

# **The Decline of the Garvey Movement**

**by Cyril Briggs**

Garveyism, or Negro Zionism, rose on the crest of the wave of discontent and revolutionary ferment which swept the capitalist world as a result of the post-war crisis.

Increased national oppression of the Negroes, arising out of the post-war crisis, together with the democratic slogans thrown out by the liberal-imperialist demagogues during the World War (right of self-determination for all nations, etc.) served to bring to the surface the latent national aspirations of the Negro masses. These aspirations were considerably strengthened with the return of the Negro workers and poor farmers who had been conscripted to “save the world for democracy.” These returned with a wider horizon, new perspectives of human rights and a new confidence in themselves as a result of their experiences and disillusionment in the war. Their return strengthened the morale of the Negro masses and stiffened their resistance. So-called race riots took the place of lynching bees and massacres. The Negro masses were fighting back. In addition, many of the more politically advanced of the Negro workers were looking to the example of the victorious Russian proletariat as the way out of their oppression. The conviction was growing that the proletarian revolution in Russia was the beginning of a world-wide *united* movement of down-trodden classes and oppressed peoples. Even larger numbers of the Negro masses were becoming more favorable toward the revolutionary labor movement.

## **Distortion of National Revolutionary Movement by the Reformists**

This growing national revolutionary sentiment was seized upon by the Negro petty bourgeoisie, under the leadership of the demagogue, Marcus Garvey, and diverted into utopian, reactionary, “Back to Africa” channels. There were various other reformist attempts to formulate the demands of the Negro masses and to create a program of action which would appeal to all elements of the dissatisfied Negro people. None of these met with even the partial and temporary success which greeted the Garvey movement.

The leadership of the Garvey Movement consisted of the poorest stratum of the Negro intellectuals – declassed elements, strug-

gling business men and preachers, lawyers without a brief, etc. – who stood more or less close to the Negro masses and felt sharply the effects of the crisis. The movement represented a split-away from the official Negro bourgeois leadership of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People which even then was already linked up with the imperialists.

The main social base of the movement was the Negro agricultural workers and the farming masses groaning under the terrific oppression of peonage and share cropper slavery, and the backward sections of the Negro industrial workers, for the most part recent migrants from the plantations into the industrial centers of the North and South. These saw in the movement an escape from national oppression, a struggle for Negro rights throughout the world, including freedom from the oppression of the southern landlords and for ownership of the land. To the small advanced industrial Negro proletariat, who were experienced in the class struggle, the Garvey movement had little appeal.

While the movement never had the millions organizationally enrolled that its leaders claimed, it did have in 1921, at the time of its second congress, nearly 100,000 members on its books, as revealed in an analysis made by W. A. Domingo<sup>1</sup> of the deliberately confused financial statement given by the leadership to the delegates at the Second Congress. Moreover, the movement exercised a tremendous ideological influence over millions of Negroes outside its ranks.

### **Reflected Militancy of the Masses in Its Early Stages**

The movement began as a radical petty bourgeois national movement, reflecting to a great extent in its early stages the militancy of the toiling masses, and in its demands expressing their readiness for struggle against oppression in the United States. From the very beginning there were two sides inherent to the movement: a democratic side and a reactionary side. In the early stage the democratic side dominated. To get the masses into the movement, the national reformist leaders were forced to resort to demagoguery. The pressure of the militant masses in the movement further forced them

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<sup>1</sup> In an article in the *Crusader Magazine*, entitled “Figures Never Lie But Liars Do Figure.”

to adopt progressive slogans. The program of the first congress was full of militant demands expressing the readiness for struggle in the United States.

A Negro mass movement with such perspectives was correctly construed by the imperialists as a direct threat to imperialism, and pressure began to be put on the leadership. A threat of the imperialists, inspired and backed by the leadership of the N.A.A.C.P., to exclude Garvey from the country on his return from a tour of the West Indies brought about the complete and abject capitulation of the national reformist leaders. Crawling on his knees before the imperialists, Garvey enunciated the infamous doctrine that "the Negro must be loyal to all flags under which he lives." This was a complete negation of the Negro liberation struggle. It was followed by an agreement with the Ku Klux Klan, in which the reformists catered for the support of the southern senators in an attempt to secure the "repatriation" of the Negro masses by deportation to Liberia.

The objective difficulties and subjective weakness of the movement, arising out of reformist leadership and its attempt to harmonize the demands of all the dissatisfied elements among the Negro people, inevitably led to the betrayal of the toiling masses.

### **Surrendered Right of Self- Determination of Negro Majorities of U.S. and West Indies**

While never actually waging a real struggle for national liberation the movement did make some militant demands in the beginning. However, these demands were soon thrown overboard as the reactionary side of the movement gained dominance. There followed a complete and shameful abandonment and betrayal of the struggles of the Negro masses of the United States and the West Indies. The right of the Negro majorities in the West Indies and in the Black Belt of the United States to determine and control their own government was as completely negated by the Garvey national reformists as by the imperialists. The Garvey movement became a tool of the imperialists. Even its struggle slogans for the liberation of the African peoples, which had always been given main stress, were abandoned and the movement began to peddle the illusion of a *peaceful return to Africa*.

At first giving expression to the disgust which the Negro masses felt for the religious illusions of liberation through "divine" intervention, etc., the Garvey movement became one of the main so-

cial carriers of these illusions among the masses, with Marcus Garvey taking on the role of High Priest after the resignation and defection of the Chaplain-General, Bishop McGuire. Feudal orders, high sounding titles and various commercial adventures were substituted for the struggle demands of the earlier stages.

How completely the reactionary side came to dominate the movement is shown in (1) its acceptance of the Ku Klux Klan viewpoint that the United States is a white man's country and that the Negro masses living here are rightfully denied all democratic rights; (2) the rejection by the leaders at the 1929 conventions in Jamaica, B.W.I., of a resolution condemning imperialism.

In both cases the betrayals just noted were carried to their logical conclusion, in Garvey's bid for an alliance with the Ku Klux Klan, and in an article he wrote in the *Black Man* (Jamaica organ of the movement) shortly after the 1929 convention in which he attacked the Jamaica workers for organizing into unions of the T.U.U.L. to better their conditions. In this article he attacked Communism as a menace to the imperialists and warned the Negro masses of Jamaica that they "would not dare accept and foster something tabooed by the mother country." So complete was the counterrevolutionary degeneration of the national reformists that the oppressing imperialism was openly accepted by them as their "mother country!" The imperialist oppressors were presented to the masses as "friends who have treated him (the Negro) if not fairly, with some kind of consideration!"

The decline of the movement synchronized with the subsiding of the post war crisis. As a result both of the lessening of the economic pressure on the masses and the awakening of the most militant sections of the membership to the betrayals being carried out by the national reformist behind the gesture of struggle phrases and demagogy, the masses began to drop away from the movement. Relieved of the pressure of the militant masses the movement began to assert more and more its reactionary and anti-democratic side.

Already at the Second Congress it was evident that the national reformists were losing their grip on the masses. As a result of the widespread exposures carried on by the Negro radicals<sup>2</sup> against the

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<sup>2</sup> The Negro radicals referred to are Richard B. Moore, Otto Huiswoud, W.A. Domingo, Cyril Briggs, and Hubert Harrison before his degenera-

dishonest business schemes and consistent betrayals of the national Negro liberation movement by the Garvey reformists, the sympathetic masses outside of the organization were becoming more and more critical of the national reformists. Within the organization itself there was such wide-spread dissatisfaction that the top leadership was forced to make sacrificial goats of several rubber stamp lieutenants. Within a few months of the closing of the Second Congress, the first big mass defections occurred (California, Philadelphia). These revolts, however, were led by reformists and were significant only from the point of view of the growing disintegration of the movement. From 1921, the movement has undergone a continuous process of deterioration and break-up, as the masses increasingly came to realize the treacherous character of the national reformist leaders.

The recent decision of Garvey to sell the Jamaica properties of the organization (pocketing the proceeds) and take up his residence in Europe (far from the masses he has plundered and betrayed), denotes a high stage in the collapse of this reactionary movement, whose dangerous ideology, as pointed out by the C.I., bears not a single democratic trait.

