

Notes on the Struggle for Negro Rights

By William Z. Foster

DURING RECENT YEARS, especially since the end of World War II, there have taken place very considerable changes in the status of the Negro people, economically, politically, and socially. This situation requires that we carefully evaluate and draw the necessary implications from these new features in the position of the Negro people. If we fail to do this boldly and precisely, we will be writing, not of the actual Negro problems of today but of those of yesterday. This means, too, that we need also to re-think through some of the older questions in this general regard.

In dealing with the American Negro question we must pay closer attention to its specifically American features. That is, while basing ourselves solidly upon basic Marxist-Leninist definitions of class, race, and nation, and their interrelationships, we must also be aware of the fact that the specific American conditions considerably mould and distort these factors among the Negro people. They even change the structure of the classes, and they give the nation a special contour. In noting these specific American features, however, we must be careful not to fall into

the ever-present danger of American exceptionalism, an error which would lead us falsely to conclude that the American Negro question is unique and without parallel elsewhere. This basic mistake would gravely disorient our Party.

Below are considered in outline a few of the most important problems in our Negro work, especially the newer ones, which should receive our close attention in the sense of the above remarks. The present wide discussion of the Negro question in general in our Party is an indication of the need for such a thorough Marxist probing in order to put our work among the Negro people upon a more realistic footing.

MIGRATION OF THE NEGRO PEOPLE

Particularly since World War I there has been a large migration of the Negro people away from the Black Belt and from the South in general, as we have often remarked. This migration has been especially heavy during and since World War II. In almost equal proportions this great exodus has flowed towards two main objectives—the cities and industries of the South and those

of the North. During 1940-50 alone an estimated 1,000,000 Negroes came North. The dynamic forces behind the great migration are: a) the repellent, worsening economic and political conditions prevailing in the Black Belt, and b) the attractive force of the great demand of the industries for workers during the wars and the preparations for new wars—with the supply of immigrants from Europe virtually cut off. Whether this exodus from the Black Belt will continue is problematical, basically dependent upon the economic situation.

The migration has had profound effects upon the geographic location of the Negro people. Before World War I a large majority of American Negroes lived in the Black Belt, but now the percentage there has been reduced to about one-third. Approximately one-third of the Negro people live in Southern cities, one-third in the Northern cities, and one-third in the Black Belt plantation areas of the South.

One of the most striking features of this big shift in the location of the Negro population is that it has greatly narrowed down the general Southern area in which the Negro people have constituted the majority of the population. It has reduced the economic base of the Negro nation as such. Whereas in 1900 there were 286 Negro majority counties and they were largely contiguous; by 1950 the number of such counties had dropped to 169, and they were far less in connected areas. The one-

time broad Negro majority region has not only been reduced in size, but it has also been considerably split into smaller, more detached areas.

One of the major conclusions we have to draw from this migration situation relates to the use of the major Negro national slogan of self-determination. As I said in my book, *The Negro People in American History* (page 559): "The conclusion to be drawn from this situation is not that the right of self-determination for the Negro nation is thereby invalidated, as opponents assert, but that more extensive territorial reorganization will be necessary when the time comes and the Negro people determine to exercise this basic right." We must be very categorical in our understanding that the Negro question remains a national question, which clearly implies the slogan of self-determination as our orientation slogan.

We must not underestimate the degree of national consciousness among the Negro people. We must always remember that among the American Negro people national consciousness is very largely expressed through racial slogans—this is one of the specific American features of this national question. Also expressions of a more clearly national character are by no means uncommon among the Negro people. Thus, very few Negroes will take it amiss when *Tide* (July 20, 1951), a leading Negro business magazine, says editorially: "As a people, Negroes

are a nation within a nation."

In the past, however, we have made serious Leftist sectarian errors by advancing the slogan of self-determination too much as a slogan of active agitation or even of action. We must give close study to this whole question of its relation to our general work. As I also said in my book (page 559), "The present Negro migration northward and towards the Southern cities, with the consequent loss of majority status in many Black Belt counties, confronts the Negro people and their political allies with the urgent necessity of raising and stressing the demand for proportional representation for Negroes. This may develop into forms of self-determination."

At present, as Jim Crow doors are being pushed open or partially broken down in various spheres, there is a widespread tendency to restrict Negro representation or participation to a token basis. Such limitations we must rigidly combat and insist that Negroes be given recognition in their full numerical and other strength. Of course, generally, trade unions and similar bodies may not demand Negro places proportionally on committees, etc., in a formal manner, but the question of proportional representation must nevertheless be kept in mind.

URBANIZATION OF THE NEGRO PEOPLE

In the very important migration of the Negro people during the past four decades the Negro masses, of

course, have been not merely changing their locality, but also their occupation. Substantially, in both the South and the North, they have moved from agriculture (in its most backward forms) into industry. Urbanization has led to greatly increased strength of the Negro press and mass organizations, and also to an intensification of the national struggle generally by the Negro people. This fact of going into industry is of extreme importance in connection with the status of the Negro people and also with regard to our Party's policies in Negro work. These are realities which our writers on the Negro question too often underestimate.

How rapidly the urbanization of the Negro people has taken place is illustrated by the fact that whereas in 1890, of the 7,500,000 Negroes at that time in the whole country, only 20 percent lived in urban communities; in 1950 some 65 percent of the 15,500,000 Negroes dwelt in cities and towns. In the South the ratio for the Negro people at present is that about 50 percent live in the cities and 50 percent in rural communities. In the North the Negro people are almost 100 percent city dwellers.

This situation makes the Negro people, who only a few years ago were overwhelmingly an agricultural people, now very highly urban; much more so in fact than the peoples in numerous capitalist countries. As against the roughly 60-66 percent of urbanization of the

American Negro people, the American people as a whole has 64 percent of its population urban, Canada 62, France 52, Italy 44, Japan 38, Argentina 34, and India 17. The urbanization of the Negro people is reflected, on the one hand, by an enormous growth of the Negro communities in cities and towns all over the country, North and South (from 50 to 250 percent), and on the other hand, by a steady decline of the number of Negroes and of their percentage ratio in Southern agriculture, including the Black Belt.

