

35

(2/1/6... 5/17/77)

A STATEMENT OF SEVERAL NEGRO COMRADES CONCERNING NEGRO WORK,
PARTICULARLY BY THE L.S.N.R.

I.

At the present time the Party finds itself on the eve of big class battles and is faced with the task of leading these struggles. In addition to the main tasks of winning the majority of the working class, building up a mass Party and fundamentally bound up with these, the Party is most urgently faced with the task of developing the hegemony revolutionary proletariat and its own leadership in the growing Negro liberation movement.

The deepening economic crisis which assumes particular sharpness in the South due to the catastrophic drop in the prices of staple products — cotton and tobacco — together with the sharpening national oppression, and the consequent worsening of the conditions of the Negroes places as a prospective in the near future a development of mass struggles of the Negro toilers in the Black Belt.

II.

At the present time the Party is not ideologically prepared to meet the tremendous task before it in connection with the development of this movement.

Since the St. Louis convention the Party's activities among the Negroes has not shown any marked progress, on the contrary in many fields a definite collapse can be registered — the high turnover in the Negro membership of the Party, a definite neglect of Negro work in the revolutionary trade unions, as shown by the absence of a Negro department in the TUUL for the past several months, and by continued neglect of Negro work in the revolutionary unions, particularly in the needle trades.

Thus the criticism of the main shortcomings of the Party which was contained in the October resolution of the ECCI remaining in full force at the present time... "the Party has not yet succeeded in overcoming in its own ranks all under-estimation of the struggle for the Right of Self Determination, and still less succeeded in doing away with all LACK OF CLARITY on the Negro question." In fact the meagre discussion on the Negro question has forcibly indicated a most profound confusion upon this question.

At the present time a series of outbursts of chauvinism have been witnessed within the revolutionary movement and even in the Party itself, particularly in the New York District.

- a) Negro workers attending a dance at the Harlem Finnish Club were confronted with open hostility and were even threatened with ejection from the hall. Party members present made little or no protest against this outrage.
- b) A similar incident occurred at a dance given by the Progressive Youth Club in Harlem, and also at an affair given by the Followers of the Trail, both sympathetic organisations.
- c) Members of the Young Liberator group in Brooklyn justifiably accused certain League comrades of white chauvinist tendencies.
- d) In the needle trades union discrimination against Negro workers on the job and in some cases even in our own union shops has been permitted to go unchallenged by our union. The Party fraction makes little or no effort within the ranks of the union to root out this evil. (See resolution of District 2).

In the majority of these cases it was shown that the Party fractions instead of carrying out a struggle against these chauvinistic tendencies capitulated ignominiously. In fact, during the investigation of the F incident in the Finnish Club, a comrade by the name of Yokinon expressed the rankest hating sentiments, inferring that Negroes should not be allowed in the pool room and bath rooms. The Section Organiser of Section 4, a Negro comrade, in the course of an investigation of another case was referred to as a "black chauvinist" and "Negro terrorist" by members of a Party unit in the Harlem section.

e) In New Brunswick, a Negro comrade who visited that town in connection with the unemployment work, could not find a place to sleep.

f) One day before the needle strike in NYC a white comrade is accused of slapping a Negro girl worker. This act led to discussion between Negro and white workers in the shop. As a result of this the shop did not join the strikers.

g) In Gary when Negro workers attended a dance of a sympathetic organisation, white workers staged a demonstration against their presence. Party members present took no steps to combat this.

h) In Washington, D.C., at the conference for the Protection of the Foreign Born Party members refused to put up a fight against Jim Crowisms of Negroes by white restaurants. It was non-Party workers who took the lead in going with Negro delegates into white restaurants and staged a demonstration against Jim Crowism.

i) In Kansas City, Negroes who attended a meeting of the ILD and signed applications for that organisation were shunted off to the LSNR.

This wave of chauvinism is taking place directly upon the background of sharpening class struggles, the tightening of the yoke of national oppression on the Negroes, the intensification of chauvinist propaganda of the white imperialist bourgeoisie, the pressure of which is reflected upon the revolutionary movement and in the Party itself. Because of the great unclarity on the Negro question, the Party is unable to effectively resist this pressure and to win the white workers in support of the struggles of the Negroes.

III.

Failure to understand and to draw lessons from the constructive criticism contained in the CI resolution must be considered as one of the main causes of this weakness. The mistakes and shortcomings pointed out by the CI have not been analysed and placed before the Party.