Historically however the movement has certain progressive achievements. It undoubtedly helped to crystallize the national aspirations of the Negro masses. Moreover, the Negro masses achieved a certain political ripening as a result of their experience and disillusionment with this movement.

### ***New Negro Liberation Movement Goes Forward Under the Hegemony of the Negro Proletariat***

The betrayal of these aspirations and the national liberation struggle by the Garvey national reformists was facilitated by (1) the immaturity of the Negro working-class; (2) the weakness both in theoretical and in organizational strength of the revolutionary labor movement in the United States at that time.

Today as the result of large-scale migrations into the industrial centers of large numbers of Negroes from the plantations, a strong Negro proletariat has come into being, developing in the class

tion. Domingo was never a member of the Party. Huiswoud, Briggs and Moore were members of the Communist fraction in the African Blood Brotherhood.

struggle and freeing themselves of petty bourgeois influences and reformist illusions. Further, as the result of the present crisis and the correct application by the Communist Party of the U.S.A. of the C.I. line on the Negro question, the Negro liberation movement again goes forward, this time under the sign of proletarian hegemony, and wages a relentless fight against imperialism and for unconditional Negro equality, including the right of self-determination of the Negro majorities in the Black Belt of the South, in the West Indies and the Negro peoples of Africa.

Before concluding, it is necessary to emphasize here that the Garvey movement, while in decline and on the verge of collapse, still represents a most dangerous reactionary force, exercising considerable ideological influence over large masses of Negroes. It will not do to ignore this movement which is most dangerous in its disintegration because of the desperate attempts being made by the national reformists leaders to maintain their influence over the Negro masses, either by saving the movement as it is or by luring the dissatisfied masses into other organizations under the control of the national reformists.

The situation affords considerable opportunity for the winning of the Negro masses away from the influence of the reformists and in another article I will deal with the tasks of the Party in relation to the disintegration and decline of the Garvey Movement.

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## **The Crisis of the Jim-Crow Nationalism of the Negro Bourgeoisie**

**by Harry Haywood**

“Colored America needs nothing so much at this time as a Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi argued that all the machinery of government in India is in the hands of the English and their native puppets. His people are neither in the possession of the implements of warfare nor are they trained in their use. They are without economic resources, illiterate and inexperienced. Therefore Gandhi argued that passive and non-violent resistance was the only effective weapon in

India's possession. He has won.... All India is following his lead, has eventually risen as one man and stopped cooperation, thus rendering impotent English government in India. The All Indian Congress has placed complete power in Gandhi to deal with England.... Gandhi tells the story for colored America.”

Thus reads an editorial in the *New York News and Harlem Home Journal*, an influential Negro bourgeois paper.

It is not accidental that Negro reformism chooses as its ideal the arch betrayer of the Indian masses, Mahatma Gandhi. The reason for this monumental reverence of Gandhi is quite evident. The deepening crisis and rising temper of the Negro masses against the increasing yoke of oppression, make necessary greater demagoguery on the part of the Negro bourgeoisie. Gandhi has developed to perfection this new type of demagoguery. Gandhi has shown best how to fool the masses, how best to betray them under the condition of sharpening crisis and rising revolutionary movement.

This is why Gandhi, who has just sold out the Indian masses “for a mess of salt,” as has been aptly stated, has become the ideal of reformism in general, and of national reformism in particular. The strategy of the Indian bourgeoisie under the leadership of Gandhi, in betraying the revolutionary movement of the Indian masses, has become a pattern for study by all national reformists, especially at the present time when these latter, haunted by the spectre of revolutionary mass ferment, are deserting on all hands the national liberation movement for the camp of imperialism.

The same forces that compelled the Indian bourgeoisie under the leadership of Gandhi to embark upon the campaign of civil disobedience and salt tax boycott and which culminated in the dastardly desertion of the struggle of the Indian masses, are at work in the Negro liberation movement in the U.S. These forces are the gathering mass struggles of the Negro toilers against imperialism.

The crisis means a hundredfold intensification of the yoke of imperialist oppression upon the millions of Negro toilers in this country. It means a reducing of their already starvation level of existence to new low levels. In the South the masses of Negro tenant farmers, share croppers and farm laborers are being driven into further bondage and dependency by the slave driving landlords and usurers. Debt slavery and convict labor are increasing. Chain gangs lengthen. Disease and famine are rife. The Jim Crow districts in the cities, with their foul and pestilential housing conditions, inhuman

congestion, exorbitant rents, are, under conditions of sharpening crisis, becoming virtual hell-holes of misery and poverty for the Negro toilers. The already poverty-stricken level of the Negro workers makes them the easiest victims of the vicious capitalist offensive of unemployment, wage cuts and speed-up.

A new and more cruel slavery is being prepared for the Negro masses. This is manifested in the fiendish terror of increased lynching orgies, increased Negro baiting activities of the KKK, the springing up of new terrorist organizations, with venomous Negro hating programs (Caucasian Crusaders, Black Shirts, etc.), the cold-blooded killings of Negro workers all over the country by uniformed police thugs, the driving out of entire Negro populations from towns.

The rapidly worsening conditions of the Negro masses, taking place under conditions of developing revolutionary labor movement, are rapidly creating the basis for a new rise in the Negro liberation movement. The harbingers of this development are already at hand, especially in the industrial centers, as witnessed in the growing militancy of the Negro workers, their active participation, with white workers, in strikes, street demonstrations, hunger marches, attacks upon storehouses and warehouses.

The first big movement of the Negro toilers took place during the period of post-war crisis, which resulted in ruinous consequences for the Negro masses – unemployment, riots and lynchings chiefly because of the immaturity of the Negro working class (large sections of which had recently migrated from the farms) and the weakness of the revolutionary labor movement. The leadership of this potential revolutionary movement was seized by the petty bourgeois intellectuals, who under the guidance of Marcus Garvey diverted the struggle into reactionary, utopian, back-to-Africa channels. But the present movement is *developing under the sign of proletarian hegemony*.

The further industrialization of the South, the migration of Negro peasants from the farms into the industrial centers of the North and South, has led to the strengthening of class differentiation among the Negro peoples.

The political awakening of the Negro workers is going on apace. The period since the post-war crisis has been marked by the emergence of a Negro proletariat upon the political arena as an independent class force. The age-long isolation and particularism is

being broken down in the crucible of sharpening class struggle. This development has been given added momentum by the present crisis and the growth of the revolutionary movement.

In this situation the Negro bourgeoisie finds that its leadership over the Negro masses is no longer undisputed. The growth and maturing of this "most important driving force" of the Negro liberation movement, the Negro working class, is a direct threat to the hegemony of the Negro bourgeoisie. It is clear that the latter cannot go on betraying the masses in the old way. It must find new methods, it must utilize more demagogy. In all the current writings and speeches of the foremost spokesmen of this group there is clearly evidenced a groping for these new methods. In the perusal of a number of articles written by such eminent Negro publicists as Du-Bois and Kelly Miller, there is an open discussion of the "dilemma" or "crisis" and a seeking of a way out. The Negro bourgeoisie, as every other bourgeoisie, interprets its own class interests as the interests of the people as a whole. It is therefore quite clear that this "crisis of the Negro race" is in reality a crisis in Negro bourgeois nationalism which is being sorely tried by the growing militancy of the Negro masses.

The conditions of the Negro masses are worsening from day to day. They are clamoring for relief from their misery. They are demanding action on the question of their vital needs. This struggle of the Negro masses against starvation and against capitalist oppression, begins to break through the "pale" of enforced isolation and find its expression as part of the revolutionary labor movement. It is *this* that is the cause of the anxiety in the ranks of the Negro reformists. It is in this light that we must explain this new outburst of frenzied demagogy of the Negro bourgeoisie. The old methods of pacifying the masses are no longer effective in the present situation. New ways must be found to check the rising spirit of rebellion of the Negro masses against their deepening misery. New weapons of betrayal must be forged. Hence the adulation of the arch traitor, Gandhi. Hence the paeans of praise for this throttler of the revolutionary movement of the Indian masses, because it is Gandhi who is the embodiment of this new type of demagogy.

