

Which Way Out

What Chance Freedom!

By Oscar C. Brown

The Communist

By James

THE Negro in the United States is already in a "49th State," or certainly in a state different from that in which other American citizens live. The small number of Negroes who enjoy equal opportunities and benefits of American citizenship are but the exception that makes the rule. To over-emphasize these isolated instances, and to deny the existence of the ever tightening shackles that bind the masses of Negroes in this country is a form of self-deception that tends to blind us to any new approach toward a larger emancipation for the majority of our folk.



OSCAR C. BROWN

Very few white people have ever seriously considered the Negro as entitled to complete citizenship and equality. Had not the slave labor in the South threatened to enslave the free labor of the nation and destroy the equilibrium of the industrial North, slavery would have remained an established institution for a long time. "To save the nation," the slave had to be freed, and he was. But, in a few years, the "moral passion" of the nation receded. The Negro was face to face with competition from four and one-half millions of "poor whites" of the South, who had not theretofore been considered a part of the South's economy. Soon, the northern troops returned home, leaving the freed Negro in destitution and ignorance, in the midst of his former over-lords and new competitors, whose hostility and bitterness were merciless. As far as the Negro was concerned, the South never accepted the verdict of Appomattox. During the march of time, the South has come North; the winter playground of the nation has moved South; intersectional marriages, investments seeking profit, intercourse in amusements, sports, education, religion and the spread of lily-white labor unionism have destroyed the Mason-Dixon line; the North and South see "eye to eye." This is where the Negro in the United States finds himself today.

Negroes Must Move

There are millions of Negroes in this country whose condition cannot be materially helped so long as they are left in their present localities. A community that will take its women and babies to see a Negro tortured, maimed, mutilated and burned, without any semblance of a legal trial by the courts the community itself created and controls; or that will lynch a Negro in his jail cell after the highest court of the state says he is not guilty; or that will burn down its own court house because it is prevented from taking a Negro from his trial to lynch him; or that will permit state lines to be ignored and transgressed so long as it is for the purpose of murdering a black man; yes, in all such communities, and there are thousands of them, there is not the remotest possibility that the Negroes residing there will, in a thousand years, get humane treatment at the hands of their mutilators. Communities that participate in or sanction these extremes cannot be expected to be fair or sympathetic to the Negro in the simple activities of life, such as education, housing, health, employment, farm operation, measures of social security and the like.

The treatment today of the Negro in the United States is not confined to any particular section; it represents the attitude of his country toward him. In the Capitol building of the nation, only a black man cannot stop in and buy a sandwich or a cup of coffee. You, a Negro, may be a doctor of philosophy from Fair Harvard, or a minister truly consecrated to the teachings of Jesus Christ, or a hero maimed in the war to "save the world for democracy," or the mother of a veteran sleeping in Flanders Field; or, be you what you will or may, if you be a Negro, you are excluded from the restaurant in the Capitol of the United States. This example, projecting from the "fountain head of American liberty," permeates the very existence of the nation, and sustains a hostile attitude throughout the country that is more powerful than constitutional provisions and legislative enactments.

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THE question which, it appears to me, is fundamental to our discussion and which I will attempt to answer in this article is the following: are the Negroes in the United States an *oppressed nation*, and, if they are, can the policy of Communism on the national question, including the right of self-determination, be applied to the American Negroes?

If reduced to their essentials, the usual conceptions of the nature of the Negro question, whether of a conservative or radical tinge, amount to setting up race prejudice as the very essence of the problem. That deep prejudice exists and has itself become one of the integral aspects of the Negro question as it affects both whites and Negroes I do not wish to deny. But any scientific analysis must start from more fundamental premises. Before explaining the Communist program, it is necessary to recapitulate the basic economic and social factors which have determined the present situation of the American Negroes.