The resolution of the EOCI was a product of the most minute analysis of Negro question in the US and the work of the Party in this field. It was the continuation and elaboration of the correct line laid down in the resolution of the VI Congress. It arose out of the necessity of further clarification of the Party on this question. It indicated the intention of the CI to call sharply to the Party's attention the growing political significance of the Negro question in the US. "I believe that we may count upon the fact that the struggle for the rights of the Negroes in America will gain very much in political actuality in the immediate future." (Kuusinen's speech).

The CI correctly stated that "in general the CP of the US has kept to this correct line recently in its struggle for the Right of Self Determination of the Negroes even though this line -- in some cases -- has been unclearly or erroneously expressed." (CI Resolution). In

what instances was this line "unclearly or erroneously expressed"?

1. The connection contained in the resolution of the Pol-Bureau summing up the discussion of the VII Party Convention, that the Negro rebellion in the South was dependent upon the maturing of the revolutionary situation in the country as a whole, which in practice would imply a postponement of active organisation of the struggle of the Negro toilers until the proletarian revolution.

"Whether the rebellion of the Negroes is to be the outcome of a general revolutionary situation in the United States, whether ~~it~~ it is to originate in the whirlpool of decisive fights for power by the working class, for proletarian dictatorship, or whether on the contrary, the Negro rebellion will be the prelude of gigantic struggles for power by the American proletariat, cannot be foretold now. But in either contingency, it is essential for the Communist Party TO MAKE AN ENERGETIC BEGINNING NOW with the organisation of JOINT MASS STRUGGLES OF WHITE AND BLACK WORKERS against Negro oppression." (CI resolution).

2. In connection with this the erroneous conception of the slogan of the Right of Self Determination as a propaganda slogan (Baker's speech at the convention) ~~is~~ "their right of self-determination of the Negroes as the MAIN slogan of the CP in the Black Belt is appropriate."

"Even if the situation does not yet warrant the raising of the question of uprising, one should not limit oneself at present to propaganda for the demand: right of self determination, but should organise mass actions, such as demonstrations, strikes, boycott movements, etc." (CI resolution).

3. The failure to clearly differentiate between the Right of Self Determination as a demand and separation at all cost, hence a tendency to capitulate before bourgeois nationalism (implied particularly in the speeches of Hathaway).

"In particular" some misunderstanding has arisen from failure to make a clear distinction between the demand for 'right of self-determination' and the demand for governmental separation, or simply treating these two demands in the same way. However these two demands are not identical." (CI Resolution).

4. The conception of the ANLC as a mass organisation predominately of Negroes to lead the Negro National liberation movement which involved the tendency to hide the face of the Party in the struggles of the "Negroes (See minutes of Pol-Bureau).

"It is advisable for the CP in the North to abstain from the establishment of any special Negro organisations, and in place of this to bring the Black and white workers together in common organisations of struggle and joint action." (CI resolution).

These vital criticisms have not been placed before the Party, but instead in the discussion of the Pol-Bureau on the resolution, the undue stress was laid upon the endorsement of the general line by the CI.

That the comrades are not yet alive to the significance of the CI resolution and its restatement on this question is shown in the attempt to smuggle under the cloak of the resolution the old erroneous

conception of a Negro organisation. This in spite of the restatement of the perfectly clear and correct statement of the CI position. This is seen in the attempt of comrades to distort the CI restatement into confirmation of the ~~x~~ incorrect policy pursued at the St. Louis convention. Instead of a courageous Bolshevik self-criticism there is an attempt to saddle the Negro comrades with the fault of distorting the CI line on the LSNR question. As the result of this almost total lack of self-criticism, many of these mistakes are continued in the Party, especially in the LSNR.

IV.

This total lack of self-criticism indicates a failure to appreciate the full implications of the resolution of the CI as evidenced in:

1. The delay in publishing the CI resolution - it was published in the US only after it had been published in the International Communist press. Even now it is only published in the Communist, which has a limited circulation.

2. Weakness of the clarification campaign -- failure of the leading white comrades to write articles in the Party press clarifying the Negro work in the light of the resolution.

3. And most glaringly of all in the crass under-estimation of the necessity of struggle against white chauvinism, as evidenced in the position of Comrades Baker, Amter, and Amis, who make an undialectical differentiation between the fight against white chauvinism and the developing of the struggles of the Negroes, which is tantamount to a capitulation before white chauvinism. (Letter to the District Negro Dept. and the speeches of these three comrades in the Pol-Bureau).