The Negro bourgeoisie stands at the cross-roads. It must either place itself at the head of the growing movement of the Negro masses and carry out a semblance of struggle for the crying needs of these masses, or admit its complete bankruptcy. In other words it

must master the teachings of the arch strategist of national reformism, Gandhi. It must "head in order to behead" that movement, in order to preserve the separation of the Negro masses under conditions of deepening crisis and developing revolutionary struggles. A glance at the present activities of the Negro bourgeoisie shows that their whole strategy is to narrow down the movement of the masses by placing before it limited objectives, to confine it to the Negro "ghettoes," to prevent it from merging with the revolutionary labor movement.

Already at the beginning of the crisis, the Negro reformists began to intensify their demagogy among the Negro masses. Forced on by the growing militancy of the masses and the activities of revolutionary organization, the Negro bourgeoisie and their white "liberal" friends organized series of round table conferences to talk over the situation of how best to check the growing movement of the Negro toilers.

The main Negro reformist organizations on a national scale are the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the National Urban League. The N.A.A.C.P. carries on activities on the political field, "fights" for reforms solely through legal channels. For example: It furnishes legal defense for outstanding cases of persecution of individual Negroes. In the case of lynchings its activities are almost solely confined to "investigations" and agitation for anti-lynch legislation.

The National Urban League, an organization noted for its strikebreaking activities, operates on the industrial field. Its program, according to the executive secretary, Eugene Kinckle Jones, is the "handling of acute economic problems growing out of the presence of an increasing Negro population."

The executive boards of both of these organizations include not only white liberals but also certain out and out imperialist elements. These organizations are financed by such representatives of American finance capital as John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and Julius Rosenwald. Also such imperialist agencies as the Stokeses and the Carnegie Foundation contribute to the support of these organizations.

The most acute question concerning the Negro workers at present is unemployment. The National Urban League has taken the leadership on this field with the support of all Negro reformist organizations, churches, Y.M.C.A.'s, fraternal organizations. Already at the beginning of the crisis these organizations initiated so-called

“emergency job finding campaigns.” Their program included (1) the organization of separate, Jim-Crow “relief” drives, for the unemployed Negro workers; (2) the representation on all fake charity and relief committees, both on a local and national scale, as well as on so-called investigation and survey committees. For an example, the Wofter Committee appointed by the Rosenwald Fund (Chicago) upon agreement with President Hoover for an “economic” survey among Negroes. T. Arnold Hill, head of the Industrial Relations Department of the National Urban League, was recently appointed by Col. Woods, director of President Hoover’s “Employment” Committee as “liaison” officer between this committee and the Negro group. The program of the League also includes “making jobs” for unemployed intellectuals. In this connection it seeks to get prominent capitalists to invest capital in undertakings in the Negro districts and to have these enterprises staffed by Negroes. For example: the Dunbar Apartments and the Dunbar National Bank, John D. Rockefeller institutions in Harlem.

Hand in hand with these general activities an intensification of bourgeois separatist propaganda is being carried on. Everywhere the spokesmen of the Negro bourgeoisie are appealing for greater race loyalty, race cooperation, as the foreign born and the revolutionary labor movement is being intensified.

With the deepening of the crisis and the consequent increasing of the discontent of the masses, these activities are taking new forms. Within the last few months the Negro reformists have initiated boycott movements under the slogans of “Don’t trade where you cannot work,” “All jobs in the Negro districts for Negroes,” etc., etc. The agitation against the foreign-born and the revolutionary labor movement which was already noted at the initial stages of the movement is now being put forward sharply. For instance, Oscar De Priest, millionaire congressman, is one of the staunchest supporters of the anti-foreign-born legislation proposed by the Fish Committee. In all mass meetings called by these fakers demagogic tirades are launched against the foreign-born and the revolutionary labor movement. The argument used is that the foreign-born workers are usurping the rightful places of the Negro workers in industry, and that the white revolutionary workers merely want the Negroes “to pull their chestnuts out of the fire.” The real reactionary essence under all of this demagogy and crass betrayal of the Negro masses is shown in the stand of De Priest on the United States Senate food

“relief” bill. On this occasion De Priest rejected the bill, stating that “if we believe in states’ rights we should give the people of the states the right to take care of their own.”

The boycott movement was first started in Chicago a few months ago by the Negro reformists. It was supported in general by the white politicians who sought to utilize this movement for political capital. Agitation was particularly sharpened against the foreign-born; these pernicious activities finally resulted in a riot, in which Negro workers, egged on by the Negro reformists and white capitalist friends, drove foreign-born workers from a construction job. This movement was temporarily stopped in Chicago chiefly due to the activities of the Communist Party. But, recently it has again been revived, and this time threatens to assume national proportions.

In New York the movement is already on foot; for example, current issues of the Pittsburgh *Courier*, as well as local Negro bourgeois papers, carry lengthy articles calling for support of the “Don’t buy where you can’t work” movement. The movement in New York assumes broader aspects than previous movements in other cities. Here this movement is being inspired by such elements as Roscoe Conklin Bruce, Negro representative of John D. Rockefeller interests in Harlem, James Hubert of the National Urban League, James Stephens, Negro assemblyman in the New York legislature, and a number of white Tammany Hall politicians. These elements, through Stephens, have introduced a bill in the New York state legislature “against” discrimination against Negro workers by utility companies. The bill is proposed as an amendment to the civil rights law and will make it unlawful for Utility companies to discriminate against Negroes on grounds of race or color. The bill, according to Stephens, “is an answer to the prayer of the Harlem Negroes to break into the employ of the New York Telephone Company, the New York Electric Light,” etc., etc.

However, even this fake gesture is negated by a stipulation that “under the provisions of the Stephens bill a Negro may seek employment of a public utility company, and may be turned down provided there is no work to be given.”

On this fake issue mass meetings are being called throughout the Negro districts; calls are being made for mass support of this bill. Hand in hand with this, at all meetings vicious attacks are being made against the foreign-born workers and the revolutionary labor movement.

The purpose of all of these pernicious activities of the Negro reformists and white capitalists is obviously to narrow down the developing mass movement of the Negro toilers against increased imperialist oppression, to isolate it from the general revolutionary movement, and to divert it into channels harmless for the imperialists.

In making “comparisons” between the Negro and Indian bourgeoisies it is necessary to keep in mind that the Negro bourgeoisie, unlike its Indian class brothers, has little or no connection with industry. Because of the terrific oppression of the Negro masses, the Negro bourgeoisie was late in forming. Even at the present time it consists in the main of a thin stratum of capitalist business people and intellectuals. The character of the oppression of Negroes in the Black Belt militated against the development of a Negro bourgeoisie in this district. Here the surplus labor of the Negro population was gobbled up by the white ruling classes. Therefore the only chance for the development was in the cities. Arriving on the scene only in the epoch of imperialism, at which time the chief means of production and transportation were already in the hands of imperialist monopolies, the Negro bourgeoisie could not get any foothold in industries. This explains its peculiar development as a class of insurance and real estate brokers, and bankers on a small scale, with their chief sphere of activities confined to the segregated districts of the cities.

Thus the October Resolution of the C.I. states that,

“Industrialization in the Black Belt is not, as is generally the case in colonies properly speaking, in contradiction with the ruling interests of the imperialist bourgeoisie, which has in its hands the monopoly of all industry...”

Thus it is clear that the basic contradiction – the contradiction between the independent capitalist development of the country under the political domination of the national bourgeoisie and the monopolist colonial policy of imperialism is lacking in the case of the Negro bourgeoisie. The market of the Negro businessmen and intellectuals is almost exclusively based upon the masses in the Jim Crow districts of the cities. This almost complete dependence upon the Negro masses makes the Negro bourgeoisie interested in keeping these masses separated from the whites. It is interested in preserving the Black Belt in the cities. One of the prominent spokesmen of this group, writing in the St. Louis *Argus* (a Negro bour-

geois paper) makes the following illuminating remarks in this connection.

“Such progress as Negro business has made has been due in a large measure to its *segregated* nature. Insurance is a case in point. Had there not been segregation in insurance, it is doubtful if Negro insurance could have survived. Behind almost all of the larger Negro fortunes is this same principle of segregation.”

