

The Struggle for the Leninist Position on the Negro Question in the U.S.A.

By HARRY HAYWOOD

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The present program of our Party on the Negro question was first formulated at the Sixth Congress of the Communist International, in 1928. On the basis of the most exhaustive consideration of all the peculiarities, historical development, economic, living and cultural conditions of the Negro people in the United States as well as the experience of the Party in its work among Negroes, that Congress definitely established the problem of the Negroes as that of an *oppressed nation* among whom there existed all the requisites for a national revolutionary movement against American imperialism.

This estimation was a concrete application of the Marxist-Leninist conception of the national question to the conditions of the Negroes and was predicated upon the following premises: first, the concentration of large masses of Negroes in the agricultural regions of the Black Belt, where they constitute a majority of the population; secondly, the existence of powerful relics of the former chattel slave system in the exploitation of the Negro toilers – the plantation system based on sharecropping, landlord supervision of crops, debt slavery, etc.; thirdly, the development, on the basis of these slave remnants, of a political superstructure of inequality expressed in all forms of social proscription and segregation; denial of civil rights, right to franchise, to hold public offices, to sit on juries, as well as in the laws and customs of the South. This vicious system is supported by all forms of arbitrary violence, the most vicious being the peculiar American institution of lynching. All of this finds its theoretical justification in the imperialist ruling class theory of the “natural” inferiority of the Negro people.

This whole vicious system of oppression, while being most sharply felt by the Negro masses in the South also affects their social status in the rest of the country. The Negro poor farmers and farm laborers fleeing from the misery and starvation of the Southern plantations to the industrial centers of the North, do not thereby obtain freedom. On the contrary, at their heels follows also the heritage of plantation slavery resulting in lower wages, worse living conditions, discrimination in social life even in the “liberal” North.

Thus the agrarian revolution, *i.e.* the struggle of the poverty-stricken and land-starved Negro sharecroppers and poor farmers on the Black Belt and in the South for the land, for the destruction of all vestiges of slave bondage – this, together with the general struggle for democratic rights of the Negro people all over the country, as well as for their rights to independent national existence on the Black Belt, constitute the chief axis of the Negro national liberation movement in the U.S.A.

The enslavement of the Negro masses in the United States is an important prop of American imperialism. American imperialism is fundamentally interested in the preservation of the slave remnants in Southern agriculture and the national oppression of the Negro people as a condition for the extraction of super-profits. It is the force that stands behind the Southern white ruling classes (capitalists and landlords) in their direct and violent plunder of the Negro masses in the Black Belt. Therefore, the liberation struggles of the Negro masses are directed against the very foundation of the capitalist-imperialist social structure in the United States.

In the present epoch of imperialism and proletarian revolution the Negro question in the United States must be conceived as part of the national colonial problem, or, in other words, it is part of the general world-wide problem of freedom of the oppressed and dependent peoples from the shackles of imperialism.

The Leninist conception of the national question in the present historical epoch was formulated with remarkable clarity by Comrade Stalin in his book *The Foundations of Leninism*:

“It (the national question) is now seen to be the world-wide problem of the deliverance of the inhabitants of the colonial and dependent countries from the yoke of imperialism.... The imperialist war and the Russian Revolution have confirmed the Leninist view that the national problem can only be solved in the arena of the proletarian revolution, and when it is linked up with that revolution; that *for the revolution of the western world the path of victory lies by way of revolutionary alliance with the struggle of colonial and dependent nationalities to throw off the yoke of imperialism.* The national question is part of the general question of the proletarian revolution, part of the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat.”

This Leninist treatment of the national question applies with full force to the Negro problem in the United States.

This question, which prior to and during the Civil War and Reconstruction was a part of the bourgeois revolution, now becomes a part of the proletarian revolution. The proletarian revolution must solve in passing the uncompleted task of the bourgeois democratic and agrarian revolution in the South, left over by the Civil War.

“A radical transformation of the agrarian structure of the Southern states is one of basic tasks of the revolution.... Only the victorious proletarian revolution will completely and finally solve the agrarian and national questions of the Southern United States in the interest of the overwhelming majority of the Negro population in the country.” (Thesis of the Sixth Congress of the C. I. on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies).