Slave Plantations Continue

The economic survivals of chattel slavery in the South provide the foundation for the present oppression of the Negroes in the United States. These survivals are to be found in the plantation system, which is not a mere shadow of the old slave plantation, but a direct continuation of it, utilizing semi-slave forms of labor such as sharecropping. Besides directly enslaving hundreds of thousands of Negro farm families, the plantation is the generating center of semi-slavery which has come to affect the poor white farmers as well and has penetrated into southern industry. The semi-feudal nature of the plantation economy is revealed most clearly by the fact that the Black Belt—the area in which the Negroes form the majority of the population—has remained practically intact since Emancipation. There are today 5,000,000 Negroes in the area of the old slave plantations and 3,000,000 live in its immediate environs. The Black Belt is, in fact, akin to a huge prison farm where the mass of Negro farmers are virtually bound to the soil. The old slave codes have been replaced by the vagrancy laws, crop lien, strict punishment for breaking contract, etc.,

For The Negro?

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S. Allen

The Separate State Hokum

By George S. Schuyler

which operate with equal effectiveness in assuring forced labor to the planter.

The plantation has determined the very course of economic development in the South. Industry came—but not to the Black Belt and not for the Negro. The textile industry, by far the largest in the South, is for the most part located in regions bordering on the plantation country and its doors have been barred to the Negro, as if by pre-arrangement with the plantation master. Industry, with the exception of the Birmingham area, has drawn its main labor supply from the white peasantry.

Not until 1916, when other sources of labor were closed by the World War, did capitalists make a concerted drive to tap the labor supply in the southern Black Belt. Over the opposition of the planters, an exodus was initiated which eventually brought about 1,000,000 Negroes into the North—and into modern industry. While the migration had little effect upon the plantation economy, it resulted in certain significant and progressive changes. For the first time on a large scale a Negro industrial working class was formed, creating a broader basis for solidarity between white and black labor, despite the fact that the first stages in this process were accompanied by dissension and strife. With the growth of the Negro working class and the Negro urban population, the field of operation of the Negro middle class was enriched and broadened. A more or less stable but thin layer of Negro business enterprise was able to encrust itself upon the body of the Negro community.

There could have been no "happier solution" of the Negro question, if one wishes to indulge in historical conjectures, than if the exodus had succeeded in depriving the plantation of the main portion of its peons, distributing the Negro population more evenly over the country and destroying the Black Belt prison of a whole people. But it was too late. The plantation system had already become strongly entrenched and was bolstered by a severe credit system which finds its source in the principal financial centers of the North. The labor demand proved to be only tem-

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WHEN ever the Afro-american, flailed unduly by poverty, prejudice and proscription, yammers aloud for succor, there is a wild stampede of hungry sociological shamans loaded down with weird and colorful nostrums, clamoring to assuage his hurts.

Thus, we have been periodically afflicted with the Back-to-Africa dervishes from the early days of the Republic to the advent of the infantile paralysis of Garveyism; the high pressure Group Economy salesmen who view segregation through rose-tinted spectacles, and the wistful witchmen who see Zion amid the snows of Alaska or the swamps of the Amazon.

The beleaguered Brother has grabbed at one or the other of these nostrums as the rowels of adversity have bitten deep, but his saving sense of humor and fundamental cynicism have, after cursory examination, restrained all except the lunatic fringe from swallowing such crackpot proposals. The shamans rattle their shells and toss their gri-gri bags for a season, charm a moron minority with their bombastic amphetigories, enjoy a grateful change of diet from neckbones to filet mignon, and then, when the disease has run its course and dues grow scarcer than dinosaurs, they hock their wardrobes and hold off their landladies until they glimpse another glorious vision of cash.

Scarce had the wallops of the current depression beaten the Brother to his knees, than these Profiteers of Despair bore down upon him, in response to his fervent yelps, bearing old nostrums in new cellophane. To be sure, the Back-to-Africa blather, sans Garvey, was offered again while learned clerks barked from a hundred platforms the virtues of Black Fascism, but in addition the witch doctors dazzled the Ethiopian imagination with visions of the Separate State.