Then under the sub-caption of “Thrive on Segregation,” the writer continues:

“The monumental fortune of the late Madam Walker and Mrs. Malone can be accounted for upon this principle of segregation. The wealth of our professionals comes under the same explanation. The Negro has achieved most wonderfully in those segregated fields in which he has a monopoly; he had a monopoly because of race prejudice....”

It is clear that this segregational interest of the Negro bourgeoisie coincides with the isolation policies of American imperialism, and lies at the basis of the collaboration activities of the Negro reformists with the latter.

These isolation tendencies of the Negro bourgeoisie are reflected in the Jim Crow nationalism of this group. Interpreting its own interests as the interests of the Negro people as a whole it attempts to rally the Negro masses in support of its class interests through slogans of “race loyalty,” “race solidarity,” etc., etc.

Thus the same writer quoted above says:

“Race loyalty offers the main source of hope. Those Negroes who hold that the Negro businessman must measure up to the best white businessman before he need expect the Negroes’ patronage, are speaking beside the point; and what is more, they are asking the Negro to lift himself by his own boot straps... even our chain stores in a ‘cut-throat trade war’ would not survive unless Negroes supported them for racial reasons.”

On the other hand the Negro bourgeoisie is sensitive to national oppression of the Negroes which keeps the Negro masses at a poverty level and limits their buying power. This fact makes it interested in raising the economic and cultural level of the Negro masses. Thus hand in hand with its slogans of “race loyalty,” etc., etc., it also puts forth the slogans of “social equality” (meaning by this equal opportunity), down with trade union bars, the purpose of which is to keep the Negroes in the lowest category of labor. In this

interest, in raising the economic and cultural level of the masses, consists its link with the masses.

It seeks to reconcile the contradiction between its isolation interests and the interest of the masses by the following arguments: in order to secure equality, the Negroes must first gain the respect of the white people. This can only be done by the development of "race initiative." The Negroes must become economically independent as a race. Hence they must support their own business and professional people.

The whole trend of this Jim Crow nationalism is towards building up a sort of segregated group economy among the Negro masses in the cities, with the Negro bourgeoisie as intermediaries between the Negro masses and the ruling imperialist bourgeoisie. It is clear that social equality in their sense means equal communities of Negro and white peoples living side by side in the cities, but separated. A sort of Jim Crow equality. The Negro bourgeoisie never questions the actual domination of the imperialist ruling class, but on the contrary servilely accepts the position of the latter as supreme exploiter. It has waived all rights to the Black Belt, it has become more or less reconciled to the limited atmosphere imposed on it by the imperialist bourgeoisie, and with the growth of the political consciousness of the Negro toilers, the segregational face of Negro bourgeois nationalism become more pronounced.

The two strategical lines in the liberation movement of the Negro masses are becoming more and more sharply defined with the development of that movement; the line of the Negro reformists which leads to betrayal of the revolutionary movement of the masses, and the line of revolutionary solution of the Negro question to be realized through a fighting alliance of the Negro masses and the revolutionary workers, Negro and white, under the leadership of the Communist Party.

The problem of petty bourgeois tendencies among Negroes will be further considered in some future issue of *The Communist*.

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## **Against Bourgeois-Liberal Distortions of Leninism on the Negro Question in the United States** by Harry Haywood

Before the Fourth Congress the bourgeois formula “race question” found general acceptance in the Party as a definition of the Negro question in the United States. The fact that no one questioned the correctness of this formula was itself indicative of the passivity and general lack of clarity in the Party in the field of Negro work. Its utilization not only reflected an incorrect line but also played an active role in hampering a Marxian formulation of the question.

It is quite clear now that after the decisions of the Fourth Congress on the Negro question to consider this question as a “race” question is to underestimate the intrinsic revolutionary strength of the Negro liberation movement, to fail to understand its basis in the final analysis as the struggle of the Negro masses upon the Black Belt for national independence, i.e., for self-determination.

Indeed, this was the essence of the opportunist line of the renegades Pepper and Lovestone, as expressed in the theory of “second industrial revolution in the South,” which put forth the perspective of liquidation of the Negro peasantry and hence the social basis of the Negro liberation struggles within the framework of the present system. It was no accident that these latter repeatedly emphasized in resolution and speech that the Negro question was a “race” question. Such a definition flowed logically from their opportunist line.

The October resolution of the E.C.C.I. by definitely establishing the Negro question in the United States as a national question, at the same time revealed the bourgeois essence of the formula “race” question. It is therefore but natural that this resolution which laid the basis for a complete turn in Negro work, a decisive break with the opportunist line of the past, should be met by the most desperate resistance on the part of all opportunist elements in the Party. All of these now take up the opportunist chorus; “the Negro question is a race question,” seeking in this manner to drag the Party back into the old rut and hamper its orientation upon the new line.

The fact that there exists a “practical” alliance between the chauvinist elements and some of our Negro comrades, should not be the occasion for wonder. It merely confirms the Bolshevik axiom that there is no difference in substance between open opportunism and opportunism covered by “left” phrases, in this case represented respectively by the chauvinist tendencies among white comrades and the “left” social democratic tendencies among Negroes.

The chauvinist tendencies in the Party are rooted in a deep lack

of faith in the Negro masses, a hangover of social democratic and A.F. of L. ideology, which finds its political expression in an underestimation of the liberation struggles of the Negroes. The proponents of this position consider the Negro movement not as an ally of the proletariat, not as a movement to be utilized in the interest of strengthening the class struggle of the latter, but as a factor detracting from pure proletarian class struggle, as something contradictory to that struggle. They therefore deny the struggles of the Negroes in the name of the proletarian revolution. On the other hand, the “leftism” among Negro comrades is a complete capitulation before the chauvinist position. The comrades representing this position find themselves in the absurd position of trying to fight chauvinism in practice, while at the same time accepting its main theoretical premises. It is clear, therefore, that this “fight” reduces itself to a mere farce.

Comrade Huiswood, in an article entitled “The World Aspects of the Negro Question” appearing in the February *Communist*, gives us an excellent example of this latter tendency. In this article written one year and a half after the Fourth Congress, he not only revives the opportunist formula “race” question, but attempts to give it a theoretical basis. In this manner he places himself in direct opposition to the CI line, giving objective support to the rankest chauvinism. Attempting to prove that the Negro question in the United States is a race question as opposed to a national question, Comrade Huiswood, together with his co-“thinkers” prove instead their absolute desertion of the Marxian-Leninist position on this question and inevitably slide down into the swamp of the most sterile bourgeois liberalism.

### ***The Class Essence of Bourgeois Race Theories***

It is not by accident that revolutionary Marxism nowhere places the question of an oppressed people, i.e., a social question, as a race question. Race, as a social question, exists only for the ideologists of the bourgeoisie and in the minds of those deluded by them. With these the purely biological category race, based upon differences within the human species, such as color of skin, texture of hair, etc., acquires a social meaning, i.e., race becomes an explanation of social phenomena. Upon this false premise are reared equally false theories which claim the existence in nature of master and slave races, the former by their “inherent” qualities destined to rule, while

the latter because of the absence of these qualities are fitted only for a menial position. The existence of a different level of advancement among peoples, the fact that European nations have reached a higher economic and political stage of development than say, the Africans or Asiatics, is not considered as accidental, i.e., as the result of objective natural and social causes but is attributed to the “natural” superiority of the Europeans. The purely physical concept “race” is identified by these theoreticians with intellectual, moral and cultural traits. White skin becomes the symbol of civilization, high culture and intellectual prowess, while black skin symbolizes barbarity, low morals, dependency, etc. The struggle between the two is regarded as the result of “instinctive,” racial antagonisms. It is perfectly logical therefore that in the “interests” of humanity it becomes the duty of master races to watch over these incapables, to shoulder the “white man’s burden” and to see to it that they serve society in that capacity, which by virtue of their “natural” shortcomings they are best fitted.

It is clear that behind these theories is concealed the definite class policy of the bourgeois ruling classes, that they are merely a cloak for national oppression. They represent a proper ideological super-structure for a system based upon the super-exploitation of subject peoples, a moral sanction for the prevailing social order.

