

# Left Sectarianism in the Fight for Negro Rights and Against White Chauvinism

By William Z. Foster

THE GREATEST single achievement of the Communist Party is the persistent fight which it has long conducted for the immediate rights and equality and the ultimate national liberation of the Negro people. In this respect the Party stands far in advance of all organizations, political and otherwise, in the class struggle. The Party's fight, linked with that of the Negro people, has been militantly directed against every form of white chauvinism and Jim Crow segregationism.

The Party's battles in defense of the Scottsboro Boys, the Martinsville Seven, the Trenton Six, for Willie McGee and Mrs. Ingram, against lynching and the poll tax, against discrimination in housing projects, for the unionization of Negroes, for Negro political representation, are only a few of our activities, which have contributed greatly to the progress of the Negro people and which have made our Party beloved and respected among this persecuted people. All this serves to refute current Social-Democratic slanders to the effect that, "Communists are obstacles to the struggle for Negro rights," or "Advancements being made are a natural outgrowth of an evolving democracy," and the like.

The Communist fight for and with the Negro people has been waged, not only in the realm of practical policy, but also in that of theory—Communists having long been pioneers and leaders in these respects. With our theory of the national character of the Negro question, our specific fight against white chauvinism in all its manifestations, our struggle for Negro-white unity in every field, and our struggle against the distortion of Negro life in history, art, and literature, we have made and are continuing to make, major contributions to the general intellectual struggle and development of the Negro people.

## WHITE CHAUVINISM

The Communist Party has learned during the course of decades of struggle on the Negro question that the greatest ideological barrier and the main danger in the fight for Negro rights and equality is white chauvinism. White chauvinism, the poisonous ideology of white supremacy, is cultivated by the ruling classes of capitalist industrialists and planters for the allied purposes of: facilitating the super-exploitation of the Negro toiling masses, driving a wedge between Negro and white

workers and farmers, weakening the entire labor-progressive movement, and furthering generally the cause of reaction. Originally developed by the Southern planters as a defense of chattel slavery, white chauvinism has been taken up by capitalists generally as one of the most dangerous of all their ideological weapons against the working class and its democratic allies.

White chauvinism is, above all, the weapon of fascists, and its potential danger increases with the growth of McCarthyite tendencies in this country. With the drive of American imperialism for world conquest, for domination built upon Anglo-American white supremacy, white chauvinism also becomes increasingly an international menace. Jim Crow follows the flag, and wherever American militarists and businessmen go, and this is throughout the capitalist world, they take with them the deadly virus of segregation. Awareness of this rising danger is shown by the aggressive denunciation of Jim Crowism by the aroused peoples of the U.S.S.R., China, India, and various other countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

White chauvinism has been systematically cultivated in this country, North as well as South, for over three centuries—ever since chattel slavery got under way in colonial Virginia. Until the advent of the Communist Party, with its militant theoretical and direct struggle against Negro oppression, there has been little challenge, as such, to white chauvinism, except on the part

of the Negro people themselves. During the long struggle against slavery, culminating in the Civil War and the Reconstruction Period, a considerable attack was made upon white chauvinism by some Abolitionists, but this fight by no means eradicated it. In fact, there was very much chauvinism in Abolitionist ranks. As for the A. F. of L. and the Socialist Party, they have cultivated, not combatted, this political menace.

The general result has been that white chauvinism, in all its array of crassly brutal and insidiously subtle forms, originating with the ruling bourgeoisie, has seeped down into the masses and has become deeply imbedded in all aspects of American life. The Government, churches, schools, and colleges, fraternal organizations, industries, armed forces, mass entertainment systems, trade union bureaucracy, and all other institutions, are contaminated to a greater or lesser extent by this dangerous American ideological plague.

The white workers of the North and South, as well as the farmers and intellectuals everywhere, are more or less infested with white chauvinism. Nor is the Communist Party altogether immune. The C. P., with its Marxist-Leninist principles and its constant struggle for and with the Negro people, is far freer from the political disease of white chauvinism than any other predominantly white organization in the country. Nevertheless, it has many outcroppings of it, which it constantly must fight against. Among

the more common manifestations of white chauvinism in the Party are passivity in the fight for Negro rights, failure to develop social contact with Negroes, refusal of homeowners to rent rooms to Negroes, hypocritical attitudes toward Negro Party and union functionaries, failure to upgrade Negro workers in industry and to elect them as union officials in progressive unions, disapproval of intermarriage, the practice of white chauvinist language and habits, etc.