The Negro masses, once the allies of the Northern bourgeoisie (during the Civil War and Reconstruction), have now become the allies of the proletariat. In their struggle for national liberation these masses constitute an important part of the army of the revolutionary proletariat in the struggle for the overthrow of American capitalism. Hence, the victory of the proletarian revolution in the United States and the struggle of the Negro masses for national liberation demand the consummation of a united fighting front of the white toilers and the Negro people against the common enemy, – American imperialism. Such a united front can only be effective on the basis of direct and effective support by the white working class (as the working class of the oppressor nation) to the efforts of the Negro masses to free themselves from the imperialist yoke. In this connection it is important to keep in mind the dictum of Karl Marx to the English working class on the Irish question: “A people which oppresses another people cannot itself be free”.

From this Marxist-Leninist formulation of the Negro question proceeds the line of the Party. While fighting against all forms of inequality of the Negro people, for the abolition of all forms of slave exploitation and oppression and for complete social equality, the Party was urged by the Sixth Congress of the Communist International to come forward openly and unreservedly for the rights of Negroes in the Black Belt to national self-determination. The mobilization of the masses of toilers for this struggle was to go hand in hand with a pitiless fight against all forms of white chauvinism (the ideology of the imperialist oppressor) as the main danger, while at the same time all hangovers of petty bourgeois nationalist distrust among the Negro toilers were to be patiently combated.

Only on this basis could there be welded a close, unbreakable unity between the Negro and white toilers in their struggle against the common enemy. Only in this way could our Party fulfill its international proletarian obligations. Such were the directives of the Sixth Congress on the Negro question in the U. S. A.

This treatment of the Negro question as a question of an oppressed nation was, however, by no means new. Lenin, in his writings on this question had already laid the theoretical ground work for our Negro program.

As early as 1913, in his brochure *The Development of Capitalism in American Agriculture*, Lenin, in defending the Marxist position on the agrarian question against the theorists of the Narodniki (Populists) and Social Revolutionaries, laid bare the agrarian essence of the Negro question, indicating its national revolutionary character. In reply to the petty-bourgeois economist, Himmer, who contended that the "United States was a country which never knew feudalism and is foreign to its economic survivals", Lenin wrote: "This statement is in direct opposition to the truth, for the survivals of slavery differ in no way from the survivals of feudalism and the survivals of slavery are very strongly felt up to the present time in the former slave-owning South".

In the same pamphlet Lenin compared the position of the Negroes in the South with that of the serfs in Czarist Russia, stating that the "similarity of the economic position of the Negroes with that of the former serfs in the agrarian centers of Russia is remarkable.... The South", Lenin continued, "is a hemmed-in prison with the absence of fresh air for the 'liberated' Negroes".

It was on the basis of this analysis that the Second Congress of the Communist International placed the Negro question in the U.S.A. as the problem of an oppressed nation. In the thesis of this Congress on the national and colonial question which was developed under the direct guidance of Lenin, the Communist Parties were committed to "support the revolutionary movement *among subject nations (for example, Ireland, American Negroes and in the colonies)*". [Emphasis mine – H. H.]

The revolutionary program of the Party on the Negro question has been tested and confirmed in the development of the class struggle in the U.S.A. and in some substantial political gains for the Party in the leadership of the Negro masses.

Although the Party from its very inception raised the slogan of struggle for Negro rights, its activities in this field did not result in any real successes in the leadership of mass struggle among Negroes. Obviously, this was in the main due to our theoretical unclarity, our lack of a

real Leninist approach to the Negro question as a question of an oppressed nation. Consequently the work of the Party during this period was fraught with many errors and weaknesses. Without waging an uncompromising fight for the emancipation of the Negroes as a nation, for their right to national self-determination in the Black Belt, without bringing forward the historical connection between this struggle and that of the white working class, it was impossible to conduct a consistent fight against the poisonous influences of white chauvinism in the ranks of the white working class and to overcome distrust among the Negro toilers. Without the recognition of this right, it was impossible to weld the iron unity of the working class, to develop its hegemony and the leadership of the Party in the liberation struggles of the Negro toilers.