However, it would be a serious mistake to underestimate the profound social role played by these theories. Arising first as a moral sanction for a national colonial policy, these dogmas become fixed in laws, in turn influence politics and in this manner react again upon the social economic basis, sharpening and deepening the exploitation of subject peoples and perpetuating the existing social relations.

The basic policy of the bourgeoisie of oppressing nations in regard to “subject” peoples is directed towards the arbitrary arresting of the economic and cultural development of the latter as the essential conditions for their least hampered exploitation. This is the real meaning of all national (racial) oppression.

In order to carry through this policy, the ruling classes of the oppressing nations requires the utmost isolation of the subject peoples under its denomination, the complete segregation of the masses of their own nation from those of the oppressed. Towards this end they utilize all available circumstances. Differences of race, language and culture become so many advantages in the realization of

this policy. Chauvinist theories are reared up, glorifying the language, culture and race of the oppressing nations and vilifying similar qualities and institutions of the oppressed, all of which serve the purpose of cultivating among the masses of the oppressed nations feelings of scorn and hatred for the oppressed, while on the other hand, among the latter sentiments of rancor and distrust in regard to the oppressing peoples as a whole, In this manner they are pitted against each other and the isolation of the masses of the oppressed nations achieved.

Unable to win the masses for its predatory policy by purely ideological means, the ruling classes of the oppressing nations through bribing the upper strata of the petty bourgeoisie and the labor aristocracy with portions of the super-profits extracted from the exploitation of subject peoples, creates for itself a social basis among the masses of its own nation. These in turn become interested in the national-colonial policy and serve as the social bearers of chauvinism among the masses and in the labor movement.

Thus in France, the French bourgeoisie utilized the French workers against national minorities represented in this case by the Italian, Spanish and colonial immigrants. In addition to sustained chauvinist propaganda among the French workers, the bourgeoisie plays upon the petty bourgeois moods of the latter. By holding out to them greater opportunities to rise to the position of foremen, labor aristocrats, etc., it succeeds for a time to keep up the bar between them. In this manner the French bourgeoisie are enabled to receive a relative super-profit from the special exploitation of the immigrant workers.

However, the United States offers us the most classic example of this policy. Here the labor aristocrats led by the A.F. of L., fully cognizant of the fact that their privileged position can only be preserved at the price of the exploitation of the split up, unorganized and unqualified workers, composed chiefly of immigrants and Negroes, actively aid the bourgeoisie in perpetuating the position of the latter. This fact was already noted by Engels in a letter to Herman Schlutser, dated March 30, 1892:

“The working class (the native-born American workers, H.H.) has developed and organized mainly in trade unions. But according to the position it occupies it is an aristocrat, which has the possibility to leave the simple and badly paid occupations for the emigrants. From the emigrants only a

small part enter the aristocratic trade unions, they are subdivided into nationalities, which in the majority of cases do not know the local language. And your bourgeoisie can far better than the Austrian Government incite one nationality against the other, Jews, Italians, Czechs, etc., against Germans, Irish, etc., so that in New York I believe exists such differences in the standards of life of the workers as would be inconceivable in other countries.” (Retranslated from Russian).

To this it is necessary to add that the special exploitation of the foreign born is in general confined to the first generation. The second generation already becomes 100% American, adopting the language and culture of the country. Therefore, the ideological prerequisites for their further retention as a distinct national minority disappears.

But the greatest advantages in carrying through a national colonial policy exist in those cases where the oppressing nations are distinguished from the oppressed by pronounced physical differences (differences of color, texture of hair, etc.). Such is the case in the United States, Africa and the West Indies. In Africa and the West Indies, this advantage is augmented by territorial separation of oppressed and oppressing and particularly in the case of the African colony by distinct languages, dialects and long-standing national and tribal cultures in marked contrast to the oppressing imperialist nations.

In this respect the position of American Negroes differs from that of the Negroes in West Indies and Africa. Here they are not territorially separated from the oppressing white American nation, but on the contrary, live together with the whites within the confines of one State. Under these conditions the bourgeois ruling classes must pursue the most energetic policy in order to keep up the bar of separation between white and Negroes, i.e., retard the process of assimilation and thus preserve the conditions for the super-exploitation of the latter. This fact, together with the absence of a distinct language, the weakness of national culture among Negroes, has led to a more pronounced emphasis upon the race factor as the only factor upon which the bourgeois ruling classes can erect a hostile ideology directed towards inflaming the “national mind” against them. These are the main causes why in the United States we find the racial factor more emphasized than in Africa or the West Indies.

In addition to the above, racial ideologies have here an older traditional basis than in most countries. The peculiar historical development of American capitalism bound up as it was with the development of cotton production and the necessary utilization of Negro slave labor, contributed to the early rise of racial theories. The moral sanctioning of the brutal system of slavery necessitated the exclusion of the Negro slave from the human category. The race theories of this period were consequently directed towards establishing the Negroes as a sort of sub-human species who by virtue of their "inherent" mental incapacity were doomed to eternal slavery.

With the "emancipation" of the slaves and their consequent conversion into semi-slaves on the land and lowest paid wage-slaves, in the cities, these ideologies underwent a corresponding change. The sub-human status occupied by the Negroes in the moral norms of the preceding system became incompatible with their new economic and social status. It became necessary to transfer the Negro from a sub-human type into a human being, but however, of an inferior sort. In the South where the social and economic survivals of slavery are most pronounced, we find also its strongest ideological hangovers. Here the Negro is still regarded as little better than an animal and treated in a corresponding fashion.

The epoch of imperialism or monopolistic capitalism, the political superstructure of which, according to Lenin, "is a return from democracy to political reaction," reflects a similar retrogression in the realms of ideology. In the United States the further fusion of finance capital with remnants of pre-capitalistic form in Southern agriculture, which takes place in this period, is accompanied by a corresponding unity in the field of ideology.

It is therefore not accidental that in the last 2 or 3 decades, i.e., with the development of imperialism in the U.S., we witness a pronounced strengthening of racial ideologies. Within this period the "theoreticians" of race have increased their activities a hundred-fold. Virtual floods of literature on "race questions" have flown from their prolific pens. It is necessary to note however, that these theories have dropped their old primitive trappings and appear now in a pseudo-scientific garb. Dogmas of inferior and superior races are now paraded forth as a scientific fact. Hilferding in his "Finance Capital" correctly notes the tendency of finance capital to prostitute science to its interest on the national question.

"Since the subordination of foreign nations is carried

out by force, that is by very natural means, it appears as if the ruling nations owes its domination to special natural qualities, i.e., to its racial peculiarities. Thus the strivings of finance capital for power acquires in the ideology of race the trappings of scientific justification; its actions in this way receive the appearance of being conditioned and rendered necessary by natural science. In place of the ideal of democratic equality there appears the ideal of oligarchic domination.” (Retranslated from the Russian.)

It therefore becomes understandable when in the United States we find serious scientists occupying themselves in trying to substantiate the dogma of basic differences between races, by seeking for differences in the bio-chemical composition of the blood of Negroes and whites.

Thus in the United States the race factor appears to dominate in the relation between whites and Negroes. The aggressive nationalism of the American bourgeois ruling classes when directed against the Negroes acquires a racial cloak. American national culture appears as the culture of the white race. Science, art and philosophy receive a racial stamp. American institutions become the white man’s institutions and are contrasted in a derogatory manner to those of the Negroes. National culture is interpreted as racial culture.

It is quite natural therefore that this tendency would evoke a similar trend among Negroes.

The economic and social strivings of the nascent Negro bourgeoisie and intelligentsia is expressed ideologically in a racial form. The race ideology of the white bourgeoisie becomes opposed by Negro race ideology. Thus, in the last two decades with the growth of a Negro bourgeoisie, all elements of a Negro culture have been created. This culture includes historical background based in part upon ancient African civilization, Negro art and literature reflecting the environment of oppression of the Negroes in the United States, etc. This tendency received its most extreme expression in the Garvey movement with its black gods, black religions, glorification of all things black, etc.

As in all cases of national culture, this tendency among Negroes reveals an attempt of the Negro bourgeoisie to mobilize the masses under its ideological influence in the furtherance of its own class interests.