The fight against white chauvinism is of basic importance to both Negro and white workers. It is not simply a matter, important though it is, of relieving the Negro people of this bitter hardship. Even more significant is the fact that the fight against white chauvinism is indispensable for developing the Negro-white solidarity, without which the labor-progressive movement can make little real headway. White chauvinism is a deadly obstacle to the advance of American democracy and the preservation of world peace, and it is upon this basis above all, that it must be relentlessly combatted. The fight against white chauvinism must not only be linked up with every fight for Negro rights but every other struggle of the working class and its allies. It is not merely a Negro matter but a broad working-class question. This emphasizes the great importance of the leadership shown in this issue during the past few years by Comrade Pettis Perry.

White chauvinism, of course, must especially be combatted and eradi-

cated from the ranks of the Communist Party. There can be no place in our Party for such bourgeois poison. Even though white chauvinism is far less with us than with any other class struggle organization, nevertheless, such outcroppings of it as occur are very offensive to Negro comrades, who correctly expect from our Party the very highest standards in this respect. The resignation of Negroes from our Party on the grounds of white chauvinism, and there have been such, is intolerable and a disgrace to the Party. Negro members must be made to feel perfectly at home in the Communist Party, not only politically, but also, and especially, socially. This can be done only on the basis of a persistent fight against all manifestations, however subtle, of white chauvinism. In this respect our Party must, and in fact does, set a glowing example to the whole labor and progressive movement. The Party's outstanding fight against white chauvinism is a decisive proof of its vanguard role and that it is indeed the true Party of the Negro people.

#### LEFT SECTARIAN DEVIATIONS

In our Party's long fight in the complex task of winning for the Negro people full economic, political, social and cultural equality, including therewith the fight against white chauvinism, we have naturally made many mistakes. These, of both a Right and a "Left" character, we have freely pointed out and acknowl-

edged in practice. The worst Right-opportunist mistakes that the Party ever made in the Negro question was its failure, over a period, to fight the Browder treachery, to the effect that the Negro question was automatically solving itself, that there was no need to struggle over it, and that the Communist Party itself in the South was unnecessary. Even more handicapping to our work in the long run, however, has been a persistent passivity in the Negro question and a failure to raise Negro demands in mass organizations, on the false opportunist grounds that to do so would be to jeopardize our general Party program of work. This is white chauvinism. These opportunist moods have by no means been liquidated and today they remain the main danger in our Party's Negro work.

The Communist Party has also made many Left-sectarian mistakes in this vital sphere of work. Among these was the early Leftist presentation of the slogan of self-determination as an advocacy of a Negro Republic in the Black Belt. Another, persistent, Leftist error has been our playing down, and often denial of the basic role of race in the Negro question—a fundamental mistake which is still largely uncorrected. Still another error of this general character has been our sectarian tendency largely to ignore the political progress that has been made recently by the Negro people, and to fail to evaluate it objectively. Then, too, many comrades, in sectarian fashion, have gone on repeating in the

old way the dictum that the Social-Democrats consider the Negro question as simply a class question, despite the fact that, in their own opportunist way, they have for many years been dealing with it as a "racial" question—as witness their handling of the Truman civil rights program, F.E.P.C. legislation, etc.

We are also making a number of serious Leftist errors in our present struggle for Negro rights—specifically in our fight against white chauvinism, which is the chief subject here to be dealt with. These errors are a deadly handicap in our fight against the dominant danger from the Right—white chauvinism, both in our Party and among the masses; hence their elimination presents us with an imperative task.

The current sectarian errors in our fight for Negro rights, of which the fight against white chauvinism is an integral part, are directly related to similar errors in other phases of our Party's mass work. Here we must bear in mind the central lessons of the Resolution of the National Committee. These lessons, briefly stated, are that our Party, during the period since 1948, committed a number of major sectarian errors and that it is necessary to develop a broader mass political policy. Among such errors noted by the Resolution were an overestimation of the role of the Progressive Party as the mass party of the people, instead of understanding it as one of the major means towards this end; and the following, in the 1948-52 elections, of a "rigid third party line," instead of a broad

united front coalition policy involving the third-party movement.

These were Leftist sectarian errors, and many similar errors are to be found in other branches of the Party's mass work. The main cause today of such sectarian trends is a wrong reaction to the great pressures now being exerted against us by the Government in its drive for war. This heavy pressure—of ideological and political terrorism—marked by many arrests is aimed to isolate the Communists from the masses and to destroy the Party.