The Negro people are manifestly becoming an important factor industrially. The Negro ghetto commodity market of today does some \$15 billion in trade annually; but far more important, the Negro workers have broken through a host of Jim-Crow barriers and penetrated widely into industrial jobs. Although they are still very grossly discriminated against in industry by being pressed into the unskilled categories and confined, as far as possible, to service occupations, nevertheless, they have come to play a very strategic role in the basic industries. According to *Time* magazine of May 11, 1953, Negroes are estimated to comprise some 11 percent of all industrial workers. In the coal mines Negro workers constitute about 25 percent of the total, in steel and auto about 15 percent, and in meat-packing plants about 30 percent. In maritime, railroad, lumber, chemicals, and other basic industries Negroes are also a big factor in the

working force. There is also a very small Negro labor aristocracy of skilled workers developing; this is, of course, as yet only a tiny factor, but we must note it nevertheless.

The urbanization of the Negro people, which means in practice largely their industrialization, radically changes their economic outlook, problems, programs, demands and struggles. A generation or so ago, when 80 percent of the Negro people lived in the South, the great majority under terrible share-crop conditions on the plantations, it was quite proper to speak of the Negro people as a peasant people and to place, as we did, the demand for the land as the central, all-decisive demand of the Negro people as a whole. But in the changed situation of the Negro people, who are now about two-thirds urbanized, it is incorrect to do so today.

The breakup of the plantation system and the distribution of land to the land-starved Negro agricultural laborers and sharecroppers is still the most vital single economic demand of the Negro people in the South. We must not underestimate the tremendous importance for the whole Negro people of the completion of the bourgeois revolution in the South. But we must also clearly realize that the majority of the Negro people in the United States are turning their economic attention to demands characteristic of an industrial people—on the workers' side for better wages, shorter hours, social insurance, the right to organ-

ize, etc.—always bearing in mind the special Negro aspects of these questions. In the latter respect, the organization of the workers in Southern industry into trade unions is a matter of the most decisive importance for the Negro people. Our Party's policy must reflect these changing economic interests of the Negro people, as well as their altered political status.

CHANGED CLASS COMPOSITION

Migration and urbanization (industrialization) and hastening class differentiation have profoundly changed the class composition of the Negro people. Four decades ago the Negro people, with four-fifths of their number in the South—the great mass on plantations—was made up overwhelmingly of virtual peasants, and the industrial working class, petty bourgeoisie, and bourgeoisie were relatively tiny. Whereas now, with two-thirds of the Negro people living in cities, South and North, the whole class situation has drastically altered. All the Negro classes characteristic of capitalism—working class, middle class, and capitalist class—have grown rapidly; whereas the peasantry has declined heavily percentagewise.

But these expanding classes of the Negro people have by no means grown at a uniform rate. This is also a matter of extreme importance to consider in working out policy for our work among the Negro people. Obviously, the Negro working class

has grown and is growing the most rapidly. The middle class is also expanding—Negro college enrollment in 1950 was up 2500 percent over 1930 (*Tide*, July 20, 1951). The bourgeoisie is also growing. But the proletariat is growing fastest of all. This is because the workers are less confined economically by the walls of the ghetto than are the other classes. The workers have won the right to work, although by no means fully, in many of the white man's industries; whereas the Negro professionals, although increasing in numbers and slowly breaking their way into society at large, are still largely confined to a Negro ghetto clientele. The Negro bourgeoisie, which is mainly a petty bourgeoisie by general standards, is still the most confined of all the classes to the ghetto. It, too, is expanding with the growth of the Negro communities, but it is hedged about with greater limitations than either of the other classes, being practically barred from the great national industries.

The inevitable result of urbanization and industrialization, with its consequent class differentiation, will be to sharpen up the class antagonism of the Negro workers against the white bourgeoisie in all fields. There will also be—a minor factor—an increase in class antagonisms within the ranks of the Negro people. This will be true despite the fact that today the great mass of Negro workers are employed by white capitalists. This factor is still relatively minor, but it is one that is

bound to grow in importance with the development of the respective classes. One of our major tasks will be, while actively defending the class interests of the Negro workers, at the same time to maintain the national unity of the Negro people as a whole.

LEADING ROLE OF NEGRO PROLETARIAT

As the Communist Party Program indicates, the national front of the Negro people against Jim Crowism and the other special national persecutions to which they are subjected, and as far as possible the front against McCarthyism and war, must be broad enough to include all classes—workers, peasants, middle class and bourgeoisie. To realize and act upon this basis is of the most elementary importance. Another thing we must never forget is that, in the fight of the oppressed peoples all over the world the only basically reliable force to lead the national front of the people is the proletariat. This is one of the great lessons of the period of imperialism, and it has been taught again and again by such great leaders on the national question as Lenin, Stalin, and Mao Tse-tung. It applies also to the Negro working class in the national front of the American Negro people.

Certain factors are necessary actually to make the proletariat the leader of the national struggle. It cannot come about merely by wishing for it, talking about it, or formally deciding it. One important factor

in bringing about the necessary worker leadership is the growth in size of the working class. This condition is being met by the rapid expansion of the Negro proletariat. Another factor is that the working class must strengthen its position in industry and the unions. This also is taking place—the Negro workers are less confined than formerly to purely service occupations and have become a real industrial proletariat. Still another factor necessary for proletarian leadership is that the workers in all Negro organizations and elsewhere bring their ideas and problems to the fore and in this way strengthen the whole fight of the Negro people. This, too, is taking place to a much larger degree than we are commonly aware of. But all this will not avail without a solid building of the Communist Party in the ranks of the Negro people.

We have at least one dramatic example of the Negro workers exercising a leading role among the Negro people. This was with regard to the trade union question. It is a matter of knowledge that for many years, due to the Jim-Crow policy of the trade unions, the large majority of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois leaders of the Negro people took an anti-union position. They urged emphatically that Negro workers should not join the trade unions. But the latter never really shared this position. They continued to press for admission into the unions. Not only did they finally succeed in this objective—to the ex-

tent that there are now at least 1,500,000 Negro workers in the unions—but in doing this they drastically changed the line and policies of the whole Negro leadership on this vital question. This is an example of what we mean by the leading role of the proletariat.