It is clear from the foregoing that the so-called race question of bourgeois sociologists as it appears both in Africa and in America, consist *in fact* in the *utilization of the physical difference*, i.e., differences in color of skin, texture of hair, etc., *between Negroes and whites by the imperialists for the purpose of facilitating, sharpening and perpetuating the exploitation of the latter.*

### **A Marxian-Leninist Formulation of the Question**

A real Marxian-Leninist formulation of the question will show that the Negro question in the United States, similar to all questions of backward and subject peoples, arises not out of any so-called natural and immutable differences between Negroes and whites, that it is not the results of “instinctive racial hatred,” but has its *objective roots* in the difference of economic and cultural development between Negroes and whites under the conditions of a class order of society. This difference far from being due to any “inherent” traits of either, is the result of the fact that owing to certain objective social causes, the white peoples in Europe and America were able to reach a higher stage of economic and political organization than the Negroes in Africa. This fact, together with the culmination of a series of economic and social circumstances, the growth of merchant capitalism and the slave trade, the necessity of utilizing cheap slave labor in the development of a new continent – created the basis for the enslavement of the Negro peoples. Therefore, under the class system of society in the United States, the difference between backward and advanced peoples becomes converted into a contradiction between oppressed and oppressing peoples.

However, the socio-economic content of the Negro question changes in accordance with definite stages in the development of capitalism in the U.S. During the period of slavery, the Negro question was a slave question, a struggle between Negro slaves and white slave-masters. With the “emancipation” of the slaves, the consequent development of the Negro peoples in a capitalist environment and the growth of class differentiation among them, the Negro question takes the form of a national question. The socio-economic content of the contemporary Negro question in the U.S., consists on the one hand in the efforts of the imperialists through national oppression to violently retard the economic and cultural development of the Negroes, to perpetuate the semi-slave form of exploitation in Southern agriculture and hence the basis of super-

exploitation of the Negro workers all over the country; and on the other hand, in the struggle of the Negro masses, against national oppression, for equality which latter can only be realized through revolutionary struggle for the right to national self-determination of the Negroes on the Black Belt.

Race as a category of national science, i.e., a super-historical concept, exerts no influence upon the social development of people in contemporary class society. The efforts of the bourgeois theoreticians of "race" to artificially transplant a category of natural science into the realm of social phenomena is merely an attempt to furnish a "scientific" pretext for a national colonial policy. But, false race ideologies thus created play an important role. These facilitate the isolation and segregation of the masses of the oppressed nation from those of the oppressor [oppressor nation – ed.], thus making possible the retention of the economic and cultural backwardness of the former and in this manner facilitates their super-exploitation. Thus race ideologies give the bourgeoisie of the oppressing nation the possibility of deepening and perpetuating the national oppression of weaker peoples.

Imperialism as a system which draws its main struggle from the super-exploitation and oppression of backward and weaker peoples, must inevitably utilize every advantage which would serve to prolong those conditions of its existence. External physical differences between oppressing and oppressed peoples are utilized by the imperialists in a similar manner as differences in language, religion, etc. For example, the national policy of American imperialism in relation to the Negroes, seeks its sanction in dogmas of inferior and superior races. By virtue of this, national ideology of the American bourgeoisie when directed against Negroes appears as racial ideology, national antagonisms appear as racial antagonisms. Conflicts breaking out upon this basis are called "race" riots, "race" wars, etc.

It is therefore quite evident, that race as an ideology plays a big role in the national oppression of the Negroes in the U.S. Regarded in this sense it must be said that race becomes a factor in the national question.

But it would be absolutely erroneous, on the basis of this, to ascribe to what is in fact an ideology the importance of a social question in itself. To do so would be equivalent to reducing the national question to one of its factors. Concretely it would be tantamount to reducing the Negro question, a social question, to a question of

race-ideology, i.e., to blur over the economic and social roots of this question, and finally to a capitulation before bourgeois race theories.

Precisely in this consists the basic methodological error of those comrades who maintain that the Negro question in the U.S. is a “race question” as opposed to a national question. Confused by the prominence of the race factor in the relations between Negroes and whites, these comrades believe that these relations cannot be explained on the basis of Marxian-Leninist theory on the national question. To consider this question a national question would be, according to them, to “simplify” the question. Therefore, they feel it necessary to make some “improvements” on the teachings of Marx and Lenin on the question of oppressed peoples and to set up a new category, the conception of “race” as a “social” question. In this manner they follow in the wake of bourgeois ideologies who attempt to transplant the biological concept race into the sphere of social phenomena, and inevitably end in reducing the Negro question to an ideological factor. Those comrades who magnify the role of the “race” factor in the relations between Negroes and whites in the U.S. must inevitably arrive at a practical agreement with the liberals who regard the Negro question not as basically a socio-economic question, having its objective roots in the economic and cultural disparity between Negroes and whites under the conditions of a class order of society, but as a question which arises as the result of the “inherent evilness” of human nature to be overcome through proper education!

### **How the Communist Adherents of “Race” Theories Reduce the Negro Liberation Movement to a Feeble Bourgeois Opposition**

Politically in the contention that the Negro question is a “race” question is contained a deep under-estimation of the powerful economic and social forces lying at the basis of the Negro movement and consequently an under-estimation of the revolutionary potentialities of that movement.

This fact is quite clearly revealed in all the writings of the exponents of this viewpoint. For example, in the above mentioned article Comrade Huiswood departing from this scientifically untenable premise attempts to substantiate his position by creating non-existent differences between the position of Negroes in Africa and the West Indies on the one hand and of those in the U.S.A. on the

other. He says:

“It is essential that we *distinguish* the situation of the Negro masses in the colonies – Africa and the West Indies; the semi-colonies, Haiti and Liberia, who suffer from colonial *exploitation* from that of the Negroes in America, a *racial minority* subject to racial persecution and exploitation.” (???)

“We must take into consideration the *national colonial character* of the Negro question in Africa and the West Indies and the *racial character* (?) of this question in the United States.” (Emphasis mine, H.H.)

In spite of his confused terminology, it is quite evident that Comrade Huiswood wishes to contend that there exists a fundamental difference in character between the exploitation and oppression of the Negroes in the United States and those in Africa and the West Indies. Let us examine the facts. We have already indicated that the colonial policy of imperialism is directed towards retarding economic developments of subject peoples as the best condition for the extraction of super-profits. Therefore it is obvious that colonial exploitation can have no other meaning than just this extraction of super profits, which in turn can only be carried out through political oppression, i.e., through national, or as Comrade Huiswood prefers, “racial persecution.” The question is naturally raised, does Comrade Huiswood infer that American imperialism derives no super-profits from the exploitation of the Negroes in the U.S.? One has only to take into consideration the position of the Negro peasantry, the difference between the average wages of white and black workers, the number of white skilled workers in proportion to skilled workers among Negroes, to arrive at an idea of the enormous super-profits derived from the exploitation of the Negro toilers in the U.S. What then is the meaning of Comrade Huiswood’s vivid description of the miserable conditions of the Negroes, low wages, peonage and share-cropping, etc., if they do not point precisely to this fact. If the foregoing is true, i.e., if considerable super-profits are derived from the exploitation of Negroes in the U.S., then it is clear that the character of their exploitation as well as their oppression does not differ from the character of exploitation and oppression of the Negroes in Africa or the West Indies. The Negroes in the United States are an oppressed national minority, i.e., an “internal colony” of American imperialism. To assume that there is a difference in character be-

tween the exploitation of national minorities and colonial peoples is to fail to understand the teachings of Lenin on the national-colonial question. The fact that the exploitation varies in degree – e.g., the Negroes in the U.S. are not as intensely exploited as for instance the Negroes in Congo – is due mainly to differences in cultural and economic development between the Negro populations in the two countries and not in the character of their exploitation. Therefore, to insist that the Negroes in the U.S. are not subjected to exploitation of a colonial character is to “forget” about share-cropping and peonage in the South, the miserable conditions of the Negro workers all over the country and to play into the hands of bourgeois reaction.

Thus we see that the attempt of Comrade Huiswood to prove his thesis that the Negro question in the U.S. is a “race” question inevitably results in the elimination of the very basis of the Negro liberation movement. It is not remarkable therefore that Comrade Huiswood arrives at the quite consistent conclusion that “it’s only distinctive feature (the Negro question, H.H.) is its racial origin” (!!).