Under this heavy drive from the Right, many elements weaken and quit. This is Right-opportunist capitulation. The sectarian trend in the Party, however, manifests itself by a sort of drawing within our shell under this pressure, the needless abandonment of our outposts among the masses and a narrow concentration upon our main stronghold, the Party. This is a special type of sectarianism in this period of sharp persecution. The worst manifestation of such sectarian reactions were the marked tendencies, at the outset of the drive against us, to go underground; a sectarian course which our Party has not yet fully overcome. Under the circumstances, the proper Communist policy would have been to redouble our efforts to maintain and extend our mass contacts, which obviously we are very far from having done. To the extent that we are experiencing today some isolation, this is primarily due to these sectarian moods of withdrawal. It is not that the masses are rejecting us.

Of course, large sections of the workers have been poisoned by Wall Street's anti-Communist, pro-war campaign; nevertheless, in view of the people's well-known desire for peace, their anti-fascist spirit, and their determination to defend their standards of living, greater opportunities exist for work among them than we are now taking advantage of.

The current sectarian trend has especially shown itself in our trade-union work. Without attempting here to make a rounded-out evaluation of our trade-union work, it is quite clear that we have not made a solid, united front struggle to maintain and develop our mass contacts and activities in the A. F. of L. and also (with some notable exceptions) in the C.I.O. Similar trends are to be observed also in the independent unions. Undoubtedly a more resolute united front struggle would have left us in a much better position generally in the trade-union field than is now the case.

In the general field of peace work there are also to be observed the characteristic sectarian trends of this period. Here broad opportunities lie before us, in view of the deep mass longings for peace, to build up strong united front campaigns. But, again, there manifests itself the tendency to withdraw within ourselves, rather than to go boldly to the masses.

There are also serious sectarian trends to be seen in our defense work. During the past five years our Party has written basic labor history in its heroic struggle against govern-

ment persecution under the Smith, McCarran, and other semi-fascist laws. But our fight has been needlessly narrow, when objective conditions offered opportunities for a much broader mass struggle. The sectarian trend manifested itself in our recent trials by a too narrow concentration upon legal defense as such and by a neglect of the broad general mass political work, not only in defense, but in peace, workers' standards, Negro rights, etc. In this weakness we have a clear expression of the characteristic Leftist deviation of this period, to withdraw needlessly (under cover of resounding general slogans), from the mass contacts and to retire upon the Party fortress itself.

#### SECTARIANISM IN FIGHT FOR NEGRO RIGHTS AND AGAINST WHITE CHAUVINISM

The sectarian trends in our Party's Negro work are part of this same general pattern of Leftist errors characteristic of this period of severe political reaction and government repression. In the struggle for Negro rights there is always to be combatted the main danger of white chauvinism, which is a Right danger, and a high barrier in the fight for Negro rights. We must also fight the lesser Right danger of Negro bourgeois nationalism. White chauvinism, as it manifests itself among the masses of the working class and in the ranks of our Party, is a reflection of white bourgeois nationalist ideology and it is Right-opportunism of the worst character. Right-opportunism

underestimates the significance of white chauvinism, both without and within the Party, treats it as a minor evil, and makes little or no fight against it; it is, in short, essentially a surrender to the white chauvinists.

In the fight for Negro rights the main danger is white chauvinism, and the main weakness is a failure to fight it. In the fight against white chauvinism, to the degree that it is being waged, the main hindrance to a successful struggle is sectarianism and distortion of the battle against white chauvinism.

The Party cannot fight either the main danger of white chauvinism or the lesser danger of Negro nationalism with policies, as now, heavily handicapped by Leftist sectarianism. Leftism always cultivates, not weakens Right dangers. The Left-sectarian tendency isolates the Party from the masses, makes a caricature of the fight against white chauvinism, considers white chauvinism as virtually ineradicable and proposes impossible disciplinary measures to combat it. In the end, both the Right and "Left" deviations come to the same result—no fight, or, at best, a weakened fight against white chauvinism. It is, therefore, a basic necessity, if our Party is to make a solid fight for Negro rights and against white chauvinism, that it must eliminate these Leftist errors which are widely prevalent in the Party and are crippling its Negro work. These errors are the more dangerous because they have been but little discussed and not at all fought. Here let me review some of

the more important of these errors. a)—*Neglect of Work among the Negro masses:*

The most serious sectarian error now being made by the Party in its fight against white chauvinism, and one which gives birth to various other sectarian mistakes, is to neglect work in general among the Negro masses and to develop the fight against white chauvinism primarily as an inner-Party campaign. Many comrades—Perry, Henderson, Haywood, and others—have indicated this serious lack of mass work in the N.A.A.C.P., the Urban League, and among the Negro people in general. The Right tendency cultivates this basic inner-Party-orientation error by contending, especially in practice, that it is both unnecessary and impossible to carry on the fight against white chauvinism among the broad masses. And the sectarian trend cultivates the error by divorcing itself from the masses and making an unbalanced concentration upon the Party itself. Some of these comrades would seem to imply that the Party is the main source of white chauvinism in the working class.