Undoubtedly at this time the Negro workers are coming forward as a leading force in the Negro liberation movement, but as yet they are far from being dominant. The petty-bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie are still its leaders. It is our Party's task, within the framework of National Negro unity, to develop all the leadership potentialities and opportunities of the workers.

ROLE OF THE NEGRO BOURGEOISIE

The ghetto bourgeoisie is the traditional bourgeoisie of the Negro people, with roots running back beyond the Civil War. As remarked above, it has expanded recently with the general growth of the Negro urban communities; but it still remains a fringe bourgeoisie, blocked from genuine industrial expansion and also facing an ever-greater competition from the white bourgeoisie for the increasingly important Negro market. The one-time widely held dream of Negro nationalists to build up a rounded-out Negro economy has proved illusory and has been abandoned.

One of the most marked characteristics of the present situation of the Negro people is that the Negro bour-

geoisie is under heavy, unprecedented attack from the rival imperialist white bourgeoisie. What is involved in this struggle is the control of the Negro national market (with \$15 billion yearly) and the political domination of the Negro people. It is necessary that we give close study to all the ramifications of this struggle.

The imperialist capitalists, for the more effective penetration of the Negro market, which is largely one of retail trade, are using a variety of means. They are setting up connections with the important Negro banks and insurance companies; they are establishing chain stores with Negro managers in the ghettos; and they are advertising heavily in the Negro press. Sylvia Porter in the *N. Y. Post* (Dec. 3, 1954) states that Wall Street hopes for one billion yearly in Negro investments. The imperialists are trying not only in some cases to exterminate the Negro bourgeoisie, but also largely, if not mainly, to change its character—to make it organically dependent upon the imperialist bourgeoisie. These trends for white control have a direct historical relationship to the earlier white penetration of Negro organizations and movements, but the latter were directed more towards securing political control over the Negro masses than the direct conquest of the national Negro market, as is the case today.

Lenin in his famous colonial theses at the second congress of the Communist International, held in

1920, pointed out how the imperialist bourgeoisie in the colonial countries undertakes to control and dominate the national bourgeoisie and frequently succeeds. Later on, in the special conditions prevailing in China, Mao Tse-tung characterized this corrupted section of the national bourgeoisie as the comprador bourgeoisie. In all colonial and semi-colonial countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America this tendency is to be found. Undoubtedly, there are also such tendencies being cultivated among the Negro people in the United States by the big bourgeoisie, even though, of course, they are not a colonial people. Important Negro papers such as the *Amsterdam News*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Chicago Defender*, and especially *Ebony*, are already so full of advertisements of the big imperialist outfits for automobiles, electrical appliances, cigarettes, whiskey, food products, etc., as to be practically dependent upon them. Significantly, this trend is among the most Republican, most conservative wing of the Negro press. Interestingly, these journals frequently polemicize against the so-called ghetto bourgeoisie as stand-patters, because of the latter's "pro-segregation" tendencies. *Ebony* attacks them sharply and frequently as having vested interests in Negro segregation. In analyzing the Negro bourgeoisie, however, we have to bear in mind its pronounced American specific features.

The above tendencies to accept the controls of the imperialist bourgeoisie are at present not the domi-

nant ones in the Negro bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, but they are the most dangerous in the ranks of the Negro people. And they are definitely on the increase. We, therefore, must not ignore them, but on the contrary, must carefully evaluate and combat them. They provide much of the economic and political base for the considerable body of apologists for the American Jim-Crow system that has grown up in recent years among Negro intellectuals—those who take the shameful position that "things are not so bad for the Negroes in the United States." The latest disgraceful example of this tendency was Rep. Adam Clayton Powell at the Bandung conference.

The Negro bourgeoisie generally is not revolutionary; it is not aiming consciously at the national liberation of the Negro people—although such help as it may give to the struggle can objectively have this effect. The time was, however, when the Negro bourgeoisie, although very small, was militantly revolutionary, during the Abolitionist fight, during the Civil War, and during the Reconstruction period. The Negro bourgeoisie may possibly become so again with the further increase of the fascist danger and the sharpening of the attacks against the Negro people. In general its present outlook is reformist.

As a whole the Negro people constitute a very important section of the democratic, peace-loving forces of the American people—despite

conservative and reactionary elements in their ranks. On the question of peace, although there are numerous Negro red-baiters, Soviet-haters and warmongers, these by no means exercise such a decisive influence among the Negro people as do, for example, the pro-war bureaucrats in the labor movement. The support of the bipartisan war policies by Negro leaders, even among the bourgeoisie, is by no means as widespread, aggressive, and unconditional as that in corresponding white circles. As many of our writers have pointed out, their support is but a wavering one. Very often their attitude is one of silence on foreign issues and of obvious sympathy for the peoples either threatened by or under the heel of American imperialism. They distinctly have a fellow-feeling with the oppressed peoples of Asia and Africa. On the question of fascism, notwithstanding their opportunists, the Negro people are in the forefront of the opposition—a Negro fascist would be almost a contradiction in terms. On the general questions of economic and political reforms, the leadership of the Negro people, in the press and elsewhere, generally takes a constructive position.

In the matter of equal rights for Negroes, the Negro people naturally display their greatest unity and progressive spirit. The fight against Jim Crow is the deepest expression of their national feelings. Even the most unreliable comprador elements among the bourgeoisie and petty-

bourgeoisie in their own slippery manner take some part in the fight against the most outrageous features of Jim Crowism. Thus *Ebony*, which is on the extreme right, nevertheless, bitterly assails many aspects of Jim Crow. Negro conservatives take this stand of at least partial opposition because, betray as they may, as Negroes they cannot escape personally the whips and scorpions of Jim Crow. Here the racial factor is a decisive element in determining their attitude.