It was this lack of Leninist clarity on the question of self-determination that prevented the Party from exerting any appreciable influence upon the first great movement of Negro masses since the Civil War and Reconstruction period. This potentially revolutionary movement of the Negro toilers, which arose in the post-war period, was allowed to fall under the influence of reactionary petty-bourgeois utopians led by Garvey and thereby diverted from a struggle against American imperialism into channels of a "peaceful return to Africa".

These dangerous weaknesses in our work among Negroes could only be overcome on the basis of the development of a real Bolshevik Leninist program, the kernel of which is the conception of the Negro question as that of an oppressed nation, as part of the question of the proletarian revolution. Only on this basis could the Party effect a decisive change in its Negro work and come forward as the real leader in the struggle of the Negro masses against imperialism. This program was a great contribution to the class struggle of the American working class, giving it a powerful weapon with which to break through the barriers of bourgeois race and national hatred, to tap the tremendous reserve force of the proletariat, the struggle of the Negro masses against imperialist oppression, and to unite the Negro and white toilers in a common struggle against capitalism.

The first real achievements of our Party in the leadership of the struggles of the Negro masses date from the beginnings of the application of this Leninist line. A historic landmark in the development of our Negro work was the public trial of August Yokinen. In this trial the case of discrimination by a white Party member against Negroes was made the occasion for a political demonstration in which the Party's program on the Negro question and the struggle against white chauvin-

ism were dramatized with an unprecedented effect before the widest masses throughout the country. Comrade Browder in his report before American students, in estimating the political significance of this trial, declared “that it was a public challenge dramatically flung into the face of one of the basic principles of social relationships in America – the American institution of Jim-Crowism.... The expulsion of Yokinen, expressing our declaration of war against white chauvinism, exerted a tremendous influence to draw the Negro masses closer to us.”

In this trial the Party achieved a great step forward in the education of its membership and the masses around the Party on our program on the Negro question. This was particularly exemplified in Comrade Yokinen himself who, after six months, came back into the Party as one of the staunchest fighters for its program of Negro liberation and who, as a result of his courageous and militant stand on this question, was deported by the Negro-hating imperialist government. The trial of Yokinen served to prepare the Party ideologically for a real interest in the struggle for Negro rights.

The Yokinen trial was immediately followed by the organization of a mass movement to save the lives of the Scottsboro boys. On the basis of the political preparation through the Yokinen trial the Party was able to seize effectively upon the issue of the frame-up of these boys to develop a tremendous campaign of mass action and the exposure of the whole system of national oppression of the Negroes. The Scottsboro campaign marked the first real nationwide mobilization of masses by the Party for a concrete struggle against one of the cornerstones of capitalist Negro oppression – the institution of lynching. Through the struggle on this issue the Party was able to bring its program before the widest masses of Negro and white toilers, arousing among them the greatest sympathy and confidence. Scottsboro, as the first big battle conducted by the Party on the front of Negro national liberation, did much to break down the traditional barriers of chauvinism and national distrust separating the Negro and white toilers. This struggle, which was coupled with a real political exposure of the treacherous role of the Negro bourgeois reformists of the N.A.A.C.P., hastened the process of class differentiation among the Negroes – the separation of the interests of the Negro proletarian and semi-proletarian masses from the general interests of “race solidarity” as propagated by the Negro bourgeois nationalists. The Negro toilers began to understand class divisions. They began to find out who were their friends and who their enemies.

Only through the vigorous application of our correct Leninist program on the Negro question could the Party carry through and lead such

a struggle as the Scottsboro campaign. This campaign gave rise to the sudden movement of mass participation of Negro workers on an unprecedented scale in the general struggles of the working class throughout the country. The great strike of the Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia coal miners which broke out in 1931, during the first part of the Scottsboro campaign, witnessed greater participation of Negro workers than any other economic action led by the revolutionary trade unions. Large masses of Negro workers rallied to the unemployed movement, displaying matchless militancy in the actions of the unemployed. Notable examples of this were the heroic demonstrations against evictions in the Negro neighborhoods of Chicago and Cleveland.