Previous nostrums had had their disadvantages. Back-to-Africa involved a long ocean voyage with the disquieting



GEORGE S. SCHUYLER

prospect of becoming the *piece de resistance* at some simple native feast. Segregation was so familiar to the Afro-american that even the moving eloquence of degree-burdened professors could not dispel his apprehension. But here, now, was a proposal that really intrigued the less sapient Sons of Ham. No turbulent Atlantic to cross, no boa constrictors to wrestle in the dim jungle, no devotees of anthrophagy to outrun. Here was segregation with all of the apparent advantages of segregation and none of its obvious demerits. Unlike the brand which he was painfully familiar, this segregation permitted the Negro to rule with the white folk completely out of the picture. At one stroke it freed him of peonage, lynching, discrimination and disfranchisement. What more could be expected this side of Paradise?

The Communists dyed their segregated state proposal red and called it Self-determination for the Black Belt. The black Fascists dubbed their nostrum the Forty-Ninth State. But as Al Smith says, "No matter how thin you slice it, it's still baloney." The Forty-Ninth State proposition is perhaps less fantastic than that of the Communists, a fact which will surprise no one except Communists. Its advocates propose that Congress set aside a state for the Negroes where they may retire from the bootings of Nordica and pursue their destiny far from the influence of the Ku Klux Klan, such a state presumably to be carved from one or two of the existing commonwealths.

Counting the Cost

The Stalinites, on the other hand, unwilling to relinquish the crown of Ultra-asininity, propose that a state for colored people be gerrymandered from those sections of the Southern states where the population is predominantly Negroid. According to a map which they have prepared (a simple task for those who customarily blueprint future civilization) this territory would include much of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas, and small portions of Tennessee, Texas and Florida. Across the map of the United States this territory would

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porary and, besides, other sources of labor were being uncovered by the expropriation of the farmers and the middle classes on a large scale.

Economic Progress Stopped

The present crisis of the capitalist system should thoroughly dissipate the dream of economic progress under capitalism, which is still indulged in by inveterate optimists or out-and-out charlatans. Even those slight footholds gained by the Negro on the ladder of economic advancement, hailed so jubilantly by bourgeois writers, are swiftly being lost. The economic crisis has reversed the cityward flow of the Negro; one is even met by new social philosophers, inspired by the middle ages, who find hitherto unsuspected joys of life in the agrarian South. The doors of industry are being irrevocably closed to the Negro workers under the guidance of the N.R.A., while the A.A.A. denies the privilege of even semi-slave labor on the land to increasing numbers of tenant families. The small Negro businesses and professions lead only a nightmare existence, haunted by the chain stores, monopolies and the restrictions of a small Negro market. Even the "capstones" of Negro business—some of the largest banks and insurance companies and the few industrial undertakings—have struck bottom. There has been an alarming reduction in the number of Negro landowners and in the hard-gained acreage owned by Negro farmers. Sharecropping, the most severe survival of chattel slavery, is increasing.

If these facts seem harsh to many, they are nonetheless true. Progress under chattel slavery was entirely out of the question. Marked progress under capitalism, in the sense of a full and unretarded development of the Negro people, has been almost equally impossible. The plain fact of the matter is that capitalism as a whole and, more specifically, the plantation system with its superstructure of appalling oppression, have retarded and prevented economic development of the Negro people as a whole even within the bounds of capitalism. The capitalist powers have exerted the same retarding force in the colonial world, preventing the maturing of revolutionary movements against old and outworn social systems and throwing their support to the feudal and patriarchal classes. Capitalism has created the basic inequalities of our time; in the case of the Negro it has, in addition, carried over the inequalities of chattel slavery. It is our task to remove these inequalities by destroying their basis.

Corresponding to the special type of economic exploitation which has applied to the Negro, there has arisen a whole system of severe oppression and persecution, the facts of which are too well known for me to expound here. Suffice it to say that the ideology of "white supremacy"—the most significant social legacy of chattel slavery—maintained and strengthened by capitalism, has prevented the assimilation of the Negro. Differences in racial characteristics have been utilized to delimit a whole section of the American population as a socially outcast nation, subjected to the domination of Yankee imperialism. The "stigma of race" has played the role of demarking a nationwide Black Ghetto.