Another harmful aspect of this Leftist inner-Party orientation is its tendency to separate the fight against white chauvinism from the mass struggle for Negro rights. It is a typical sectarian attitude to consider white chauvinism as a sort of detached phenomenon, especially within the Party, and to shoot into it on this basis. But this whole trend is basically incorrect and tends to crip-

ple our work generally among the Negro people. White chauvinism cannot be fought as a thing in itself by a separate campaign. It can be fought only in connection with the struggle of the Negro people for full economic, political, social and cultural equality. The fight against white chauvinism is an organic part of this broad struggle for Negro rights and cannot be divorced from it without itself becoming reduced to an empty, harmful abstraction.

Of course, we must carry on special campaigns in our Party against white chauvinist tendencies—for our standards in this matter are vastly higher than are to be found at present in any predominantly white organization; and our Negro comrades are quite right in insisting that we must maintain and improve these high standards. But to separate this inner-Party campaign against white chauvinism from the mass struggle for Negro rights, as is now dangerously the case, means to make this campaign sterile and largely impotent.

The most important measure necessary to strengthen the fight against white chauvinism without and within our Party, therefore, is vastly to improve our struggle all along the line for Negro rights and to weave the fight against white chauvinism in with this general mass struggle. We must become, far more than we are now, the tireless battlers among the masses against lynching, police brutality, and the whole Jim Crow system. We must greatly intensify our fight for the rights of the Negro

people to vote and to be elected, to work in every industry and calling, to occupy all grades in the armed forces, to belong to all trade unions, to acquire a solid education, to achieve full leadership in all mass organizations, to live in any neighborhood they choose, to secure justice in the courts—in short, to enjoy the fullest equality in every respect. The fight against white chauvinism must become an integral, inseparable part of this mass struggle. This is the main path to drastically strengthen our position among the Negro people, and, concretely, to put our fight against white chauvinism upon a more practical and effective basis than now exists.

#### b) *The Leftist Definition of White Chauvinism:*

Together with intensifying our work among the Negro masses and with linking up organically together the fight for Negro rights and against white chauvinism, our Party must achieve a more realistic definition of what constitutes white chauvinism than is now the case. In this general respect the Party is also seriously hampered by Left-sectarian conceptions and practices.

White chauvinism is a reactionary bourgeois ideology and it must be vigorously combatted inside and outside the Party, whenever it manifests itself. In order to do this effectively, attention must be paid to the varying degrees with which workers and others are infected with this ideological poison and remedial steps taken accordingly. Confirmed

white chauvinists, those who are openly or covertly advocates of white supremacist ideas and practices, are enemies of the Negro people and the working class, and they should be treated as such. Our Party cannot tolerate the membership of such elements; expulsion is the answer for them. There are large numbers of workers, however, many of them members of our Party, who, although genuine friends of the Negro people, sometimes, through lack of sensitivity or understanding of the Negro question, give vent to white chauvinist expressions and acts. Obviously the treatment in such instances is friendly education, not harsh disciplinary measures. In determining who is a white chauvinist or guilty of white chauvinist tendencies, therefore, the question of resistance to correction must be considered.

There is, in the Party, however, a strong Leftist sectarian tendency to evaluate white chauvinism as a uniform political disease and to lump together and to throw into one pot as white chauvinists all those who are in any way, however slightly, tainted by this weakness. The sectarian tendency also sharply condemns as conciliators of white chauvinism, if not as outright chauvinists, all those others who see any difference in degree of contamination with white chauvinism. This sectarian definition of chauvinism practically eliminates education as a corrective measure and puts the whole stress upon organizational measures. Consequently, not only have comrades been unjustly disciplined, and even

expelled, but the whole fight against white chauvinism has been confused and weakened.