This attitude is merely a continuation of the position of these comrades, together with Comrade Peters, as expressed in the meeting of the District Bureau with the Bureau of Section 4 in which the question of the work in Section 4 was discussed. The work of this section is mainly among the Negroes in Harlem. On this account the weaknesses of the Party in its Negro work is most glaringly brought out in this section. Besides the numerous crass manifestations of chauvinisms pointed out above, which occurred mainly in this section, we have indifference and passivity in regard to Negro work upon the part of a considerable section of the white membership as shown in a) difficulty to mobilise any considerable number of white comrades for work among Negroes; b) failure of comrades to appear when assigned to certain tasks -- distribution of leaflets, eviction cases, demonstration against discrimination, failure of the white unemployed comrades to participate actively in the Harlem Unemployed Council, allowing this to reduce itself to a Negro organisation; c) small attendance of white comrades at inter-racial affairs, dances, etc., etc. In the face of this clear cut situation, Comrade Peter and Amter analysed the general weakness of the Party in that section as due NOT TO FAILURE to prosecute a consistent struggle against white chauvinism in the section but to "weak leadership" of the section committee, the leader of which is a Negro comrade.

This can be interpreted as nothing also but an attempt to take the emphasis off of the struggle against white chauvinism and gives objective support to the latter: It is a definite retreat from the resolution against chauvinism adopted by the district. "The slogan of equal rights of the Negroes WITHOUT A RELENTLESS STRUGGLE IN PRACTICE AGAINST ALL MANIFESTATIONS OF NEUROPHOBIA ON THE PART OF THE AMERICAN BOURGEOISIE can be nothing but a deceptive liberal gesture of a sly slaveowner or his agent." (CI resolution).

5.

V.

The development of the class struggle is bringing to light in a sharper form than ever the mistakes and weaknesses of the Party on the Negro question. At the present time these mistakes and unclarities revolve around the question of the League of Struggle for Negro Rights. This question of the LSNR is not merely a tactical question, but is a question of the deepest political significance. The question is raised does the development of the Negro liberation movement demand the building of a mass organisation predominately of Negroes apart from the Party and the revolutionary trade unions to lead the struggles of the Negroes, or the other conception that the liberation movement of the Negroes must find its expression mainly through the Party and revolutionary trade unions? Upon the answer to this question depends our understanding or lack of understanding of the implications of the CI resolution.

It is not an accident that the CI finds it necessary to re-state its policy on the LSNR.

VI.

What is actually behind this conception of^a Negro organisation? It is the tacit inference that the Party and the revolutionary trade unions cannot lead the struggles of the Negro masses but must have a special organisation to lead these struggles. This special organisation cannot help but assume the character of a political party and tends to substitute the Party in the Negro field. It results in relegating all responsibility for the organisation and leadership of struggles of the Negroes to the Negro comrades or, at best, these few white comrades immediately assigned to Negro work. In the final analysis, it leads to an abandonment by the Party and revolutionary trade unions of the struggles of the Negro toilers.

The prevailing tendency is to relegate the Party's Negro work to the LSNR, which is regarded by the Party membership as a Negro organisation. This is shown in the following:

a) The decision of the CC endorsed by the Pol-Bureau, to the effect that the National Negro Dept. and the LSNR were duplicating each other and that therefore comrades Amis and Newton should alternate in making tours for the LSNR. This decision amounts in practice in a liquidation of the National Negro Dept.

b) The case of the Kansas City ILD which turned over applications of Negro workers to the LSNR.

c) In the identification by comrades of Negro work exclusively with the building of the LSNR. The majority of the correspondence of the National Negro Dept. deals almost solely with the LSNR, with little or no attention paid to the work of the Party, TUUL and ILD among Negro workers.

d) This abandonment of the struggles of the Negro masses is particularly reflected in the liquidation of the Negro Dept of the TUUL and the hesitancy in raising the demands of the Negro workers by their revolutionary trade unions. And particularly shown in the Needle Trades Union -- as a concrete example is the omission of all Negro demands in the reformulation by the general board, on the eve of the strike, of

the general demands, as well as the policy of confining the statement of the demands of the Negroes to leaflets printed, especially to be distributed among Negroes. When the Needle Trades finally decided to call Negro workers to a meeting, it proposed to call the meeting in the name of the LSNR.