The substance of all the foregoing is that the Communist Party Program is correct in proposing to unite the Negro people as a whole, including the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie, in the broad Negro-white coalition, "to join hands in a common fight against the ravages of economic depression, against the menace of McCarthyism, for jobs, peace, equal rights, and democracy." It is among our most basic tasks to help realize this Negro national unity in the highest degree possible, jointly with other democratic forces in the vitally important national elections of 1956.

In carrying out this Negro national unity policy we must bear three propositions in mind:

- 1) We must work for the leadership of the Negro proletariat in the Negro people's movement; 2) while cooperating with the Negro bourgeoisie in general insofar as it fights for constructive measures, we must not tail after it in an acceptance of its leadership; 3) we must actively

oppose the treacherous comprador element in the ranks of the Negro people. That is, we have to, on pain of disaster to our Party's work and to the Negro struggle, avoid both the Right danger of following uncritically after the Negro bourgeoisie, which would lead us into the swamp of reformism, and therewith of imperialism; and also the "Left" sectarian danger of refusing to cooperate with the Negro bourgeoisie in general, which would tend to isolate us from the masses. Both the Right and "Left" dangers are now present in our work, and we must fight on two fronts against them.

RACIAL FACTOR IN FIGHT FOR NEGRO LIBERATION

One of the long-time and most persistent weaknesses in our Negro work is our failure to take into full consideration the racial factor in the fight of the Negro people. Such neglect is both harmful and dangerous, as it greatly confuses and weakens our Negro work. This mistake must be corrected.

The Negro question is fundamentally a national question, and we must never lose sight of this elementary reality. But it is a national question with a strong racial factor in it, and it is important also to bear this fact in mind. In history there have been many examples of oppressed nations where the question of race did not enter into the picture. Among such examples, we may mention the Irish under the British, the Poles under the Tsarist Great

Russians, the French Canadians under the English Canadians, and the Koreans under the Japanese. When the question of race occurs, as with the American Negro people, the national oppression is greatly deepened, sharpened, and complicated. Here I shall not attempt to define the concept of "race," as that has been done adequately, I believe, in my books, *The Negro People in American History* (pp. 473-475) and *Outline Political History of the Americas* (pp. 553-571).

The terms "race" and "nation" are not mutually exclusive, as some of our writers on the Negro question seem to think. On the contrary, in the situation of the American Negro people, they are very much interlocked and interrelated, and it is very necessary that we do not confuse them. The racial element has long been practically ignored by us, especially in a theoretical sense. This is a serious error, for the question of race is important. Without the racial factor Negro national oppression never could have assumed the particularly horrible aspects that it has in the United States. It is absurd to analyze the Negro question if the racial angle is ignored or denied, as is so often the case.

Except for the racial aspect, specifically the color question, it would have been impossible to make slaves of the Negro people in the first place. The continuance of slavery over the centuries also would not have been possible. And at the present time, without the race element, the main-

tenance of compulsory ghettos and the whole Jim-Crow system could not be kept up. Also the ratio of absorption of the Negro people into the general mass of the American population would proceed at a much more rapid rate than is now the case. The question of race affects every phase of the Negro national question. One of its most important effects is that in the face of the Jim-Crow system, it provides a tremendous bond of solidarity among the oppressed Negro people. It forces everyone with even the slightest discernible trace of Negro descent under the dual persecution of the Jim-Crow system. It is a factor that makes even Negro pro-imperialist betrayers of the basic interests of the Negro people give some sort of grudging support to elementary anti-Jim Crow reform measures, as the color bar hits them too, and they cannot escape it as individuals, no matter how rich or servile they may become.

The question of race bears down so heavily upon the Negro people that overwhelmingly, they consider it the basic problem they confront, practically ignoring all the elementary considerations of Negro nationhood. And perhaps 99 per cent of the American people have the same opinion—that the Negro question is purely a racial matter. Although we Communists have over recent years played down the question of race, it is a fact nevertheless that our main practical slogans

in this general field are anti-racist in character—that is, those relating to the fight against *white* chauvinism.

At this point a sharp word of warning is necessary if mistakes are to be avoided regarding the element of race. We must not, in dealing with the racial factor, use it as some sort of substitute for the national question. This is the course of the reformists and it has nothing in common with the policy of the Communist Party. We must, in analyzing class and racial factors in the Negro question, understand above all that the Negro question in its essence is basically a national question.

In the early days of our Party, inheriting the previous wrong line of the Socialist Party, we erroneously considered the Negro question to be simply a class question. A few years later, we came to consider it to be primarily a racial question. Still later we got to understand it as a national question, but in doing this we unwisely discarded almost altogether considerations of the racial factor. This was a mistake which we must now correct; otherwise we cannot have a sound Negro policy. We must understand and deal with the Negro question in its three-fold complexity—as a *class* question, a *racial* question, and overall, a *national* question. We cannot discard any one of these three factors without falling into theoretical and practical confusion.

THE FIGHT AGAINST WHITE CHAUVINISM

White chauvinism, the ideological basis of Jim Crowism and of the super-exploitation of the Negro people, is a deadly political disease which must be resolutely fought. It is idle to think of accomplishing basic and lasting results for and with the Negro people unless at the same time a struggle is waged against this ideological poison. One of the very best achievements of our Party is precisely the fight that it has made over the years and is making today against white chauvinism. In this respect the Communist Party stands far in the forefront of all other general organizations in this country. Our Party's fight against white chauvinism is one of the major expressions of its fundamental Marxist-Leninist character.

The greatest menace we have to be on guard against in this respect is the Right danger. This is the failure or refusal in general to fight against white chauvinism under one pretext or another. Such a failure is the mass weakness on the question, and as we know, this weakness frequently goes to the extreme among white workers of actively practicing white chauvinism. Then there is also the negative fact, illustrating the deep extent of white chauvinism among the American people, that there are more than a few traces of white chauvinism even in our own ranks, although our Party is far in advance of other organizations as

to being free of this poison. The fight against white chauvinism is one we must make constantly, not only among the white masses, but also in our own Party. The Negro people expect our Party to be clean of poisonous white chauvinism and to set an example in this respect.