Is it not obvious that any imperialist interested in covering up the economic and class roots of the Negro question would agree with such a formulation?

We will not dwell in detail upon the other glaring errors contained in Comrade Huiswood’s article, e.g., his total misunderstanding of the characteristics of a nation among which he includes “majority of population and organized communes,” (?!?) whatever this may mean; or his complete blurring over the peasant question, behind which is revealed the old opportunist Lovestone-Pepper idea of liquidation of the Negro peasantry through migration and industrialization. All this merely shows that Comrade Huiswood’s “world aspects of the Negro question” are different from those of the Comintern.

For a more consistent exposition of the viewpoint which contends that the Negro question in the U.S. is a “race question” as opposed to a national question, we are obliged to turn to Comrade Sheik. Undoubtedly Comrade Sheik in his numerous articles and theses on “race questions” has won the spurs as chief theoretician of this position.

The basic views of this comrade were set forth in an article entitled “To the Question of the Negro Problem in the U.S.” (*Revolutionary East*, No. 7, 1929). These views can be reduced to the fol-

lowing basic argument. Says Comrade Sheik:

“We cannot speak about national antagonisms between whites and Negroes in the U.S. in the ordinary sense of that term, because the American Negroes are not a nation. Apart from the complete absence among them of a national language, a national culture; in their racial conflicts with the white Americans, *the fundamental economic content and sense of all national antagonisms is absent; the presence of two economic systems standing at different stages in social economic development.*” (Emphasis mine. – H.H.)

Leaving aside for the moment the question of national language and culture, we shall deal first with the most fundamental argument of Comrade Sheik, which is contained in the last sentence. Here Sheik reduces the fundamental question of the economic essence of nationalist movements to the schematic and non-Marxian formula of contradiction between two “economic systems standing at different stages of socio-economic development.” Such a formulation of the question is glaringly incorrect from a methodological standpoint. It is difficult to understand how in the epoch of imperialism, one who calls himself a Marxist could speak without qualifications about the “existence of two economic systems standing at different stages in socio-economic development.” Still, since Sheik himself does not qualify this statement we would be presumptuous to assume that he means other than what he says. It is obvious, however, that only one who is absolutely incapable of understanding the peculiarities of the present imperialist epoch could speak in such a categorical manner.

Leninism teaches us that the epoch of imperialism or finance capital, among other things, is distinguished by the penetration of capitalist relations into the most remote sections of the earth, and the drawing in of the most backward peoples into the sphere of world market relations, *i.e.* into the general imperialist system. In the colonies or among backward peoples, we are not confronted with two systems standing at different stages in socioeconomic development, but what we are confronted with is the interweaving of the most varied socio-economic forms – primitive tribal, feudal, slavery, etc. with capitalist relations, all subordinated to finance capital. It is therefore obvious that there is no Chinese wall between socio-economic forms, least of all in the present period. There exists one economic system, imperialism, which inevitably subordi-

nates to itself, preserves and utilizes all pre-capitalistic forms in the plundering and exploitation of subject peoples. Of course there exists difference in the economic and cultural levels between oppressed and oppressing people, but this does not mean, as Sheik obviously implies, a difference between two economic systems.

Regarded in this manner, the socio-economic background of national antagonisms between oppressed and oppressing peoples is not a contradiction arising as the result of two different economic systems, but as a result of differences in economic and cultural levels between oppressed and oppressing peoples which under imperialism becomes a contradiction between finance capital on the one hand, which preserves and utilizes all pre-capitalistic forms in the super-exploitation and oppression of backward peoples, and on the other hand, the independent economic development of these peoples. It is obvious that in precisely this consists the economic content of the antagonisms between Negroes and the whites in the U.S., i.e. in the contradiction between finance capital which preserves and utilizes semi-slave forms of exploitation of the Negro masses in Southern agriculture and in this manner preserving the conditions for the super-exploitation of the Negro toilers all over the country, and the economic and cultural development of these latter. The same slave remnants in Southern agriculture are an integral part of imperialism. It is equally obvious that Sheik in denying the existence of national antagonisms among Negroes, denies at the same time the economic content of the Negro question.

It is also necessary to state that Sheik's inference that the Negroes have no special culture is absolutely unfounded. We have already indicated that the Negroes have a culture which reflects their whole historical development as a people in the U.S. And as to separate language (and this is evidently what Sheik means when he speaks about "national language"), this is not one of the prerequisites of the nation. "A common language for every nation is necessary, but a different language for every nation is *not* necessary" (from the pamphlet on *Marxism and the National Question*, Stalin).

Therefore, it is not surprising that Sheik, ignoring the powerful socio-economic factors at the basis of the Negro question in the U.S. should arrive at a purely subjective definition of the Negro question. For example, he says:

"The race question exists as a *social question* thanks to the physical differences between peoples and to the fact

that *racial prejudices* arising on this basis are often utilized by the exploiting class for guaranteeing and strengthening their privileged position.” (Emphasis mine. – H.H.)

According to this the Negro question does not arise from the difference in the economic and cultural development between Negroes and whites and the policy of American imperialism to perpetuate this disparity, *i.e.* to artificially arrest their economic and cultural development as a condition for the attraction of super-profits, but on the contrary, arises, “thanks to the physical differences between Negroes and whites and prejudices arising on this basis!” In other words, the Negro question is a question of “race prejudices” and “physical differences!” Does this not in reality constitute a complete capitulation before bourgeois race theories and a practical agreement with the Liberals? But we will allow Comrade Sheik himself to draw his own political conclusions. Further he says:

“Not being actually connected by inner ties and separated from the dominating races by anything but *artificial racial divisions* and race oppression arising on this basis, an oppressed racial minority does not necessarily reveal in its ideology those traits which are characteristic for the ideology of the oppressing nations. The basic determining trait of this ideology *is not the striving towards separation and independence, but on the contrary, a striving towards intermingling and amalgamation, towards full social equality.*” (Emphasis mine. – H.H.)

Thus, the Negro liberation movement is deprived of all revolutionary content and becomes a struggle for social equality *not* in the revolutionary sense which in the South can only mean independence and the right of self-determination, but social equality in the liberal-reformist conception of that term, *i.e.* a “struggle” against “race prejudices” and “artificial racial divisions.” It is clear that only the liberals and reformists counterpose the demand for independence to the demand of social equality. It is precisely they who foster the illusions that the struggle for social equality is not a struggle directed at the very basis of imperialism, not a struggle, the implications of which are national independence for the Negroes in the Black Belt, but a struggle against the superstructure of racial ideology and race prejudices which they entirely divorce from its economic roots. Consequently, according to them, the objects of this “struggle” can be obtained within the capitalist system without

revolutionary struggle. And as we have seen, Sheik's position amounts objectively to this.

### **How the Communist "Theoreticians" of Race Turn Lenin into a Bourgeois Liberal**

It is quite clear from the foregoing that the mistakes of the Communist exponents of "race theories" are inseparably bound up with and arise out of an anti-Marxist and essentially liberal approach to the national question in general. It is therefore not surprising but on the contrary, perfectly consistent, that this non-Marxian approach is not confined to the national movement of the Negroes in the United States, but to nationalist movements in general. Thus, Comrade Sheik puts forth as one of his strongest theoretical arguments the statement that:

"Among American Negroes there is no developing industrial bourgeoisie, hindered in its economic development the struggle of which (for its free economic development) for the winning of internal markets and for the removal of obstacles standing in the path of economic progress, could give these national movements a progressive character." Further he asks: "*Where then is the need for markets, about which Lenin spoke? Where then is the necessity for the removal of all obstacles?*" (My emphasis, H.H.).

Sheik is evidently under the impression that only the struggle of the industrial bourgeoisie for markets can give nationalist movements a progressive character. If this is so, then not only the movement of the Negroes in the United States, but also those of the Negroes in the greater part of Africa are *not* progressive as an industrial bourgeoisie among Negroes in both the United States and the greater part of Africa is practically non-existent.