This tendency is also seen in the Party. Material prepared in some sections for International Women's Day, leaflets issued by some sections for February 25th demonstrations, etc., etc.

The Party has failed to show its face as the leader in the struggle against lynching, it has not turned down proposals for the holding of a national day of protest against the lynching terror of the white ruling class against the Negro masses, but has tended to relegate the struggle against lynching to the LSNR. This is reflected in the case of comrades in the field where outrages occur calling protest meetings in the name of the LSNR instead of in the name of the Party and the mass revolutionary organisations.

As a result the LSNR has become a cloak for chauvinist leanings within the Party. The present conception of the LSNR as the leader of the struggles for Negro rights furnishes an excuse for failure to develop the Negro work in the Party and mass organisations and thereby encourages the indifference and passivity prevalent among a considerable section of the membership of the Party and revolutionary mass organisations in regard to Negro work. On the other hand this artificial division between general Party work and so-called Negro work does not give the possibility of development of Negro comrades who to a certain extent continue isolated from the white workers.

The throwing of Negro comrades exclusively into Negro work tends to stunt the development of these comrades. Efforts are moreover made to discredit them because of their fights against white chauvinism.

Finally, the LSNR is not the medium through which the white workers can assume the leadership in the struggle for Negro rights.

VII.

The LSNR assumes the character of a political party, "organising the active struggle for full equality and for the right of self determination." (See paragraph 2 of Rules of Organisation of LSNR Programme). The LSNR thus tends to substitute the Communist Party on the Negro field. Under the influence of this erroneous conception a leading Negro comrade proposed the establishment of a trade union department in the LSNR.

Though formally an organisation of Negro and white workers, the few white members are mostly Party members. The organisation cannot hope to gain sufficient white non-Party workers to change its Jim Crow character. It is clear that when a white worker is sufficiently developed to not only understand that the struggles of the Negro workers are at the same time the struggles of the white workers, but also to

take a leading part in the struggles for the Negroes, such a worker is a fit candidate for the Communist Party. (Comrades in the field constantly point out their inability to attract white workers). Even a considerable section of our white Party membership do not yet realise fully the necessity for actively engaging in the struggles of the Negro masses, as witnessed by the passivity and indifference within the Party in regards to the struggles of the Negroes. The situation in Detroit is the most outstanding example of this. The Negro workers who are isolated in the LSNR groups themselves see the Jim Crow character of the LSNR, and are raising the question "where are the white workers?" This is true everywhere in LSNR work. Even the affiliations of mass organisations through the city committees does not solve this question, as this brings Negro and white workers together only ~~xxx~~ through top committees and leaves the isolation of Negro workers still in force.

VIII.

All these mistakes and erroneous tendencies connected with the LSNR are increasingly becoming an obstacle in the struggle against chauvinism, encouraging passivity and indifference among the white membership of the Party, hampering the united struggle of Negro and white workers and makes it difficult for the Communist Party to assert its leadership in the Negro liberation movement.

Thus the whole conception of a special mass organisation to lead the struggles of the Negroes is incorrect and represents a departure from the CI line on the Negro question in the USA.

"Even if we should immediately want to build up a large mass organisation now, for the purpose of struggling on the Negro field, nothing would come of this except new illusions..... I see a certain error in the decision of the Party, which is really an old decision on the Negro organisation, and we ~~may~~ were not any wiser, otherwise we would have corrected the matter. Almost all the Negro comrades are against building up a special Negro organisation in the US. Perhaps with great efforts we have won a few very well disciplined comrades, comrades who because of their discipline, are ready to carry out incorrect decisions. But the other Negro comrades are absolutely against it; they say: we are for social equality, why begin social equality by separating us Negroes by allowing us only our own organisation?...!" (Kuusinen's speech).

The liberation movement of the Negroes must find its expression chiefly in the Party and the revolutionary mass organisations. The Party taking the open leadership of the struggle drawing into it all of its mass organisations. The struggle of the American proletariat and the struggle of the oppressed Negro masses are closely interwoven. Our basic strategy is to secure the hegemony of the proletariat, and the leadership of the CP in the Negro liberation movement. Favourable conditions for this exist in a large Negro industrial proletariat formed in last years. The American proletariat must assert its immediate leadership through the Negro workers who are an organic part of the working class in this country. This can be done only if the white workers are won ~~for~~ the support of the struggle of the Negro masses.