Obviously, white chauvinism cannot be effectively combatted with such crude Leftist methods, whether among the masses or in the ranks of the Party. Party members must be sensitive and alert to correct all manifestations of white chauvinism, but not in this sectarian way. Especially charges of white chauvinism should not be thrown around so recklessly as is now the case. This is a most serious charge, and it should not be leveled against a Party member until it is clearly justified. A comrade in our Party, convicted of white chauvinism, is crippled from then on, if not politically dead. Such severe penalties should be reserved for real white chauvinists, not for comrades where need is for more education on the Negro question. Also we should not dull the effects of the white chauvinist appellation by applying it indiscriminately. A sectarian handling of the vital question of white chauvinism produces more of this poison by causing passivity among the white membership and withdrawal from activities with Negro comrades. It also sets up serious, if not dangerous, frictions in the Party.

The development of a correct definition of white chauvinism also carries with it a more correct application among the masses of the Party's fight against white chauvinism. Our Party fights resolutely, upon every occasion, for Negro rights and full equality. How much, however, it is

able to insist upon its advanced stand against white chauvinism in a mass organization depends upon Communist tactical considerations in the given circumstances. Undoubtedly those comrades have taken a Leftist sectarian position on more than one occasion who have laid down as the basis for cooperation with non-Party masses, heavily infected with white chauvinism, the full acceptance of the Party's advanced stand on the Negro question.

### c) *Leftism Regarding Negro National Sensitivity:*

Lenin and Stalin have taught us upon many occasions that the Communist Party, in dealing with oppressed peoples, must carefully bear in mind the fact that these peoples, as a result of long periods of persecution and super-exploitation, have developed moods of suspicion and enmity which they tend to direct not only against the specific oppressing classes, but against the whole oppressor people. This makes it very necessary for Communists of the oppressor nations to follow such a course as will win for the Party the fullest confidence and cooperation of the oppressed masses, including their individual members in the Party.

The American Negro people are an oppressed nation. Understandably and justifiably they have in the main developed many suspicions and enmities towards whites—not simply towards the ruling classes, but towards all whites. Nor are Communists exempt initially from this sus-

picion. This is a natural phenomenon, the normal result of the terrible historical experience of the Negro people in three-and-a-half centuries of exploitation, persecution, and ostracism — chattel slavery, peonage, lynch terror, the Jim Crow system, and rank discrimination in every sphere of life. *And this persecution and super-exploitation are still going on.* Under these circumstances it would be a political miracle if the Negro people, in the main, did not have deep suspicions and hostilities regarding all whites, who are so largely chauvinists and active participants in the Jim-Crow system. These national moods can and do persist actively even when a considerable degree of Negro-white political cooperation has developed—and their remnants will undoubtedly last over into Socialism. What some ill-informed comrades erroneously call the “over-sensitivity” of the Negro people towards white chauvinism is thus rooted in their centuries-long historical experience.

The basic answer of the Party to this important question is to carry on a tireless mass fight for the rights of the oppressed Negro people. No less important, the Party's white members, purging themselves of all traces of white chauvinism, must work in a spirit of comradely friendship and complete social equality with Negro comrades. If these things are done, Negroes coming into our Party will quickly come to realize that it is their Party and that they are in the midst of true friends and co-fighters. Their resentment at na-

tional oppression, added to their general working-class spirit of revolt, readily makes of Negroes the best of Communists. Unfortunately, as remarked above, our Party, although it is incomparably the best champion of the Negro people, has not yet reached the necessary high levels of understanding and work in this general respect.

The Leftist tendency in the Party presents some strange and dangerous remedies, to deal with this question of Negro national sensitivity. Comrade Haywood, for example, quotes a New York district functionary to the effect that, “No white comrade should ever do anything to offend a Negro.” This idea, often expressed, is sheer nonsense. The good will and hearty cooperation of the Negro people in general and of Negro comrades in particular, is not to be developed by such patronizing attitudes, which really reflect white chauvinism. Such policies would mean to put Negro comrades in a sort of touch-me-not category, which would be impossible among Communists, with our vigorous methods of debate and struggle, and which would be highly offensive to Negro comrades.

Another sectarian idea, along the same line, goes to the effect that Negro functionaries, in fact, Negroes generally, should not be criticized politically. Not long ago a top white Party functionary, speaking to me of a comrade who was showing strong bourgeois nationalist tendencies, said matter-of-factly, “Of course, we could not criticize him

as he was a Negro." Such an uncritical attitude is basically wrong and it is by no means an isolated case. We have had many bad experiences because of it in the Party and in mass organizations.