While the Negro masses were beginning to participate more and more in the class struggles in the North, an event of great historical significance occurred in the Black Belt – the organization of the Sharecroppers Union and the heroic resistance of the sharecroppers to the attacks of the landlords and sheriffs at Camp Hill, Alabama. In this struggle, the revolutionary ferment of the Negro poor farmers and sharecroppers received its first expression, resulting in the establishment of the first genuine revolutionary organization among the Negro poor farmers – the militant Sharecroppers Union. The agrarian movement of the Negro masses was further continued and developed in the Tallapoosa fight in which the sharecroppers gave armed resistance to the legalized robbery of the landlords and merchants.

This whole series of class and national liberation struggles was further deepened and politicalized through the Communist presidential election campaign of 1932. In this campaign the Party was able to further extend its program among the masses, rallying large numbers of Negroes behind its political slogans.

Thus the application of a Bolshevik program in conditions of sharpening crisis and growing radicalization of the Negroes has resulted in the extension of the political influence of the Party among broad masses of Negroes, and in the growth of the Party membership among them. Of outstanding importance in this period is the establishment of the Party in the South and in the Black Belt.

These struggles have led to a growing class consciousness of the Negro working class and its emergence upon the political arena as an independent class force in the Negro liberation movement. In the course of these struggles the Negro working class is rapidly liberating itself from the treacherous reformist influences. Thus the characteristic of the present stage of the development of the Negro movement is the maturing of this most important driving force of Negro liberation – the

Negro industrial working class. The Negro workers, in close organic unity with the white working class and under the leadership of the Communist Party is the only force capable of rallying the masses of Negro toilers in a victorious struggle against capitalism. The struggle for Negro liberation is now taking place under conditions of growing proletarian hegemony and Communist Party leadership.

The Negro question at the present time assumes greater significance than at any time since the Civil War and Reconstruction period. The present period marks for the first time the participation of masses of Negroes in the political life of the country as a force independent of the major capitalist parties. The significance of the Negro question as a factor in the sharpening of the revolutionary crisis of American imperialism has been thereby greatly increased.

The Leninist line on the Negro question was hammered out in the sharpest struggle against the opportunist line developed under the leadership of Lovestone. In the period prior to the Sixth Congress of the C.I. the work of the Party was characterized by weakness and hesitancy. This was due to the absence of a Leninist line on this question. These dangerous shortcomings of the Party in its work among Negroes were not at first so much expressed in open theoretical formulations, as they were expressed in practice characterized by neglect, passivity and indifference.

However, it remained for Lovestone to provide a theoretical foundation for all the opportunist views prevalent in the Party on the Negro question and to crystallize them into a definite right wing line in which all weaknesses were justified. This line was an integral part of the whole system of right wing views put forward in the Party by Lovestone, which found its fruition in the counterrevolutionary theory of American exceptionalism. This line was first clearly formulated in the report of Lovestone at the Fifth Convention of our Party (1927). In this report Lovestone stated the following:

“The migration of hundreds of thousands of Negroes from the South into the industrial centers of the North and East is rapidly changing the Negro masses from a reserve of capitalist reaction into a reserve of the proletarian revolution.”

In other words, as long as the Negroes remained on the farms in the South they were reserves of capitalist reaction and could be considered reserves of the proletarian revolution only to the extent that they migrated into the industrial centers of the North. It is clear that this formulation justifies the complete desertion of the Negro toilers of the South.

At the same time it rejects the role of the Negro peasantry as allies of the proletarian revolution and as an essential driving force, under the leadership of the Negro industrial working class, in the Negro liberation movement. This whole line was based upon a social-democratic denial of the national agrarian question among Negroes.

Not only did the Lovestoneites deny the possibility of revolutionary struggle on the part of the Negroes in the South, but they considered the very existence of the Negro agricultural masses as inimical to such struggles.

This counter-revolutionary conception was categorically rejected in the resolution of the Sixth Congress of the C.I. and in the resolution of the Executive Committee of the Communist International October 26, 1928.