There is also the "Leftist" danger, which can do grave damage too in the fight against white chauvinism. We had a big dose of this deviation during the past few years. This was mainly the tendency to separate the fight against white chauvinism from the struggle for equal rights for the Negro people—that is, to restrict the anti-chauvinist fight to a sort of inner-Party campaign. This mistake was expressed ideologically by the general idea that our Party was unable to fight for Negro rights until it first cleansed itself completely of all traces of white chauvinism. This was a dangerously sectarian notion, which was intensified by certain Negro bourgeois nationalist tendencies that were also present. Such sectarianism can only lead our Party into distorted and fantastic conceptions of white chauvinism and undermine our fight against it, cripple the Party's mass struggle for Negro rights, and weaken its influence among the Negro masses—all of which this "Leftist" mistake did in a very marked manner. In correcting this glaringly wrong policy, however, some have hopped to the other harmful extreme, to the Right, of slackening in general the fight against white chauvinism.]

In the matter of the fight against white chauvinism three important considerations, closely related, should be restressed. The first is that the fight against white chauvinism must be greatly strengthened, both without and within our Party; the second is that the only way this struggle can be waged effectively is on the basis of a mass fight for Negro rights, a fight which must be greatly stepped up on all fronts. Without a fight at the same time for Negro rights, the fight against white chauvinism becomes empty. The third consideration is that the struggle for Negro rights and against white chauvinism must go ahead simultaneously, it being impossible to separate the two aspects of the one general struggle for Negro liberation without falling into the most serious Right opportunist and "Left" sectarian errors. The supreme thing we must understand is to increase drastically our general fight for Negro equality in all fields and to tie in skillfully with this a relentless struggle against every manifestation of white chauvinism.

ON THE QUESTION OF THE RECENT REFORMS

During the past dozen years, and especially in the period since the end of World War II, the Negro people and their white allies have won a number of reforms in their fight against the outrage of Jim Crowism. These reforms have been advertised all over the world as marking the virtual ending of Jim-Crow persecu-

tion in the United States. This is a gross misrepresentation. At most the reforms have merely blunted some of the most jagged edges of the Jim-Crow system. The Negro people remain grossly discriminated against in industry, in politics, in law, in the arts, in housing, in travel, and in every other phase of American life.

In every case it will be seen that the relief granted to the Negro people by these reforms is but partial, and that even this partial relief is at best uncertain and precarious. While it is a fact that there have been no public lynchings during the past three or four years, it is also a fact that there continue many brutal shootings of Negroes in the South and elsewhere, and police violence against Negroes is a crying evil all over the country. It is also true that there has been a partial desegregation of the army, but nevertheless Negro soldiers are still abused in the South, few Negroes reach the status of officers* and subtle forms of discrimination prevail through all branches of the armed services. Also in recent years, because of trade union action, Negroes have had some better access to jobs in industry, including the skilled trades; but they are still heavily discriminated against. The old rule of the last to be hired and the first to be fired still generally applies to their situation.

There is, it is true, also a tendency

* Defense Department statistics (*N. Y. Times*, April 24, 1955) show that although enlisted Negro soldiers amount to 13.7% of the total in the Army, Negro officers account for only 2.9% of Army officers. In the Navy, Air Force and Marines Negro officers amount to less than 1% of the total.

to put up occasional Negroes as candidates on Republican and Democratic tickets; but this is still only on a token basis, with the Negro people falling far short of being proportionately represented. The decision of the U.S. Supreme Court calling for desegregation of the schools is very important; but this order is very far from being enforced, especially in the South. The same limitations are also to be seen with regard to such advances as the Negro people have been able to make against the Jim Crow barriers in the arts, in the theater, in sports, etc.

In evaluating these reforms we must beware of two dangers—the "Leftist" danger, which would underestimate them and sweep them away as of no real importance, and the Right danger which, overestimating them, would hail them as virtually signaling the end of the Jim-Crow system. One thing we must be careful about is to evaluate these gains, limited though they may be, as the Negro people understand and feel them, which is that they are important. It is easy for whites, who do not feel personally the terrors, injuries, and humiliations of the horrible Jim-Crow system, to brush the reforms aside. But it is a fact that, despite all the shortcomings of such reforms, the Negroes hail every alleviation, however small, of the rigors of the Jim-Crow system. For example, they rightly saw it as a real victory for the Negro people when Marian Anderson was able to sing in the Metropolitan Opera House,

the first Negro to appear there during its 70 years of existence—notwithstanding the fact that gross discrimination against Negroes still prevails in this and other cultural institutions.

Such concessions as they have won, far from satisfying the Negro people, distinctly encourage and spur them on in their determination to fight for more. This is as it should be. The Communist Party must let no opportunity pass to cultivate and strengthen this fight of the Negro people. It should re-double its efforts in this direction, and it should combat all tendencies to self-satisfaction and to rest upon our oars.

In relation to the situation of the American Negro people perhaps the most favorable development is the growing feeling of friendliness of whites for Negroes that is to be observed. This is noticeable in the better relation between white and Negro workers in industry and in the unions, in the friendly reception given to pioneer Negro students in various Southern Jim-Crow colleges, in the mass heroizing of Negro ball players, and the like. While hailing these gradually improving personal relations, we must never minimize the remaining deepseated and widespread white chauvinism which, as we well know, infects the white people and is quite capable of flaring up into terrible race riots and lynchings. This poisonous white chauvinism we must fight ceaselessly.

In speaking to the Negro masses regarding the anti-Jim-Crow reforms

which they have won in recent years, there are two things that we must make clear. The first of these is that these reforms have been relatively superficial and have not struck at the heart of the Jim-Crow system. And the second thing to warn against is that even these limited reforms are in a very precarious situation in view of the dangerous state of reaction in this country and consequently they must be defended militantly by the Negro people and their white allies as a basic and most vital part of the general defense of civil rights. The Program of the Communist Party does a great service in stressing the threatened situation of the Negro people and the imperative necessity for an active fight for the defense and improvement of their conditions.