Political criticism is not some sort of punishment. It is a major constructive means for the ideological development of our Party's members, and also the only way by which the Party can formulate its policies and ensure their correct application. All Party functionaries, and also Party members, must both criticize themselves and be subject to self-criticism. We cannot have two standards in this matter. Negro comrades are the first to reject the non-Communist idea that they should not be criticized. Our task is not to exempt our Negro comrades from healthful criticism, but to see to it that it is genuine and not made in a hypocritical manner, with subtle, or not so subtle, overtones of white chauvinism, as is now so often the case.

#### d) *Sectarianism Regarding White Supremacist Terminology:*

The white supremacists who for over three centuries have controlled almost unchallenged the means of mass information and education in the United States have saturated our cultural life, especially our language, with innumerable racist trends and expressions highly insulting to the Negro people. This is a basic part of the general means used to keep the Negro people in special subjection. These anti-Negro trends in American cultural life are not only

widespread, but often of a very subtle nature. Generally, the Communist Party has done a splendid pioneering job in combatting these corrosive white chauvinist influences in American culture and in bringing forth the Negro as a major constructive intellectual factor, both from an historical standpoint and in the present situation.

During the past few years, however, our Party has tended to tolerate a number of crass Leftist-sectarian errors in this general matter, especially in its efforts to cleanse the American language of its white chauvinist infection. Thus, impossible language standards are being set up and comrades are often called to order or disciplined as white chauvinists for using speech expressions which are devoid of white chauvinist content. In February, 1950, Lloyd L. Brown wrote an important article on this subject in *Masses & Mainstream*, but too little attention was paid to it. Now, however, we must give consideration to this general question; for mistakes in this respect, such as are now widely being made, tend to damage the Party and its mass connections.

Lloyd Brown lists many words and expressions which are obviously white chauvinist and very derogatory to the Negro people. Such terms must be rigidly excluded from the vocabulary of Communists and also vigorously combatted in the mass circles where we have influence. The problem becomes more complicated, however, when it comes to words and phrases which, while not in them-

selves white chauvinist, are used in a white chauvinist manner against Negroes. Thus, among many, are the words "boy" and "girl", which are widely used insultingly to adult Negro men and women. The Leftist reaction to this practice is the trend to play down or discard altogether these words as applied to Negroes. But this is nonsense. Our task is not to eliminate such basic words from the vocabulary, but simply to war against their being used in a derogatory sense against Negroes.

The worst linguistic sectarianism, however, develops around the use of the word "black" and its derivative terms. The roots of this question are two-fold. The first element is that the white chauvinists, for centuries past, have designated a black skin color as the badge of physical, mental, and social inferiority; and second, that there has grown up in the English language, during the course of many centuries the practice of designating evil or fearful things as "black" or "dark." Among these are such as "black despair," a "dark outlook," and modern variations, blackmail, blackmarket, etc. There are hosts of such expressions.

The sectarian reaction to all this is substantially to strike the word "black" and all its derivative terms, from our vocabulary. But this is typical Leftist nonsense. Contrary to it, we must actively defeat all attempts to demean black as a skin color and take the position that all skin colors—black, brown, red, yellow, and white—are all equally nor-

mal, natural, and beautiful. Here, at least, we can learn from Marcus Garvey, with his militant defense of the dark color of his people. As for the second category of words, those conveying the general idea that "black" is evil, in general they should be ignored as having no relation to white chauvinism. They often hark back to remote antiquity, when the night, the "black dark," was a period of great danger to primitive man and the day was his time of ease and happiness. For the most part, such expressions, with "black" as the symbol of evil, were evolved by ancient peoples who probably had never even seen a Negro.

The sectarian practice regarding the term "black," indirectly feeds the Right danger—white chauvinism—as Leftism always cultivates Right opportunism, by playing into the hands of the white supremacists who try to discredit dark skin colors. There is no basis in the actual life of the Negro people for such sectarianism. The most outstanding Negro writers freely use the term "black" to designate their people, as Dr. Du Bois, with his *The Souls of Black Folk*, and *Black Reconstruction*; Drake and Cayton's *Black Metropolis*; Spero and Harris' *The Black Worker*, etc. The term is also otherwise freely used, as in the newspaper, *The Black Dispatch*, and the names of the most popular Negro magazines are *Ebony*, *Jet*, and *Tan*. So let us have done with such sectarian nonsense as the "anti-black" trend.