“Thus the agrarian problem lies at the roots of the Negro national movement. The great majority of the Negroes in the rural districts of the South are *not* ‘reserves of capitalist reaction’ but *potential allies of the revolutionary proletariat*. Their objective position facilitates their transformation into a revolutionary force which under the leadership of the proletariat will be able to participate in the joint struggles with all other workers against capitalist exploitation.” (Emphasis mine – H. H.)

The theory of the Negro masses in the South as “reserves of capitalist reaction” attained its further development in the Lovestone-Pepper theory of the Industrial Revolution in the South. The “Industrial Revolution in the South” was a cornerstone of the whole system of opportunist views which comprised the theory of American exceptionalism.

According to this theory American capitalism was to find a way out of its growing contradictions and escape the general crisis of world capitalism through the opening up of a whole new territory for capitalist expansion – the Southern states. This was to be done through the establishment of industries, and the mechanization of agriculture.

Thus the perspective was not one of the inevitable sharpening of the crisis in the U.S.A. but the opening up of a new era of unlimited prosperity for American capitalism, the ushering in of a “Hooverian Age” corresponding to the Victorian Age of British capitalism. Thus in America we were confronted not with decaying, moribund capitalism but progressive, robust capitalism. This counter-revolutionary movement of the theories of the bourgeois liberal apologists and enthusiasts,

reflecting the awe of the petty bourgeoisie before the strength and “impregnability” of American imperialism.

On the Negro question this theory represented a continuation and further development of the theory of the Negro masses as a “reserve of capitalist reaction.” The “industrial revolution” was to sweep away the remnants of slavery in Southern agriculture, proletarianize the Negro peasantry and thus automatically disentangle the complicated problem of national antagonism in the South. The Negro question as a special national question was to be solved within the confines of the capitalist imperialist structure without a struggle.

The whole opportunist theory of American exceptionalism was shattered in the Address of the Communist International to the C.P.U.S.A. (May, 1929), which reads in part:

“With a distinctness unprecedented in history, American capitalism is exhibiting now the effects of the inexorable laws of capitalist development, the laws of decline and downfall of capitalist society. The general crisis of capitalism is growing more rapidly than it may seem at first glance. The crisis will shake also the foundations of American imperialism.”

In refuting Lovestone’s views on the Negro question the C.I. Resolution of 1930 reads:

“...the prospect for the future is not an inevitable dying away of the national revolutionary Negro movement in the South, as Lovestone prophesied, but on the contrary a great advance of this movement and the rapid approach of the revolutionary crisis in the Black Belt.”

Resistance to the C.I. program on the Negro question was further continued after the Sixth Congress in Pepper’s slogan, “Negro Soviet Republics.” This was an attempt on the part of Lovestone and Pepper to smuggle in the old opportunist line of denial of the Negro nationalist agrarian question under left phrases. In effect it amounted to making the acceptance of Soviets by the Negro masses in the Black Belt a condition for the Party’s support of their struggle for the right of self-determination. This imposition of the slogan of Soviets from above on the Negro masses was equivalent to dictating to the Negro toilers the forms in which they must conduct their struggles against imperialism and consequently negated the whole principle of right of self-determination. Also the slogan of a “Soviet Republic” contained an opportunist attempt to skip over the present stage of preparation and

organization of the Negro masses in the struggle for their immediate demands for the right of self-determination. This opportunist distortion of Pepper's was definitely rejected in the C. I. Resolution which states:

“Moreover, the Party cannot make its stand for this slogan dependent upon any conditions, even the condition that the proletariat has the hegemony in the national revolutionary Negro movement or that the majority of the Negro population in the Black Belt adopts the Soviet form (as Pepper demanded), etc.”

The theory of the Negro masses in the South as “reserves of capitalist reaction,” made its last open stand in the bourgeois liberal conception which regarded the Negro question not as a national question but as a race question. This conception gained ground among some Party comrades after the Sixth Congress and served to cloak their resistance to the line of the C. I. and the Party.