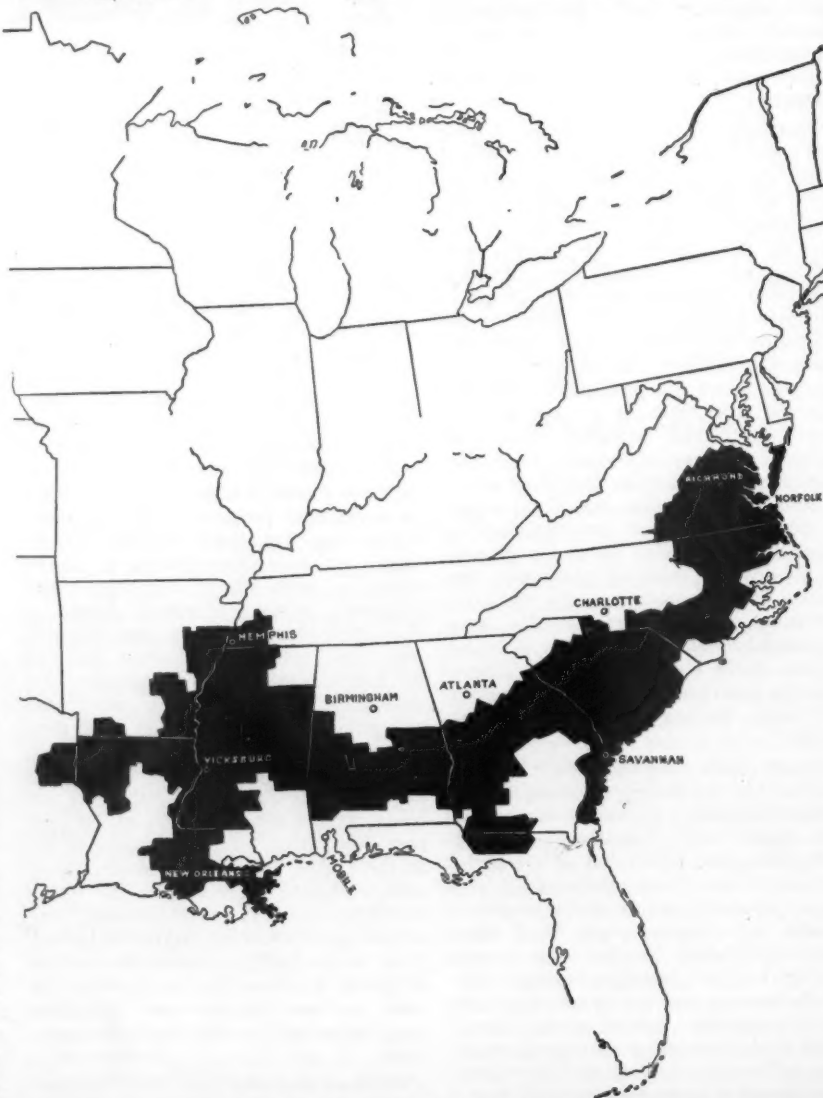
With these fundamental facts in mind, we may now proceed to examine the Communist program with regard to the Negro question. Of course, the

Communist program in all its aspects applies to the Negro as well as to the white. But additional problems, not pertaining to corresponding sections of the white population, are here involved. To these we now turn.

Self-Determination Necessary

Contrary to the opinion held in some quarters, the right of self-determination does not exhaust the entire demand of the Communist Party with regard to the Negro. Self-determination is only one, although the most important, aspect of the struggle for equal rights. It is, in effect, the slogan of equal rights applied in its fullest extent to the specific conditions existing in the South. The demand for equal rights for Negroes—as it applies to all phases of our economic, social and political life—has been raised and fought for

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The Black Belt as outlined by the Communists

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by Communists in all parts of the country. The slogan itself has for so long been, at least verbally, in the program of liberals that its most obvious applications are generally understood. It is necessary, however, to emphasize that while the liberals have restricted it entirely to the social and political field, the Communists extend it to the economic sphere as well, as expressed in the demand for "equal pay for equal work," "the right to all jobs," etc. In addition, the struggle for equal rights and the fight against all forms of discrimination and persecution are organized and led by the Communists, not in a reformist or opportunist fashion from above, but in such a way as to involve the broadest masses of white and Negro in a militant struggle for their rights. The difference between the reformist and Communist methods is best exemplified by the Crawford case, on the one hand, and the Scottsboro case on the other.