THE QUESTION OF NEGRO  
BOURGEOIS NATIONALISM

Negro bourgeois nationalism is a basic expression of the fact that the American Negro people in the Black Belt of the South constitute a nation with the status of national minority in other parts of the country. Negro nationalism essentially expresses the striving of the Negro bourgeoisie to win control over the Negro national market, to hold the Negro workers under their exploitation and control, and generally to use them for the bourgeoisie's own political advantage. Historically, the Negro bourgeoisie, or more properly, petty bourgeoisie, have played a democratic revolutionary role. They fought for the liberation of their people—during the decades of struggle against slavery, during the Civil War and Reconstruction period, and during the long decades of bitter lynch-terror that followed the Republican betrayal of 1876.

But now the Negro bourgeoisie (and also sections of the petty bourgeoisie) is tending to give up, at least for this period, its revolutionary role. Under the pressure of the white American bourgeoisie it is being restricted and corrupted—as witness the stifling of Negro business concerns and the opportunistic maneuvers in various degrees and divisions of labor of the Randolphins, Whites, Yergans, Schuylers, Bunches, Sampsons, Tobias, *et al.* While these elements still support some of the demands of the Negro people and while all efforts must be made to

create an all-Negro national front, the Negro bourgeoisie are more and more tending to come to an understanding with the white bourgeoisie at the expense of the Negro people. Examples of this were their long opposition to the trade unionization of Negro workers and their present attempts to lash the Negro people to the war chariots of American imperialism. More and more, the responsibility for furnishing political leadership to the Negro people as a whole falls upon the shoulders of the vigorous Negro proletariat.

Negro nationalism, like white chauvinism, but in a lesser degree, is a divisive force in the class struggle. It penetrates into the ranks of the Negro workers, and its general trend is to create suspicions and hostilities between Negro and white workers. It plays a part in all organizations in which Negroes are active. This includes the Communist Party. The disruptive character of Negro nationalism is not, however, to be compared with that of white chauvinism, which, in the country as a whole, in the broad labor-progressive movement, and in the Communist Party itself—is the main obstacle to the indispensable Negro-white solidarity in the class struggle.

Not only is there white chauvinism and sectarianism in the Party regarding the Negro question, but also, inevitably, there are manifestations of Negro bourgeois nationalism. When a Negro comrade (taking a position akin to that of white chauvinism), opposes intermarriage, he is expressing Negro nationalism.

The same is true when it is said that all white Americans, even Communists, are white chauvinists at heart; that whites cannot really understand or appreciate the significance of the Negro question; that whites cannot be depended upon to lead Negro masses in struggle; that whites should not, in principle, be included on editorial boards of Negro papers; that the Negro people, not the working class, is the real leader in the class struggle; and that the Communist Party is not the vanguard on the Negro question. When people within or without our ranks criticize the Party almost as though it were cultivating white chauvinism instead of combatting it, they are either expressing or conciliating Negro bourgeois nationalism, or are showing strong tendencies in this general direction. Such nationalist sentiments are very dangerous. They feed directly the white chauvinists' conception that between Negro and white there lies an unbridgeable chasm and that neither can really understand or cooperate with the other—which is dangerous nonsense.

Our Party must, of course, combat Negro bourgeois nationalism, also in its own ranks. But we must be sure that what we are fighting against is really bourgeois nationalism. Hitherto, the practice has been to ignore almost completely the Left-sectarian deviation and to class all errors, except those manifestly of white chauvinism, as bourgeois nationalism. This is a serious political mistake which must be corrected. Left-sectarianism cultivates and feeds Ne-

gro nationalism and often closely resembles it, but we must not confound the two, as we have been doing. We cannot fight Left-sectarianism if we confuse it with bourgeois nationalism, and vice versa. Moreover, to throw everything into one category as bourgeois nationalism plays into the hands of the Right deviators who ascribe the whole fight against white chauvinism to Negro nationalism.

### THE FIGHT ON TWO FRONTS

In the struggle against current deviations in our fight for Negro rights, the Party must fight on two fronts; that is, against the main danger, white chauvinism, and against the lesser dangers. Left-sectarianism and Negro nationalism. We must also link up this fight with the struggle against Leftism in other branches of our mass work, as dealt with above and as indicated in the Resolution of the National Committee. We must very clearly understand that we cannot successfully fight white chauvinism when our Party's activities are so heavily handicapped with Left-sectarianism as is now the case.

Both Lenin and Stalin have provided us with many examples of how to fight on two fronts against ideological and political deviations. There is, for example, the classical struggle of the C.P.S.U. during the late 1920's and 1930's. Of course, the general position and tasks of our Party are very different from those of the C.P.S.U. at that time, but the lessons are nevertheless valid for us.

