

For a Sharper Struggle Against Reformism

by HARRY HAYWOOD

THE attempt to railroad nine innocent Negro boys to death through the frame-up trial at Scottsboro was correctly met by the Communist Party with a nation-wide challenge and seized upon as the best means to arouse the fighting spirit, to bring out the political activity of the Negro masses and to start a tide of organization and resistance to the offensive of the capitalists and Southern landlords against the Negro workers, poor farmers and share-croppers.

The Party's correct entrance into this campaign met with a degree of success which has caused our worst enemies (for example, Howard Kester of the pacifist "Fellowship of Reconciliation") to report that "it is no longer true" that Communism is a "relatively unknown term among the Negroes," and that the Communist Party's "activity among rural Negroes" has "succeeded in arousing many hitherto despondent and lethargic spirits" and that the Communists "are winning adherents everywhere."

A new turn of sharper attention of the Party toward Negro work, as a direct result of the work of the Party and the revolutionary mass organizations in the Scottsboro campaign, and a general stimulation of its agitational Negro work, have directly drawn many thousands of Negro workers under the influence of the Party and sympathetic organizations. It has laid the first proletarian foundations of the Communist Party among the Negroes in the Southern states.

One of the most outstanding achievements in the campaign has been the drawing in for the first time of large masses of white workers in support of the struggle for Negro Rights.

The Scottsboro campaign has also succeeded in making much clearer than at any previous period the treachery of the Negro bourgeoisie and Negro reformist organizations in the struggles of the Negro masses, and their alliance with the white ruling class lynchers.

Betrayers Temporarily Demoralized.

The quick reaction of the Party and revolutionary mass organizations to the Scottsboro case, the rapid mobilization of a mass movement in defense of the Scottsboro boys, the tremendous enthusiasm of the movement, profoundly influenced the rank and file following of the Negro reformist organizations. The suddenness and force of the impact of this movement against the Negro reformist—white liberal bloc in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People—caused a temporary demoralization within the top leadership of this organization, which was reflected in the treacherous silence of the N.A.A.C.P. A sham battle followed, the substance of which was really how best to betray the masses in the Scottsboro struggle. This was reflected in the "left" criticism against the N. A. A. C. P. leadership by Negro papers of definite bourgeois character, such as the Chicago Defender, Amsterdam News, etc., the "misunderstanding" in the executive staffs of the N.A.A.C.P., etc.

The role of the Negro reformist was to serve as a shield for the white ruling class lynchers, whose murderous intentions were thwarted by the wide mass movement developed by the Party. Their strategy was the following: with the help of the white slave drivers, to get hold of the legal defense and through employing the most dastardly demagoguery to confuse the masses and isolate the Communist forces, and in this manner prepare the way for the legal lynching of the boys. Direct proofs of this intention were Walter White's secret letters to the Negro press, vicious attacks upon the Communist Party, the collaboration of the N.A.A.C.P. leadership with the Southern hangmen in the torturing of the boys in jail in an effort to force them to denounce the I.L.D. defense and accept the N. A. A. C. P., etc.

Forced to Make "Left" Maneuver.

Facing with the militant mass movement and weakening prestige, the bourgeois reformists, in order to carry out their policy of treachery, were forced to execute a "left" maneuver. William Pickens, field secretary of the N.A.A.C.P., made a fake endorsement of the I.L.D. campaign, supported by the group around the Chicago De-

fender. The role of Pickens was to place himself at the head of the opposition of the masses to the official bourgeois reformist leadership so as to head the movement in order to behead it, and lead the rebellious masses back under the leadership of the reactionary reformists. The sudden about-face of Pickens and the sharp change of the Chicago Defender, which took place subsequently, were signals for the desertion of sections of the unstable petty-bourgeois elements back to the fold of the official N. A. A. C. P. leadership.

Distortions of Party Line.

But although the policy of the Party as a whole was correct in the Scottsboro campaign, there were in certain instances distortions of this policy along the line of failure to expose sufficiently the reformists and their petty-bourgeois agents among the masses, preparing them against the inevitable betrayal. In a number of articles in the Daily Worker and Liberator definite concessions were made to the underestimation of Negro reformism, e.g., the printing by the Daily—without criticism—of Pickens' fake endorsement of the campaign; the tendency to blur over class differentiation among the Negroes, as witnessed in the "Letter to Negro Editors" in the Liberator, the caption in the Daily Worker, "Negro papers join united front," the reference to the Chicago Defender as "an influential Negro paper with a circulation of 100,000," etc., etc.