In the Black Belt of the South full equal rights for the Negro can mean only one thing—the right of self-determination. This is a fully realizable and historically necessary solution. It is an inevitable concomitant of the struggle against plantation slavery and for equal rights in the Black Belt, and is, in fact, the *key democratic demand* raised not only in the struggle for Negro liberation but projected by historical progress itself in the wiping out of all the remnants of chattel slavery.

If the Negroes in the United States as a whole have not been permitted to partake of the benefits of capitalist democracy—such as they are—the reason is to be found in the fact that the vestiges of the chattel slave system have remained firmly embedded in the present social system. The Civil War and the Reconstruction period did not fulfil the tasks demanded by history. Chattel slavery was abolished, but the plantation and sharecropping remained. The most pertinent battlecry of Reconstruction—"forty acres and a mule"—was drowned in the clatter of northern demagoguery. Virtual re-enslavement on the plantation carried with it the denial of practically all civil rights.

The Civil War revolution must be completed. This is the key to the solution of the Negro question.

But it would be ridiculous to envision a new "Civil War" in terms of 1860-1865. The tasks remain essentially the same: the destruction of the plantation and tenant system, the confiscation of the landed estates for the benefit of the tenants and poor farmers and the achievement of the fullest de-

mocracy for the masses. But class alignments and, therefore, the form of the struggle have changed. In the first place, the present plantation masters, instead of finding their chief opponents in the industrial capitalists as during the Civil War, now find themselves fully at one with the capitalist class as a whole. Secondly, the plantation and tenant peasantry find at their side a large proletariat whose class interests propel them towards a final struggle against capitalism. In the sixties there was only one principal question—the struggle against the slave power. Today the struggle against the plantation system develops in the midst of a general struggle against capitalism. Under such circumstances, a revolutionary proletariat finds one of its most important allies in the Negro people, who in their struggle against the relics of chattel slavery at the same time strike a heavy blow at the power of capitalism. And the Negro people can find their only dependable and their most powerful ally in the proletariat.

A Negro Government

Any real, basic, complete transformation of the plantation country is unthinkable unless at the same time new political institutions arise carrying with them the fullest democracy for the masses of the people. The plantation is situated precisely in the area where the Negroes are in the majority of the population. A really democratic transformation would mean, first of all, that the Negroes, hitherto excluded from democracy, would now in fact be the very carriers of the widest democracy. The revolutionary governmental power which is created in the Black Belt as the result of a democratic revolution, would of necessity be in the hands of the workers and the peasantry. In such a government, from the local administrative units to the top bodies, the Negroes would be greatly predominant, because they form the overwhelming majority of these classes in the area where such a transformation would take place. There can be no better assurance of such complete democracy than that the Negroes themselves are today the most oppressed of all in the South and that they constitute the chief revolutionary sector of the plantation populace.

The highest political expression of the fulfillment of this democratic revolution is the creation of the Negro republic in the area approximating the present Black Belt. We use the term "Negro republic" not in the sense of "Negro domination" or a "dictatorship of Negroes." The local as well as the higher governmental bodies will include also large numbers of white workers and poor farmers, who have partici-

pated side by side with the Negroes in the struggle against the plantation-capitalist ruling class, and would now be engaged in the task of consolidating the newly-won power. The term "Negro Republic" merely signifies that as the result of the fullest democracy, won for the first time in the South, the Negro necessarily plays the leading and most important role in the new republic.

We have a comparable situation in our own history. The Reconstruction state governments of the South from 1868 to about 1875 included representatives of the northern bourgeoisie, the southern middle class and the ex-slaves. In the Black Belt counties the local offices were held almost entirely by Negroes. The lower houses of three southern state legislatures had a majority of Negro representatives, while a number of Negroes was sent to both the House and Senate of the United States. If fuller democracy had then been won, there would have been a much higher proportion of Negroes in the state bodies and they would have held most of the governmental positions in a number of southern states. In the course of a modern "Civil War," when an entirely new republic would arise out of the Black Belt created by really democratic classes, history would be improved upon a hundredfold.