According to these comrades the Negro question arises solely from racial distinctions and their utilization by the bourgeoisie. In this they failed to see the profound social antagonisms which lie at the base of the Negro problem, *i.e.*, the agrarian question and the struggle for democratic rights. Consequently the movement of the Negro toilers is reduced to a feeble bourgeois liberal opposition against race prejudice as divorced from its economic and social roots. It is clear that such a theory is nothing but a capitulation to bourgeois liberalism. This dangerous distortion of our line on the Negro question was categorically rejected by the C.I. and the Party. In this regard the Resolution of the C. I., October, 1930, while recognizing the role of the race factor in the oppression of the Negroes, definitely states:

“The Negro question in the United States must be viewed from the standpoint of its peculiarity, namely, as the question of an *oppressed nation*, which is in a peculiar and extraordinarily distressing situation of national oppression not only in view of the prominent *racial distinctions* (marked difference in the color of skin, etc.), but above all, because of considerable *social antagonism* (remnants of slavery).”

At the bottom of all these anti-Bolshevik theories on the Negro question lies a deep-rooted underestimation of the Negro liberation movement as a powerful force in the sharpening of the revolutionary crisis of American imperialism and consequently the non-

understanding of this movement as an integral part of the proletarian revolution.

Only on the basis of the sharpest struggle against and the defeat of these anti-Leninist conceptions within its ranks has the Party been able to go forward in the winning of the Negro masses.

Although it can be said generally that our Party has rallied to the struggle against the worst manifestations of these errors that have been so harmful to our work in the past it must be said that survivals of these anti-Leninist ideas still persist, retarding the development of our work among Negroes. While the Party has become a real factor in the struggle for Negro rights and its political influence is rapidly increasing among ever larger sections of the Negro toilers, these successes are by no means commensurate with the objective possibilities and the rising upsurge of the masses. We are *still lagging behind the rapidly deepening ferment* among the Negro toilers. Our movement among Negroes still lacks a solid organizational base in the shops, factories and in the neighborhoods. This is noticeable first of all in the extremely high turnover in the Negro membership of the Party, in the relatively small number of Negro workers in our revolutionary trade unions, and in the insufficient bringing forward of Negro cadres in all phases of Party work. There are still grave weaknesses in our struggle against and exposure of the Negro bourgeois reformist leadership. These weaknesses were brought out in the united front on the Scottsboro campaign immediately following the Decatur verdict. In this united front there were manifested open opportunist tendencies in the direction of capitulation to the Negro reformists as well as right sectarian tendencies which would narrow down the united front. In the struggle against white chauvinism there is to be observed a widespread tendency to replace a consistent and daily struggle against this poisonous imperialist ideology linked up with the mobilization of the masses of white toilers in the struggle for the specific demands of the Negro masses by occasional spectacular anti-chauvinist demonstrations in the form of mass trials, which in most cases were badly prepared. In connection with the struggles for Negro rights there is noticeable an inability to connect up the popularization of our full program on the Negro question with the development of partial struggle for the daily needs of the Negro masses in the shops, factories, neighborhoods and on the plantations.

While the Party has carried through energetically general campaigns on national liberation issues as witnessed in the Scottsboro campaign and the Communist election struggles, nevertheless these general struggles have not been sufficiently utilized for the development of

local struggles, for the mobilization of Negro toilers in the shops, factories and neighborhoods and on the plantations in the struggle for their most vital needs. Our weaknesses in the development of the struggles of the Negro toilers on the economic field are most glaringly manifested in the work of the revolutionary trade unions. The directives of the Fourteenth Plenum which call for making the Red unions the “real channels of Negro work” have not been sufficiently understood by the Party.