These distortions in policy reflected themselves in practice in the following ways:

The correct line of the Party calling for a broad united front of the working class, black and white, and of the masses of the Negro people, on the basis of struggle for the immediate and unconditional release of the Scottsboro victims, and accompanied by the sharpest exposure of the Negro reformist and white liberal bloc of agents actively engaged in this case on behalf of the bourgeois hangmen—this correct line laid down at the beginning of the campaign was not consistently carried out.

United Front Incorrectly Carried Out.

In nearly all districts of the Party, the correct line was sacrificed in an attempt to establish a "united front from the top," as exemplified in the tendency to approach the Negro masses, not through direct contact at the bottom, but through the mediation of the petty-bourgeois reformist leaders of the Negro organizations, Masonic lodges and especially through obtaining the intercession of "friendly" Negro preachers, and the giving of an inexcusable substantial position in Scottsboro conferences to the Negro churches. Such opportunist distortions of the Party line resulted in such a condition that the movement was placed to a considerable extent at the mercy of the petty-bourgeois reformist and religious leaders to utilize their opportunity to strike shattering blows at the united front movement at the most critical moments, attempting to lead the masses back into the camp of the supporters of the hangmen of the Scottsboro victims. As a result there took place in many instances a rapid deflation of the organizational results of the campaign in the districts—as witnessed by the liquidation of the apparatus that had been set up by the local Scottsboro conferences, the most glaring example being the liquidation of the All-Southern Scottsboro Defense Committee, which had been set up at the Chattanooga Conference.

Other Glaring Errors in Campaign.

Glaring errors in the campaign were the failure to organize the masses on the basis of the movement from the bottom and form rank and file organizations in the form of block committees and groups of the League of Struggle for Negro Rights and groups around the Liberator; the failure to organize opposition of the rank and file in the Negro mass organizations under reformist influence, the insufficient building of branches of the International Labor Defense.

The Scottsboro campaign was inadequately linked up with the struggles for the immediate demands of the Negro and white workers, poor farmers and share-croppers, especially on the economic field. The revolutionary trade unions and unemployed councils did not take sufficient part in the campaign.

There was also a failure to link up the Scottsboro struggle with the basic revolutionary demands of the Negro masses, especially in the South, and especially the demand for the right of self-determination. The mass indignation aroused by our campaign was insufficiently utilized to stimulate struggles of the share-croppers and poor farmers, and to crystallize organization in the agrarian districts.

Underestimation of Role of Negro Reformism.

The ideological basis of these mistakes and shortcomings in the Scottsboro campaign arose from an underestimation of the class role of Negro reformism, the failure to distinguish clearly between the national reformist tendency as based upon the Negro bourgeoisie, and its alliance with imperialist finance capital on the one hand, and on the other hand the national-revolutionary tendency of the Negro masses against the oppression of the white ruling classes. This led to a tendency to lag at the tail of the Negro reformists and their petty-bourgeois agents among the masses, and consequently to blur over our basic revolutionary demands, to avoid the linking up of the campaign to save the Scottsboro boys with the general and specific economic and political demands of the masses. In practice, this resulted in maneuvers of the united front from the top, with the Negro reformists. This underestimation of the necessity of struggling against Reformism is clearly linked up with the still existing lack of faith in the Negro masses upon the part of certain sections of the Party.

Subsequent developments in the Scottsboro campaign have exposed with startling clarity the reactionary role of Negro reformism, as represented by the N. A. A. C. P., etc., as the chief bulwark of the slave-driving ruling class against the Negro masses. Consequently, the struggle for the freedom of the Scottsboro boys, against lynching and for Negro rights, has as one of its preconditions an intensified and sustained fight against Negro reformism.

An Infamous Socialist Hypocrisy

Editorial from "Mundo Obrero," Central Organ, Communist Party of Spain, Dec. 29, 1931, Translated by Harrison George.

THE province of Badajoz. A general strike. The Governor saying that it violates the law of the "Defense of the Republic."

And Margarita Nelkin, socialist deputy for the province in parliament, writing in "The Socialist," subsidized by the Yankee telephone company, laments hypocritically:

"... a province where the landlords leave their land unplowed despite decrees punishing such action; where they are able, without any risk to themselves, to kill fruit trees in order to put an end to the principal industry of the region; where, meanwhile starving unemployed who steal a handful of fruits are shot down by machine guns, herds of pigs are turned into the orchards to eat olives; where the workers are denied work and are told to 'ask the republic for something to eat.'" etc., etc.

All this is true.

All this and much more occurs in all Spain, and not only in the province of Badajoz.

But, are there not three socialist ministers in the government since the beginning of the republic?

But, are there not in the parliament more than one hundred socialist deputies?

But, does not the government arrive at decisions unanimously?

But, does not the Civil Guard that 'shoots down starving unemployed' get the support of a government in which are three socialist ministers?

But, are not those landowners protected by the government in which there are three so-