In the Black Belt of the South the Negro agricultural population, besides being deeply impoverished, is also in an increasingly unstable economic situation. Certain long term tendencies are at work there against the Negro people. One of these has been the tremendous expansion of the cotton industry—at least 15 times over—since 1865. This expansion has in the main gone to the West, to the rich lands of Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona, New Mexico, and California, where the Negroes are a lesser factor—leaving the bulk of the Negro cotton producers in the less productive Black Belt. Mechanization, which is already playing an important role in cotton production, also works against the Negro farmers,

sharecroppers, and laborers because they are unable to buy the tractors, cotton-pickers and other expensive machines. In the case of a severe economic crisis all this could work out disastrously for the Negro cotton producers, as the less productive Black Belt would be hit with catastrophic force.

The position of the Negro workers in industry, both in the South and the North, is also particularly precarious. The "prosperity" of the past few years that has attracted so many of the workers into the industrial areas is largely based on sand. Although Negro workers have secured a certain status on the job seniority lists, they are as a group disproportionately at the bottom. They are still basically discriminated against in both hiring and firing. During the great economic crisis of 1929-33 the ratio of the Negroes to the white unemployed was about two to one, and in another economic crisis it would probably also again approach this ratio. In the present army of 4,000,000 unemployed the Negroes constitute decidedly more than their proportion in the working class. The looming danger of an economic crisis is a deadly threat to the great body of the workers as a whole, but it is doubly so in the case of Negro workers. It would more than wipe out such slight economic gains as the Negro workers have made in recent years. It could also tend to reverse the migration tendency and force large numbers of Negroes back to the Southern Black Belt.

The element of precariousness especially applies to the Negro people in the field of civil rights, where some recent gains have been made against the Jim-Crow system. Especially the growth of strong fascist trends in this country is a deadly threat to the meager and stunted democratic liberties of the Negro people. For American history teaches the clear lesson that any reactionary force which menaces the liberties of all the people, as in the case of fascism, operates with double and triple force against the Negro people, who are always a major target for the forces of reaction. Thus, it would be the gravest folly to ignore the growth of such sinister anti-Negro organizations as the White Circle League, the National Association for the Advancement of White People, and the many other actual and looming attacks upon the Negro people. Our Party must doubly warn the Negro people against illusions that the exploiters will voluntarily give up the Jim-Crow system which, as Victor Perlo estimates, brings them in yearly at least four billion dollars in super-profits. The situation demands that our Party multiply its efforts in the fight for the fullest economic, political and social equality for the Negro people.

Curiously enough, even some of the recent reforms the Negro people have won carry a threat to certain Negro national institutions. Thus, the entry of Negro baseball players into big league baseball, a real victory which was pioneered by the Communist Party, has had a cata-

strophic effect upon the leading Negro baseball leagues by depriving them of their best stars and thousands of their patrons. By the same token, the Supreme Court's decision on school desegregation will eventually radically change the elaborate system of Negro schools and colleges in the South by bringing into them considerable numbers of white students. Other Negro organizations will also be affected by these new trends, which we must note and study.

PRESSURE OF WORLD DEMOCRATIC FORCES

Now we must confront one of the most complex aspects of the present situation of the Negro people in the United States. This is to determine just how and why the Negro people have been able during the past dozen years to win the recent limited reforms after fighting in vain for them through many decades. Obviously, the first phase of the answer to this question is that the Negro people themselves have greatly broadened and stepped up their anti-Jim Crow fight during recent years. They have been enabled to do this because of various factors.

By moving into the cities in millions they have become an effective election force, notably in the strategic states of the North. By joining the unions in masses they have enormously and favorably increased their cooperative contacts with white workers—the million-and-a-half Negro trade unionists are in themselves

a powerful anti-Jim Crow force. By building the NAACP into a large and active mass organization they have increased their political power. By broadening their united front relations with various progressive white groups and organizations, particularly with the progressive trade unions, the Negro people have enormously strengthened their fighting capacity. And they have fought actively, as above indicated, in an environment where great working masses of our people are steadily becoming more understanding of, and friendly to, the Negro people.

White allies of the Negro people in their fight for justice have vastly multiplied in the past decade. In all this struggle against Jim Crow, the militant pioneering role of the Communist Party has been of basic importance. Its influence, not only in the past, but also at present, must not be minimized. The Party's current fight for Negro rights, for world peace and against fascism more deeply influence the masses than we often realize.

The ever-increasing numbers and activities of the Negro people and their white allies undoubtedly have been of decisive importance in winning the concessions that the Negro people have secured recently. Nevertheless, of itself, this force was not enough to secure these reforms. There is another great factor of decisive importance, which also must be taken into account. This is the tremendous pressure which in recent years has been brought to bear

against the American Jim-Crow system by the gigantic world forces of democracy, trade unionism, national colonial liberation, and socialism.

All over the world, especially during and after World War II, these vast forces, with the workers in the lead, have kept up a drumfire of opposition and condemnation of the Jim-Crow persecution of the Negro people in the United States. This has been especially strong on the part of the great non-white peoples of Asia, now breaking the fetters of colonial slavery, who know from bitter first-hand experience the arrogance of white-chauvinist exploiters and oppressors. The condemnation of Jim Crow has been also severe in the white nations of Europe, where every act of oppression of the Negro people is vigorously condemned by large sections of the people.

A powerful organizing force in developing this world condemnation of Jim Crowism has come from the progressive elements of the American Negro people—one of the greatest strokes in this respect being the publication and presentation to the United Nations of the famous book, *We Charge Genocide*, by such fighters as Paul Robeson, William L. Patterson, and Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois.

The Communist Party of the United States has also done much to awaken the workers of the world to the injustice inflicted upon the Negro people in this country. And in the great colonial and semi-colonial lands, in the countries of peo-

ple's democracy and socialism, and in the capitalist nations of Europe, the outstanding leaders of the campaign everywhere against Jim Crowism, are the respective Communist Parties.