"It must be borne in mind that the Negro masses will not be won for the revolutionary struggles until such time as the most conscious section of the white workers show, by action, that they are fighting with the Negroes against all racial discrimination and persecution" (Resolution of the VI Congress on Negro Question in USA).

This is even more sharply expressed in the recent CI resolution:

"In the struggle for equal rights for the Negroes, however, it is the duty of the WHITE workers to MARCH AT THE HEAD of this struggle. They must everywhere make a breach in the walls of segregation and "Jim Crowism" which have been set up by the bourgeois slave market morality. They, the white workers, must boldly jump at the throat of the 100% bandits who strike a Negro in the face. This struggle will be the test of the real international solidarity of the American white workers"

Our basic strategy determines our organisational tasks in regard to the Negro liberation movement. Our guide must be united front from below with the Negro masses on the basis of the closest organisational unity of the black and white workers.

1) Strengthening of the apparatus of the Negro departments in the CP and YCL. These departments must prepare questions on Negro work for their respective committees and on this basis study the conditions of the Negro masses. Bring forth proposals for mobilisation of membership in the struggle for Negro rights.

2) Establishment of a Negro department in our mass organisations, particularly in the revolutionary trade unions, ILD, which must raise the demands of the Negro workers and put up a struggle for these demands.

3) Negro comrades must be drawn into all leading committees, at the same time white comrades must be drawn on Negro committees.

The revolutionary trade unions must struggle for Negro rights on the economic field, that is to say, against discrimination on the job, for equal pay for equal work, the right to skilled positions, etc.

The CP, TUUL, must strengthen the work in the South. The TUUL must immediately take up the question of forming an Agricultural Workers' Union, particularly of plantation workers. Peasants committees must be set up. The leading role of the proletariat must be asserted in these committees through fractions of agricultural workers. The bloc between workers and peasants should find expression in periodic conferences of peasants' organisations and trade unions, committees of action, etc.

The United Farmers' League, Unemployed Councils must strengthen their work among the Negro workers, exposing discrimination by the fake relief outfits, fighting evictions, rallying the Negroes for the struggle for unemployment insurance, etc. Tenants leagues of Negro and white poor tenants must be organised and demands raised against high rents, evictions, etc. The ILD must take up the legal defence through mass pressure against special persecutions of Negroes. Temporary blocs with urban petty-bourgeois Negro organisations are permissible, provided they are of a mass character and the freedom of criticism, agitation among the workers in these organisations on the part of the Communists is not hindered.

The ILD, AIL, etc., must seek to affiliate various Negro organisations on the basis of struggle in their respective fields.

The AIL should break with its exclusive Latin American orientation and develop work among Negroes as the most important anti-imperialist struggle from the viewpoint of weakening American imperialism are those of the Negro masses. In addition to the above, broad committees of action should be formed on the basis of specific issues and campaigns drawing into participation all sections of Negro population willing to struggle against imperialism.

The CP must be the coordinating and leading centre of all these struggles, drawing into the struggle all organisations under its influence. Side by side with this the CP must develop independent activities among the Negro workers. It must openly champion the struggle of the Negro masses for social equality and the right of self determination. It must particularly come out against lynching, it must organise defence organisations of Negro and white workers against lynching, it must launch a bold recruiting campaign with the object of drawing into its ranks the most advanced elements among the Negro toilers.

II.

The chief task of the LSNR must be the building of the Liberator into a popular mass organ, development of workers' correspondence, etc. The Liberator must be an agitator and organiser of the Negro liberation struggle, it must sharply expose the Negro bourgeoisie and misleaders (only a Negro paper can do this effectively). Its constant call to the Negro masses must be "revolutionary struggle against the ruling white bourgeoisie, through a fighting alliance with the revolutionary white workers". The Daily Worker must constantly fight against white chauvinism. The building of a mass paper does not necessarily imply the building of a mass organisation. The influence crystallised around this mass paper must be utilised to draw the Negro workers into the CP and the revolutionary mass organisations and into support of the campaigns of these organisations.

We are of the opinion that the Pol-Bureau resolution identifying the line of the St. Louis Convention with the line of the CI, is totally incorrect, renders impossible the clarification of the Party, perpetuating the present mistakes and wrong tendencies, and lays the basis for greater confusion and still more serious mistakes.

(Signed) H. Newton
Cyril Briggs
Harry Haywood.

-- -- --