

Blind Alley 'Way Out' Offered Negro Masses By Reformist Misleader

NEGRO AMERICANS, WHAT NOW? By James Weldon Johnson. Vanguard Press, publishers. Price \$1.25.

Reviewed by
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MR. JOHNSON'S book is a programmatic document of the Negro petty bourgeoisie from the pen of one of its most brilliant representatives.

It is one of the ironies of history that a representative of that group which, by its reformist policies and shameless truckling to the white ruling class, has led the Negro people up a blind alley, now essays the role of a Moses to chart the "way out." The irony is further heightened by Mr. Johnson's admission of the political and intellectual bankruptcy of his class: "We are not so sanguine about our course and our goal as we were a decade ago. We are floundering."

Despite this admission, Mr. Johnson's goal, cleverly camouflaged behind a pretense of unprejudiced approach, impartial examination and "scientific" elimination (of opposing views), is to maintain the hegemony of this bankrupt class over the Negro liberation movement, particularly against the growing challenge of the young Negro proletariat and the increasing conviction of the Negro masses that only the Communist program offers the way out of their intolerable conditions.

In his foreword, Mr. Johnson announces his intention of outlining "the racial situation as it exists today" and of pointing "the ways which, I believe, lead out." But only a quack doctor would neglect to diagnose a given malady. To find a proper cure one must understand the malady. And Mr. Johnson completely ignores the fundamental causes of Negro oppression, which are deeply imbedded in the capitalist system of robbery and repression of the vast majority of the population, black and white, by an insignificant minority of capitalists and big landowners.

LAYING claim to a realistic approach to his subject, Mr. Johnson ignores the most realistic feature of capitalist society and its significance to the Negro liberation movement: the class struggle, with its growing solidarity of Negro and white toilers in the developing class and national struggles.

The half-slave conditions in the Southern Black Belt continue to set the pattern for the economic and social oppression of the Negroes in the North, but Mr. Johnson offers no program for the Negro toilers denied possession of the land they till, plundered of their labor and crops by the white landowners and bankers, and subjected to all forms of violent repression, except the thread-bare reformist illusions in the "fairness and impartiality" of the lynch courts of the landowners. He brushes aside this basic question of the Negro liberation struggle, the fight for the possession of the land by the landless Negro farmers, with the shameful lie that the actual enslavement (which he admits) of the Negro

croppers "is, however, unique in that it is subject to amelioration through legal processes."

Mr. Johnson devotes a relatively large portion of his 103-page book to Communism, which he does not attempt to lightly dismiss for, on his own admission, "Communism is coming to be regarded as the infallible solution by an increasing number of us." Mr. Johnson, however, attempts to conceal the fear and hatred he shares with the lynch rulers against Communism, behind an implied sympathy with the Soviet system and the aims of Communism.

Declaring that he "holds no brief against Communism as a system of government," Mr. Johnson nevertheless sets out to set up all sorts of barriers between Communism and the Negro people. His subtle method of "discrediting" Communism, does not prevent him, however from digging his own traps and falling headlong into them, or of making himself utterly ridiculous as when he denies that the wiping out of race hatreds in the Soviet Union is a Communist achievement, and attempts thereby to negate the world-significance of the October Revolution to the oppressed Negro and colonial masses.

IN HIS attempt to undermine the faith of the Negro masses in the Soviet Union, Mr. Johnson finds it necessary to ignore completely its successful solution of the National Question: the emancipation of the more than 148 nationalities formerly oppressed by Tsarism. Here he finds himself up against an embarrassing fact in the changed situation of the Jews. Not every one knows that the old Russia was a prison for over 148 nationalities, but everybody knows of the bloody pogroms and persecutions instigated by the former Tsarist regime against the Jews. And Mr. Johnson finds himself forced to admit that "oppression and repression of the Jews have been greatly abated or entirely wiped out by Communism." However, to offset the significance of this fact to the oppressed Negro people, he attempts to differentiate between "Communism in Russia," and its "possible variations" in the U. S., at the same time implying that the psychology of the American people, and not the economic system, is responsible for Negro oppression.

In his labored pretense to "a plain and reasoned statement of facts," Mr. Johnson also admits that with the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship in this country, "race discrimination would be officially banned and the reasons and feelings back of them would finally disappear." But he immediately falls back on the discredited Lovestone theory of "American exceptionalism" and declares against the likelihood of the social revolution in this country.

THERE is nothing in Mr. Johnson's book to disturb the lynch rulers or offend the white representatives of the ruling class who dominate the decisions of the Board of Directors of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, with whose top leadership Mr. Johnson was long connected. Mr. Johnson's contribution to the Negro Question boils down to a grotesque program of outworn platitudes and insipid improvisation of the old, discredited reformist policies.

To the Negro masses faced with the stark realities of mass unemployment, jim-crow denial of relief, increasing oppression and fascist lynch terror, Mr. Johnson has nothing better to offer than faith in the lynch courts and the pious hope that the lynch rulers may be induced by "education" to abandon the evil of their ways.

His closing declaration that so long as he is not spiritually jim-crowed, he is not jim-crowed, will hardly convince the Negro masses subjected in their daily lives to the degrading and harassing effects of jim-crowism and segregation, with resultant high rents, exacted by both Negro and white landlords, unsanitary conditions and jim-crow denials of jobs and equal pay for equal work.

Wanger showed it I don't know, but the chances are he did, for the blast appearing in the Examiner this morning seemed directed at this picture . . . likely, too that Luther, the Nazi, was at his home while the picture was shown, for he also was a house guest of Hearst last week-end. (The next day there appeared the editorial "Fascism and Communism" and the editorial attacking France on the situation in the Saar) . . . Watch this column for further news on "The President Vanishes," Hearst's campaign for federal censorship of films, and "Call to Arms."

Reorganization of N. Y. Film and Photo League

THE Film and Photo League of N. Y. has undergone complete revision to facilitate planned film and photo production . . . workers, writers, cameramen, typists, cutters, technicians, directors, organizers badly needed . . . assistance of John Reed Club writers in scenario and editing departments especially welcomed . . . the field of the film is certainly broad enough to include