American imperialism, despite all its strength and arrogance, has had to pay real attention to this powerful international condemnation of Jim Crowism. For it has proved disastrous to Wall Street's pretensions of democracy, pretensions which are indispensable for its program of imperialist aggression. It is a matter of common knowledge that everywhere the agents of American imperialism go they are highly embarrassed and seriously impeded by the taunts and protests of the various peoples against the outrageous manner in which Negroes are abused and mistreated in the United States. Jim Crow has turned out to be a millstone around the neck of the Wall Street would-be world conquerors. While the Jim-Crow system stands out so flagrantly in the United States, Wall Street's pretensions of being the world champion of democracy are patently absurd, and its program of establishing its international domination is made much more difficult.

Consequently, the imperialists have had to do something about the matter. This has taken the form of easing up a bit on some of the worst features of Jim Crowism. Undoubtedly international embarrassment for American imperialism over the Jim-Crow system has been and still

is a most powerful factor in conceding the Negroes such limited reforms as have recently taken place. In this respect the aim of the Washington government is not to abolish Jim-Crow segregation and persecution, but simply to smooth over some of its most scandalous features, so that it will not stand out so obnoxiously and be such an intolerable stench in the nostrils of the democratic forces of the world. Consideration of this foreign policy necessity is also the main reason why the government has sent so many pliable Negro leaders abroad to exaggerate the Negro reforms at home and try to convince the peoples of the world that things "aren't so bad" for American Negroes. It is a main reason why Ralph Bunche was given such prominence as a diplomat and why C. H. Mahony, a Negro, was appointed as a delegate to the United Nations. The idea is to make it appear to the peoples of the world that the U.S. government is fair to the Negro people.

American imperialism, as a part of its general program of international aggression, has thus been compelled to adopt an apologetic attitude for Jim Crow. Take, for example, the question of the desegregation of the armed forces, such as it is. It had become virtually impossible for the United States to maintain Jim-Crow armies in Asia or Europe in the face of the popular opposition to Negro segregation. Everywhere the segregated American army went it was a living refutation to Wall Street's pretenses of democracy.

Something therefore had to be and was done about it in the desegregation order. By the same token, at least a gesture towards desegregating the schools had become a necessity for American international policy. And if in recent years the Southern lynch mobs are not so much in evidence, a very considerable reason for this is that American imperialism is afraid of the deleterious effects abroad of lynchings in this country. Hence, the potential lynch gangs have acquired a fear that if they dare undertake a lynching, at long last the F.B.I. might possibly take some action against them.

Today, erstwhile rabid Jim Crowists in many parts of the country are yielding a bit under the ever-present contention that a partial mitigation of Jim Crow persecution is indispensable as a matter of American foreign policy. The whole foreign policy pressure thus constitutes a very powerful force in winning such limited concessions as the Negro people have secured in the past few years. It may be remarked in passing that this international democratic pressure has also helped not little the general fight of the American masses for peace and against McCarthyism in the United States. Such minor lessenings of Jim Crow sharpness as the imperialists are now conceding, while not destroying the Jim-Crow system, make very plausible arguments for American apologists in Asia and Europe, who are striving to make it appear that discrimination and persecution against

Negroes in this country have ended, or nearly so.

The above conclusions regarding the importance of the international factor in the fight against Jim Crow are borne out by the remarkable fact that the concessions have been made to the Negro people during a period of acute war hysteria and of rising fascist danger, one in which, through a whole spate of semi-fascist legislation, the democratic rights of the people as a whole—in the trade unions, in respect to the Communist Party and other Left bodies, in the school system, and elsewhere—have been seriously curtailed. In fact, the Negro people themselves have also been under a growing attack in various spheres. This seeming anomaly can be explained only upon the basis of the international democratic pressures above-mentioned, compelling American imperialism to make at least a pretense of abolishing the Jim-Crow system.

THE STRENGTHENING OF NEGRO REFORMISM

During several years past, especially in the war and post-war period, there has been a marked increase in the influence of bourgeois and social-reformist leaders among the Negro workers and other sections of the Negro people. Various factors have contributed to this—especially the illusions connected with the current false, war-made prosperity, which have also cultivated reformist influences in the trade union movement. But a powerful and special

element operating to strengthen Negro reformism, and one that must not be ignored, is precisely the fact that the government, for the international policy reasons above cited, in making some surface concessions to the Negro people, has done so through the instrumentality of the reformists. Consequently, the NAACP and other Negro organizations with reformists at their head have been enabled to profit hugely in prestige and leadership. These elements are thus getting credit for victories for which they are at best responsible only to a limited degree.

Several years ago our Party recognized that the American Negro question had become an international issue of considerable importance. But we have not drawn the necessary conclusions and policies from this patent fact as the international democratic pressure has gone on developing during the course of the world anti-Jim Crow struggle of recent years. One of the major consequences of this failure on our part is that the Negro reformists have thus been facilitated in reaping undeserved prestige. Many of them have even insolently attempted to slander and denounce the very international democratic forces which have been playing such a constructive role in the fight of the American Negro people for equal rights. By the same token, by our failure to acquaint the Negro people fully with the great importance of the fight being made for them by the democratic forces of the world, our

Party's prestige has suffered accordingly.

In this general situation the Communist Party in its Negro work faces a number of tasks which we, although belatedly, must take up energetically. For one thing, we must explain to the workers and other democratic forces in other countries the very limited character of the government's anti-Jim Crow actions, such as the desegregation of the armed forces, the Supreme Court's school desegregation order and the like. We must point out strongly the continuing reality of the Jim-Crow system. We must also stimulate these international forces to continue and intensify everywhere their pressure against American Jim Crowism. Even more important, we must make the American Negro masses fully aware of the great forces operating in their behalf on a world scale. The Negro people already are the most international-minded section of the working class and American democratic forces, and they are highly sympathetic to the democratic struggles of oppressed peoples throughout the world. With the realization of the fight these world forces are making against Jim Crow the Negro people can be all the more readily enlisted in all phases of the great struggle for peace and democracy, both in our country and abroad.