The Right to Secede

But the most crucial test of freedom would arise in the relationship between the Negro republic and the United States as a whole. It is at this point that the right of self-determination becomes the question. The right of self-determination means the right of a people to choose freely between complete political independence from another nation and political federation with that nation. One cannot say in advance under what conditions this question might arise for solution with regard to the Negro republic—that is, whether at that time the capitalists will still be in power in the rest of the country or a proletarian revolution will already have established a Soviet government. In any case, Communists support the free exercise of the right of self-determination, no matter what the choice, because it is only on the basis of a democratic choice, freely arrived at, that a federation of Socialist nations can exist. Negro Communists would agitate and organize for either separation or federation, depending upon whether the capitalists or the workers hold governmental power in the United States. The Communist party and the Soviet government would under all circumstances respect the choice arrived at as the real democratic expression of the Negro people.

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toward the advancement of our race in the trade field. And now, at this late hour, Miss Edwards would have us desert our friends and accept the beckoning hand of our enemy, an organization that has denied our women membership and discriminated against them on every hand.

Again I cannot reconcile her position, holding a job with the United States Housing Project of this city and at the same time espousing the cause of Soviet Russia in an address at the Coliseum March 31, before several thousand Communists, whom she addressed as comrades and pictured Russia a world utopia and likened unto it only the glory that could be found in heaven. Of America, Miss Edwards was most severe in her criticism painting a picture of darkness and despair as against the heavenly attributes of Russia.

Why would one of such intelligence as Miss Edwards try to have us see the glories of Russia and at the same time enjoy the maintaining of her body and soul from the coffers of the United States? Having received her education and training in America, I am persuaded that the leadership of Miss Edwards would have us to desert the constitution, overthrow the government and cast our destiny with "beautiful" Red Russia and such leadership at this time and for us is both unsound and unsafe. And that in her attack upon me and our firm, she like the rest of the "Reds" are seeking to destroy the best regulated industries, so as to bring about more unrest and discontentment in this country.

JENNIE E. LAWRENCE

Chicago, Ill.

Disagrees with Mr. Arbor

TO THE EDITOR OF THE CRISIS:—After reading in THE CRISIS, the paper of Mr. J. Edward Arbor, it occurs to me the greatest problem that the Negro has to solve is the problem of the inadequacy of thought in comprehending the enormity of the problem for which he seeks a solution. This is evidenced by the way the average self-styled leader proposes his own panacea for its solution and denounces all others who entertain different opinions from his. The Negro problem is a problem which has been developed through many centuries and will not be solved by a mathematician, however skilled he may be in his own chosen field. The real problem lies back of the backwardness of the Negro leader or preacher. The Negro is afflicted with an ancient malady or the psychology of self-destruction, which if it does not go deeper is more potent in the control of his action than his religion. The individual who is always criticizing the Negro preacher is like the man who criticized Peola in the "Imitation of Life," overlooking the primary cause, whose ignorance and prejudice hides from himself the very problem for which he seeks a solution. I believe in eternal agitation for human rights, but the thing advocated can easily become the thing fought. I have written a book which I hope Mr. Arbor will read if and when it comes off the press, but I would not dare venture the assertion that I could count on one hand the noble Negro preachers of the South of my opinion. He is fighting intolerance, but he has become intolerant to others.

The Negro, Mr. Arbor, is the victim of a caste and system forced upon him through many centuries, more binding and more merciless than the system of religious philosophy which has kept one and the same race of East Indians hopelessly divided for untold centuries. And the system under which the Negro labors is both racial and religious, though racially it is the more binding because it is so exceedingly subtle and subterranean. And to free the Negro from this religio-racial dilemma will take more than a few curt criticisms of the Negro preacher. Leaders of all shades of thought and of all different profes-

sions need to be imbued with the spirit and philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi.