These shortcomings in our work among Negroes arise from two sources – first, they are connected with the general weakness of the Party as characterized in the Open Letter to the Extraordinary Party Conference. These are the failure to carry through a real Bolshevik policy of concentration of our work on the most important industries and factories and among the decisive sections of the American working class. Inasmuch as the main masses of Negro workers are also concentrated in the decisive industries of the country – coal, steel, marine – this lack of a concentration policy must necessarily affect the work of organization of the Negro working class. Second, an analysis of the shortcomings of our Party will also show that they are to a considerable extent traceable to the still existing lack of clarity in regard to the Leninist conception of the Negro question as a national question, *i.e.*, failure to understand this question as essentially a question of allies for the proletarian revolution. This is expressed in a denial of the necessity for a special approach to the Negro workers, a tendency to blur over their special demands, failure to raise them. This is most glaringly expressed in our trade union and shop work as well as to some extent in the field of unemployment. A prevalent tendency in our revolutionary unions and to some extent in our unemployed councils is for these organizations to confine their efforts among Negroes to the placing of general demands such as equal rights on the job, no discrimination against Negroes, etc., and the failure to concretize these demands on the basis of the concrete conditions of the Negro workers in the individual shops, factories and neighborhoods. The tendency to gloss over the specific demands of the Negroes in some instances takes the form of actual resistance to struggle for these demands. This deviation in many cases is cloaked by seemingly radical phrases about no difference between Negro and white workers.

Behind this underestimation of the struggle for the demands of the Negro masses lies a deep-seated social democratic concept which regards the struggles of the Negro toilers against Jim Crowism and special persecution *not* as a *part of the general struggles of the working*

class against capitalism but as something separate and apart from that struggle, as a struggle which does not strengthen but rather detracts from the general class struggle.

This reflects the survivals within our ranks of the old anti-revolutionary and essentially white chauvinist theory of the Lovestone renegades, the theory of the Negroes as “reserves of capitalist reaction.” Without a continuous and vigorous fight both ideologically and organizationally against these dangerous tendencies, it will be impossible to carry through the task of the Fourteenth Plenum and the Open Letter in the field of Negro work.

The Open Letter reemphasizes the importance of the Negro question as a question of “allies of the American proletariat” and declares that “the Party can stand at the head of the national revolutionary struggle of the Negro masses against American imperialism only if it energetically carries through the decisions of the Fourteenth Plenum of the E. C. on the work among Negroes.”

The main immediate task before the Party is the more energetic organization of the proletarian and semi-proletarian Negro masses into the Party and revolutionary mass organizations, particularly the revolutionary trade unions as an essential part of the carrying through of the policy of concentration. This task at the present time assumes tremendous importance from the standpoint of strengthening the hegemony of the working class and the leadership of the Party in the growing Negro national liberation struggles. The key to the successful carrying through of this task at the present moment lies in the energetic putting forward and the conducting of the struggle for the special demands of the Negroes in connection with the Roosevelt National Recovery Act. The NIRA together with the Farm Relief Bill sharpens and legalizes the discrimination of Negro workers on the job and the robbery of the Negro poor farmers and sharecroppers on the plantations of the South. It means an all-around sharpening of the national oppression of the Negro people as witnessed in the new wave of lynchings in the South – Tuscaloosa, Decatur, Selma, Alabama. The struggle against this increased oppression of the Negro masses must become an integral part of whole campaign against the NIRA.

“In all mass actions, strikes and unemployed struggles the Party must pay particular attention in formulating practical demands, that it takes into consideration and gives expression to the special forms of exploitation, oppression and denial of

the rights of the employed and unemployed Negro masses.”
(Open Letter.)

The emphasis upon the development of economic struggles among the Negro toilers does not mean to slacken but on the contrary to increase in every way the struggle around the general issues of Negro liberation, such as Scottsboro and the fight against lynching. It is necessary to broaden out and deepen these struggles, bringing forward our full program of social equality and right of self-determination and building up the broadest united front on these issues. Our chief task, however, is to bring this struggle into the shops and factories and on the land, linking it up with the more immediate demands of the Negro toilers, making the factories the main base in the struggle for Negro liberation and our trade unions the main lever for the organization of the Negro working class. At the same time the revolutionary mass organizations and particularly the trade unions must come forward more energetically in the struggle on behalf of the political demands of the Negro toilers.

This must go hand in hand with the ruthless combating of all forms of chauvinist and Jim Crow practices and the patient, systematic but persistent struggle against the ideology and influence of petty-bourgeois nationalists among the Negro toilers.

Only on this basis will the Party be able to give leadership to the rapidly developing upsurge of the Negro masses and to build this movement into a powerful weapon of the revolutionary proletariat for the weakening and destruction of the rule of American imperialism.