ON THE QUESTION OF "LEFT CENTERS"

Naturally, the changes that have

been taking place in the status of the Negro people, especially during the past decade or so—urbanization, industrialization, the building up of powerful Negro mass organizations, the penetration of the trade unions, as well as the effects of the general economic and political situation in our country and throughout the world—carry with them certain necessary policy changes for us. These affect not only individual planks in our program, but also our organizational forms and methods of work. Here we can deal with only one of these specific questions, namely, the problem of the “Left centers,” now being so actively discussed in our Party.

Twenty years ago, with the Negro people in the North, although rapidly stirring, still largely isolated from the general mass white organizations, especially the trade unions, our Party had to concentrate its work upon helping create such independent organizations as the National Negro Congress. A number of years before that we also even had to give consideration to the question of forming Negro trade unions where Negro workers were barred from the conservative unions.

Now, however, we face a quite different situation, with the Northern Negro workers members en masse of the trade unions—both A. F. of L. and C.I.O.—with their building of the N.A.A.C.P. into a mass body, with their playing an increasingly important role in the Democratic Party, and with their

entering into many other types of mass organizations from which they had hitherto been barred. Obviously, in such a situation it is our task to base our Negro work upon these mass organizations. A further special consideration to this end is the fact that with the heavy government persecution of the Communist Party and all other Left and progressive organizations, the need is all the greater to ally ourselves closely with the masses in their organizations. Of course, in the South, where the Negro masses in the industries and on the farms are largely unorganized, the problem is more complex.

Those comrades who are placing all the stress upon building “Left centers” are not abreast of the actual situation prevailing among the Negro people, especially in the North, and among the broad American masses. “Left centers,” correct 25 years ago, may now be highly sectarian. On the other hand, we must not take a dogmatic, one-sided stand in this matter and make a fetish of opposition to “Left centers.” This could lead us into damaging opportunist practices. In certain cases—which have to be individually considered—“Left center” organizations and activities have to be created in order to carry on work otherwise impossible. In this respect, a very important need is to build a powerful independent Left-progressive press—and the same need exists in other branches of our mass work. The main thing to realize is that we must work within the mass organ-

izations and not isolate ourselves in separate movements. This whole question should be concretely discussed within the framework of cultivating work among the broad organized workers in the North and among the broad unorganized masses in the South.

SOME GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing Notes do not purport to present a fully rounded-out program or detailed tasks on the Negro question. They do, however, stress a number of key matters—largely new problems—to which we have not given full consideration, and also some old ones, on which we need to do some new thinking. If these lessons are taken to heart our Party can go far to recover lost ground among the Negro people. Some of these losses, like those among white workers, are directly caused by the persecution now being experienced by our Party, but others are definitely due to our own negligence.

First of all, we have got to greatly sharpen up our theoretical analysis of the Negro question. As Marxists, we must also pay special attention to its newer aspects and to its specific American features. Neglecting to do this, as with many of our comrades who undertake to speak upon our Negro work, means to deal not with the current situation among the Negro people, but with that which existed some years back.

We must orient definitely upon a perspective of increasing struggles

in the future by the Negro people, in alliance with ever greater numbers of white workers. Especially must we be aware of this regarding the 1956 national election. The Negro people's struggle will generally be provoked by sharpening economic and political reaction. Those who, in view of present reforms won by the Negro people, draw the conclusion that the anti-Jim-Crow fight is virtually won, are living in an illusion. The decisive struggle on this whole question still lies ahead.

A major point in our program, too, must be to work constantly and skillfully to strengthen the leading role of the working class in the national struggles of the Negro people. To this end, in addition to the measures mentioned above, our Party should take care to develop as Negro cadres those workers who have had actual experience in basic industry and in the trade unions.

Let us remember, too, that although the Negro masses in the North are playing a greatly increased role in the battle for Negro rights, the main center of struggle still lies in the South. Two-thirds of the Negro people live there, and it is there that even the most elementary Negro rights have to be won. That is where the big and bitter battles still have to be fought—the winning of the land for the landless, the securing of jobs in industry for the workers, Negro penetration of the trade unions, the union organization of the workers in industry, the desegregation of the schools, the establish-

ment of civil rights generally, and ultimately the winning of the right of self-determination. The South remains the main home of the Jim-Crow system and also of the struggle against it.

In the fight against white chauvinism too, we particularly must bear in mind that this struggle cannot be separated from the general fight for Negro rights, but must be an organic part of that struggle. Our Party suffered grave damages in loss of prestige and leadership because of the "Leftist" sectarian way we conducted this fight during the past several years, by our trying in practice to single out white chauvinism to be combatted by itself.

In building the national solidarity of the Negro people we must also keep in mind and always work on two fronts. That is, we must fight against the Rightist danger of tailing after the Negro bourgeoisie, and also against the sectarian danger of isolating ourselves from the masses through ill-advised "Left centers" and other "Leftist" practices, some of which have been mentioned in passing.

In our Party's fight against social reformism, which is increasingly a peril to the Negro workers and to other masses, we must, among other measures, particularly pay attention to popularizing among Negroes the important and badly neglected fact of the vital role of the world's workers and other democratic forces in the fight against American Jim Crowism.

The main thing, however, that we must remember is that improvements in theoretical analysis and tactical measures will avail us but little if we do not at the same time build the Communist Party and greatly increase its activities on all fronts in the fight for Negro rights. Our slackening in this respect during the recent past has been the most elementary reason for such losses as we have had among the Negro masses. Over the decades our Party has won for itself very much prestige among the Negro people as the tireless, pioneering and indomitable fighter for their rights. But we cannot live on our past reputation alone; we must renew and strengthen this prestige every day in the constant fight for Negro equality.

At this time, when the Communist Party is setting out to improve drastically its Negro work, we could do no better than to pattern after the splendid example recently set by Comrade Ben Davis. Although locked up in prison, Ben was able to launch a real pioneering fight against Jim Crow by his battle to abolish Negro segregation in the Federal penitentiaries. This fight is of historic importance; its great significance being that it expresses the true fighting spirit of the Communist Party, not to mention of Ben himself. Give us more of such battling and the Communist Party will soon vastly strengthen its leading, fighting position among the Negro people.