Texas Southern University in Houston, at the University of Houston in Houston, and at the University of Texas in Austin. The last two of these are predominatly white.

SNCC has a lot of sympathizers and former activists on campuses in the South, but it has not used this situation to try to organize something on the campus. This poverty of action is due to a poverty of cadre and a paucity of funds. This poverty of action on the part of SNCC is also due to a programmatic and ideological poverty in the organization.

However, despite these limitations and obstacles to Southern black campus radicalization, this new awakening holds out great prospects and possibilities in shaking up and disrupting the whole Southern way of life. This new student action serves as a catalyst and prod to the black lower classes. As was said in the Political Resolution, "From the ranks of black college students will come new cadres to give sorely needed leadership for the struggle." Students in and of themselves can do nothing about changing the society. But linked up with the struggle of the masses, students become highly significant. Because the black masses in the North show kinetic combativity and the black masses in the South show potential combativity, it is very easy for black students to see themselves as part of the overall black radicalization.

The black student awakening not only helps the black struggle but also helps the anti-war movement. The combination of the black struggle and the anti-war opposition helps pave the way for consideration and acceptance of socialist ideas. Because there is not too much action in the South, there is a great deal of time on the part of black students for consideration of various ideologies.

Southern students do not hear advocates of Black Power very often, and a great deal of revolutionary literature is not plentiful in the South. These facts explain in part the large meetings and large sales of our literature on the campuses during the tour.

What we must do now is continue to propagate our ideas, maintain contacts and prepare the way for future recruitment.

Oct. 26, 1967