Religion in its very nature is a process of binding. It binds man to his thoughts whatever those thoughts may be. And the thing that all of us needs to do, is not to free the Negro from his religion, but to free him from the traditional thoughts of inferiority, which have been the household philosophy of other races, including the Negro, for many centuries. The first step in the solution of this enormous problem is a comprehensive vision of its enormity, its past and present effects upon the Negro, and the eliminating end to which it portends.

No leader can do much more than give definition, character and expression to the prevailing consensus of opinion among any people. If he proceeds otherwise he does not become a leader, but a martyr; and, in the Negro preacher's case, undefeited and unmourned. Our salvation depends upon the evolution of a method of thinking alien to present prevailing world thought which not only actuates the white man, but has also made the Negro its contented victim.

Well enough, many Negro preachers are actually puerile in thought, and need to be educated; but the need of the Negro goes further than the education of the Negro preacher. It includes an educated constituency, drilled in the philosophy of self-preservation, of the primary equality of racial capacities in the light of the equality of circumstances, and of the love of God for all men alike. This task requires Mr. Arbor, as well as the Negro preacher, to perform.

It appears to me that both Mr. Arbor and the Negro preacher in many instances are asleep; and that the only difference between the two is that Mr. Arbor is a somnambulist who indulges in irresponsible speech while his intellectual eyes escape the enormity of the problem which confronts the Negro in America today. Mr. Arbor should wake up!

REVEREND EDWARD GHOLSON

Winston-Salem, N. C.

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I do not speak here merely in a theoretical way. This has been the actual experience of the Russian revolution. The granting and guaranteeing of the right of self-determination to the peoples formerly oppressed by the tsarist regime has been the cornerstone of the national policy of the Soviet Union. This has made possible unparalleled progress by the formerly oppressed peoples and a federation of Socialist nations in which none has privileges not enjoyed by others.

One can barely outline the subject in the space of so short an article. But I sincerely hope that I have at least conveyed to the reader the essentials of the Communist position. Especially do I wish it to be clear, that the Communist solution has nothing in common with the Utopian, jim-crow phantasy of a 49th State, which can only play into the hands of reactionaries. Nor can the question be placed as between the right of self-determination and "full, unsegregated status as Americans." For the right of self-determination means nothing more nor less than the most complete realization of democracy and equal rights.

New Deal

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This heightening of spirit among all elements of black America and the seriousness of the crisis for them make doubly necessary the consideration of the social and economic condition of the Negro at this time. It was a realization of these conditions which gave rise to the proposal to hold a national conference on the economic status of Negroes under the New Deal at Howard University in Washington, D. C., on May 18, 19 and 20. At this conference, sponsored by the Social Science Division of Howard University and the Joint Committee on National Recovery, a candid and intelligent survey of the social and economic condition of the Negro will be made. Unlike most conferences it will not be a talk-fest. For months nationally known economists and other technicians have been working on papers to be presented. Unlike other conferences it will not be a one-sided affair. Ample opportunity will be afforded for high government officials to present their views of the "New Deal." Others not connected with the government, including representatives of radical political parties, will also appear to present their conclusions. Not the least important phase will be the appearance on the platform of Negro workers and farmers themselves to offer their own experience under the New Deal. Out of such a conference can and will come a clear-cut analysis of the problems faced by Negroes and the nation.

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BUT a word of caution ought to be expressed with regard to this significant conference. In the final analysis it cannot and does not claim to be representative of the mass opinion of Negro citizens in America. All it can claim for itself is that it will bring together on a non-representative basis well informed Negro and white technicians to discuss the momentous problem it has chosen as its topic. It can furnish a base for action for any organization which chooses to avail itself of the information developed by it. It cannot act itself.

Thus looking beyond such a conference one cannot fail to hope that it will furnish impetus to a national expression of black America demanding a tolerable solution to the economic evils which it suffers. Perhaps it is not too much to hope that public opinion may be moulded by this conference to such an extent that already existing church, civic, fraternal, professional and trade union organizations will see the necessity for concerted effort in forging a mighty arm of protest against injustice suffered by the Negro. It is not necessary that