It is, however, clear that this contention has nothing in common with Marxism. Sheik in vain refers to Lenin, as Lenin nowhere and at no time reduced the national revolutionary movement to a struggle of the industrial bourgeoisie for markets. On the contrary, Marx, Engels and Lenin at all times considered that the revolutionary strength of bourgeois democratic nationalist movements (even in the classic period of the downfall of feudalism) to lie mainly in the struggle of the peasantry. The peasant basis of the nationalist movements for Marxists has always been the revolutionary basis of the national question, the pre-requisite of the struggle for a revolu-

tionary solution by the lower masses of the questions of overthrow of the yoke of medieval barbarism and the winning of national and political freedom. In this connection, Lenin wrote:

“Typical of the first period (i.e. the classic epoch of the rise of nationalist movements, H.H.) is the awakening of national movements, the rallying to them of the peasantry, the most numerous and most inert section of the population in connection with the political freedom in general and for the right of nationality in particular.” (Lenin’s Works, Vol. XIX, p. 90).

Thus revolutionary Marxism has always recognized two tactics or, to be more precise, two strategical lines in the process of struggle against national oppression; the line of the popular masses, which is a consistent struggle for the revolutionary solution of a national question and the line of the national bourgeoisie which tends towards conciliation with the forces of reaction and to betrayal of the masses. Any other viewpoint is bound to lead to a Menshevik appraisal of nationalist movements. These two lines become more and more clear in proportion to the development of the class struggle within the oppressed nation with the result that at the present time – the epoch of imperialism – the national bourgeoisie in all the important colonial countries has already deserted the national liberation movement. The national question becomes ever more a question of the peasantry.

Stalin admirably formulates the changes of the national question. In this connection he says:

“This quintessence of the national problem *now* is the struggle of the *popular mass* in the colonies and of the subjugated nationality against finance capitalism, against political enslavement and the cultural retention of these colonies and nationalities by the imperialist bourgeoisie of the ruling nations. *Of what significance can the competitive struggle of the bourgeoisie* of the various nationalities be in this formation of the national problem? Of course, *not of decisive importance*, and in *some cases of no importance at all*. It is quite obvious that it is chiefly a question here not as to whether the bourgeoisie of one nationality beats or can beat in the competitive struggle the bourgeoisie of another nationality, but it is rather a matter that the imperialist group of the ruling nationality exploits and oppresses *the basic*

*masses and first of all the peasants* of the colonial and subjugated nationalities and in oppressing and exploiting them, draws them into the struggle against imperialism, making them our allies in the proletarian revolution. (Emphasis mine, H.H. *Bolshevik*, Nos. 11 and 12, 1925; translated from Russian).

This is diametrically opposed to Sheik's contention. The nationalist movements in the imperialist epoch are linked up with the question of socialism over capitalism. The national question is now "essentially a peasant question." "The peasant question lies at the roots of the nationalist question." Sheik eliminates the struggle of the Negro peasantry and therefore deprives the Negro of a profound revolutionary force and in this manner arrived at a practical agreement with the reformists and liberals.

From the foregoing it is clear that the so-called race question, as conceived by Sheik and others, is nothing more nor less than the same old bourgeois race theory dressed up in a cloak of Marxian terminology and as such represents both from the standpoint of methodology and consequently, in its theoretical and political conclusions, an absolute desertion of revolutionary Marxism for the camp of bourgeois liberalism. Sheik has become entangled in the meshes of bourgeois ideology, namely, because of his inability to understand the national question in a Marxian-Leninist manner.

A concrete historical and economic analysis is the indisputable demand of Marxian theory in the treatment of any social problem. Such a demand applied to the concrete situation of the Negroes in the United States means the treatment of this question within certain historical confines. We must establish the definite historical stage of development through which the Negro people in the United States are passing at the present time.

North America has witnessed two bourgeois revolutions; the War of Independence (1775-81) and the Civil War (1861-65). The first revolution achieved the independence of the colonies from Great Britain. But owing to the weak development of capitalism in the country it could not proceed with any consistency against the pre-capitalist elements. In fact, Northern industry owed its development to slavery. "Without slavery," writes Marx, "North America, the most progressive country in the world, would have been transformed into a patriarchal country." (Poverty of Philosophy).

Not until a much later date did slavery become a real obstacle to

capitalist development. The contradictions between the two systems did not culminate until the Civil War. The Civil War according to its social and economic contents was a bourgeois revolution, the struggle between slave-holders of the South and the industrial bourgeoisie of the North. It was the struggle of the Northern bourgeoisie for full state power, for the establishing of a capitalist state which would most fully meet the demands of developing capitalism, and for the unification of the country under the domination of the industrial bourgeoisie. This of course meant the overthrow of the power of the slave-holding oligarchy and the destruction of slavery as a system.

In the course of the struggle the slaves were emancipated. The Northern bourgeoisie basing itself upon the freed Negroes and utilizing the latter in the capacity of allies established a revolutionary dictatorship over the conquered territory for the purpose of consolidating the gains of the revolution. (Reconstruction Period). In order to strengthen its social base the Negroes were granted full bourgeois democracy – suffrage, right to set in legislature, etc., all of which was constitutionally guaranteed in the enactment of the 13th, 14th and 15th amendment, and in turn backed up by specially mobilized Negro militia and Northern federal troops.

However, the Northern bourgeoisie was incapable of carrying a revolution through to the end. They could not carry through the complete expropriation of the former slave-holders and give the land to the Negroes. It was inevitable that these “rights” of the Negro masses were short lived. These masses were soon deserted by the Northern bourgeoisie, which latter entered into a rapprochement with the dethroned Southern landlords.

The Negroes, dastardly betrayed by their former supporters, poverty stricken and without land were left at the mercy of the reactionary landlords. They were speedily deprived of their newly won political rights and forced back into a semi-serf position upon the land of their former masters.

Thus, the revolution ended in an abortion. Its results may be summed up in the following manner: it destroyed slavery thereby reckoning the basis for the existence of the plantation system in its old form. In this manner it created the conditions for the development of capitalism all over the country. But inasmuch as the abolition of slavery was not accompanied by the division of the land among the Negro masses it led to the establishment in Southern ag-

riculture of the same relationships as followed the overthrow of feudalism in some of the European countries – the semi-feudal system of share-cropping. In this connection Lenin correctly criticized the petty bourgeois economist, Himmel, who contended that the United States had not known feudalism and was unfamiliar with its economic remnants. To this Lenin replied “that the economic remnants of feudalism in no way differed from the economic remnants of slavery and in the form of the slave-owning South, these remnants are very strongly felt up to the present time.” (The development of capitalism in Agriculture in the United States – translated from Russian).

The unfinished agrarian revolution as reflected in the preservation of the remnants of slavery in the economy of the South has its political counterpart in the unfinished bourgeois democratic revolution (as far as the Negroes are concerned) as reflected in the denial of democratic rights to the Negro masses.

From the above analysis it is quite evident that as far as the Negro peoples are concerned the task of the completion of the bourgeois democratic and agrarian revolution *still* stands upon the historical order of the day.

By leaving unsolved the task of the bourgeois democratic and agrarian revolution, while at the same time making possible the development of class differentiation among Negroes, the Civil War created the social and economic basis for the Negro and national question which has its objective pre-requisite in the territory of the Black Belt. The struggles of the Negro masses thus become converted from struggles of slaves against slave-holders into struggle of “freed men” against white landlords and capitalists against combined capitalists and semi-slave forms of exploitation and national oppression, for complete bourgeois democracy, i.e., social and political equality, which finds its highest expression in the struggle for self-determination. The Negro toilers, once the allies of the Northern bourgeoisie and betrayed by the latter during the reconstruction period, have now become potential allies of the proletariat.

In the epoch of imperialism the Negroes no longer represent an almost homogeneous undifferentiated peasant mass as was the case immediately after the civil war, but have developed within themselves a comparatively large proletariat, a fairly numerous strata of petty bourgeois and intellectual elements, as well as the beginnings of a small but not yet clearly defined bourgeoisie. This develop-

ment, taking place in an environment of national oppression, which is greatly intensifying in the epoch of imperialism, strengthens and accentuates the trend on the part of the Negroes for political emancipation.

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