Stalin is answering questions in *Pravda*, April, 1930 (*Leninism*, p. 185):

*Fifth question:* Which is the principal danger, the Right or the "Left"?

*Answer:* The principal danger is the Right danger. The Right danger has been and still is, the main danger.

Does not this thesis contradict the well-known thesis in the decision of the Central Committee of March 15, 1930, to the effect that the mistakes or distortions of the "Left" distortionists are now the principal hindrance to the collective-farm movement? No, it does not. The fact of the matter is that the mistakes of the "Left" distortionists in the sphere of the collective farm movement are of a kind which create favorable conditions for strengthening and consolidating the Right deviation in the Party. Why? Because these mistakes put the line of the Party in a false light—consequently they help to discredit the Party—and therefore, facilitate the struggle of the Right elements against the Party leadership. Discrediting the Party leadership is the elementary basis on which alone the fight of the Right deviationists against the Party can be waged. The "Left" distortionists, their mistakes and distortions, provide the Right deviationists with this base. Therefore, if we are to combat Right opportunism successfully, we must overcome the mistakes of the "Left" opportunists. Objectively, the "Left" distortionists are the allies of the Right deviationists.

Here we have the situation in a nutshell. One would have to be politically blind not to see that the serious Left-sectarianism now affecting our Party in its fight against white chauvinism, a Right danger, is falsifying the line of the Party and is hamstringing that fight. Therefore, as indicated, this sectarianism has to be fought on a two-front basis (and Negro nationalism with it).

Of course, those who practice or conciliate white chauvinism will try to take advantage of the Party's fight against Left sectarianism. This is always the case. But the very heart of the question is that they are able to make far greater capital out of the failure of the Party to fight the crippling "Leftist" distortions of its policy. The Soviet situation, above cited, again offers us a classic example. The Rights—Bukharin, Rykov, Tomsky, Uglanov, *et al.*, tried to capitalize on the fight against the pseudo-Lefts — Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev and company—even presenting themselves as supporters of Stalin and the Party line. But they were soon to learn that the downfall of the "Left" was only the opening stage of their own complete defeat.

If we are really to fight white chauvinism, then we must also fight sectarian distortions of this struggle.

# Reader's Guide to Further Study

The foregoing article deals with the following questions relating to the struggle against white chauvinism and Negro bourgeois nationalism:

1. What is white chauvinism? What are its sources and roots? Why is white chauvinism the major obstacle in unfolding the struggle for Negro rights and cementing Negro-white unity?

2. How does the poisonous influence of white chauvinism penetrate the ranks of the working class, the people's organizations, the Communist Party? Why is the ideology of white chauvinism incompatible with Marxism-Leninism? Why must vigorous and persistent struggle be conducted to combat every manifestation of white chauvinism among Communists?

3. Why is capitulation to white chauvinism a Right-opportunist manifestation? What is meant by Leftist errors in the struggle against white chauvinism today? Why do these Leftist errors weaken the fight against white chauvinism and cripple Negro work? How must these Leftist errors be combatted?

4. Why is the tendency to conduct the struggle against white chauvinism separate from the movement for Negro rights a Leftist error? Why has such separation actually impeded an effective fight against white chauvinism among Communists, and among the broad white masses and their organizations? What are some of the ways in which such errors must be overcome?

5. Why does the tendency to view every manifestation of white chauvinism uniformly, harm the fight to eradicate influences of white chauvinism? Can the influences of white chauvinism be eradicated from the Communist Party? How should Marxists fight against the use of white chauvinist terminology? Why must Marxists reject Leftist distortion on language as a diversion from the real struggle against white chauvinism?

6. What is Negro bourgeois nationalism? What are its sources, roots and manifestations? What is the relation of the struggle against white chauvinism to the struggle against bourgeois nationalism? Which is the main danger? Why?

## SUGGESTED SUPPLEMENTARY READING

Benjamin J. Davis: *The Negro People in the Struggle for Peace and Freedom*, pp. 16-23.

Pettis Perry: "Certain Prime Aspects of the Negro Question," in *Political Affairs*, October, 1951.

Samuel T. Henderson; "White Chauvinism and Negro Bourgeois Nationalism," in *Political Affairs*, December, 1952, January, 1953.

Charles P. Mann: *Stalin's Thought Illuminates Problem of Negro Freedom Struggle*, pp. 30-36.

Harry Haywood: *Negro Liberation*, chapter 7.