

The Party and the Negro Struggle

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An American Problem

THE solution of the Negro Problem lies, as in the case of most of the social suffering, in the abolition of Capitalism. But to be satisfied with this conclusion, and present the same as a cure-all to the masses will not do. The masses do not understand our theories, and the bourgeois grip upon them can not be loosened merely by the statement of such truths. It is evident that though we clearly understand our ultimate aim, the realization of it by the masses depends upon our skill to correlate our objectives with their ideology and their immediate wants and sufferings. The test of a true Communist does not lie in the correct repetition of Communist truths, an act which at times is a mere parrot performance, but in the understanding of their proper application.

In the case of the Negro we are faced with a distinctly American problem which demands a careful application of Communist strategy. The importation of the Negro to the American hemisphere arose from a desire for cheap labor power. This type of labor developed vast sections of the continent. The Negro's exploitation proceeded under conditions of chattel slavery. Thus the Southern bourgeoisie continued to grow wealthy and powerful until the two systems, Chattel Slavery in the South and Wage Slavery in the North, came to an open clash. They could not peacefully exist side by side.

As Feudalism limited the development and free expansion of Capitalism so the system of the slave barons in the South set serious limitations upon the Northern bourgeoisie. The slave system of the South with its monopoly of labor power was too effective a barrier for industrial capitalist economic penetration of the South. Two distinct systems of exploitation were developing within the same governmental structure. After many vain attempts to manoeuvre and compromise at each other's expense, the struggle broke out. For the South it was a war for independence, for the North a war for liberation. Ostensibly it was a war to abolish slavery in America but beneath the idealistic motives that were held up to the masses, was that ruthless hypocrisy of which only the bourgeoisie is capable. The hypocrisy of the Northern bourgeoisie was strikingly demonstrated when, at the conclusion of peace between the warring factions, the Negro was delivered to the tender mercies of the former slave-owning class.

A Hollow Mockery

The moral effect upon the Negroes was, of course, detrimental to the bourgeois in general. The Negro

wanted freedom and through association with his rulers had learned many lessons. He determined to make his formal liberation real. This frame of mind is not conducive to easy exploitation. It had to be curbed. The Negro's spirit had to be broken. But the Southern bourgeoisie had a "gentlemen's agreement" with the North whereby they were prevented from openly and formally re-enslaving the Negro. Such conduct would have roused the "plain people" of the North and forced another crisis. It was then perpetrated under cover. This was carried out masterfully. The Northern troops garrisoning the South did not interfere. They quietly aided in the disarming of those in the South who were interested in the preservation of the new rights and the maintenance of the so-called state of emancipation. Through this mutual understanding between the Northern and Southern bourgeoisie the Negroes and their sympathizers were disarmed. Deprived of the means of self-defence, they entrusted themselves to the care of the Federal Government. Then followed one of the most despicable steps taken by any ruling class in order to crush the opposition of the exploited. The Southern bourgeoisie, hand in hand with the illiterate and misled "poor whites," organized a gigantic, secret murder society, tortured, lynched and murdered in the dark of night. The victims were never accounted for. They ran into tens of thousands. Amongst the victims were negroes and their white sympathizers. By these methods the Negro was reduced to peonage. To this day lynching-bees and sundry means of terrorism are quite the order of the day in the South. The so-called liberation of the Negro is revealed as a farce of the worst sort—a hollow mockery.

The bourgeois press of the North has hardly uttered a word of protest against this reign of terror. It is our urgent task to throw light upon this oppressive conduct of American capitalism.

The Negroes' Answer

As a result of the bestial treatment accorded them, the mass of Negroes has developed a profound hatred, not so much of the class that caused their sufferings, as of the race to which his oppressors belong. Wasn't he despised because he was a Negro? And spat upon because of his color? Didn't the white workers themselves, under the influence of bourgeois propaganda, bar him from the labor unions because of his dark skin? Surely he could not expect help from anyone but his own kind. Thus we see the Negro throughout the country orga-

nized along purely racial lines. Due to this condition, to the tactics of Gompers & Co., American organized Labor to-day has no hold upon the twelve million Negroes.

Despite numerous difficulties, millions of Negroes have migrated North in the last two decades. Yet, even in the North, with its comparative freedom, they remain in their race organizations and retain their racial ideology. Because of the comparative civil equality and educational facilities of the North, the organizations have gained great impetus. But they are, in the main, controlled by petty bourgeois, opportunist elements. There are three principal Negro organizations representing three distinct developments of the Negro mind. These are

1. The Universal Negro Improvement Association—the Garvey Movement—headed by Marcus Garvey;
2. The Association for the Advancement of Colored People, headed by Dr. Du Bois;
3. The African Blood Brotherhood, headed by Cyril Briggs.

These bodies total an actual membership of not more than 300,000. However, by reason of their publicity organs, and other forms of propaganda they exercise an influence over millions of Negroes in the United States and many thousands in the West Indies and Africa. There are a great number of nondescript organizations, both in the United States and in her colonies. These may bring the number of Negroes actually organized to over a million and a half. Fraternal societies have a great hold upon the Negro. His churches also wield a great influence over him; they are more like social and recreation centers and have a wider scope of activities than the white church. Then there are over four hundred Negro periodicals with an acknowledged and rapidly growing influence. Most of these, like his churches, are rather free from direct Capitalist control.

Who's Who Amongst the Negroes

The Negro's mental development has been neglected even to a greater extent than that of the average white worker. Due to his peculiar history, the treatment received at the hands of the white exploiters, and the opportunism of most of his present leaders he has been made the victim of an intensive racialism and anti-all-white feeling. The Negro petty bourgeois elements, together with other schemers, have taken advantage of his state of mind to achieve their own selfish ends; while the radical element, until recently, has been up against a stone wall of closed mentality because of organized Labor's official attitude toward the Negro.

The psychology of the Negro and the effect of petty bourgeois leadership are well illustrated by the character and performances of some of the above-mentioned orga-

nizations. The Garvey Movement which, more than any other, has caught the imagination of the Negro, expresses itself in terms of liberating Africa and this, otherwise ideal, objective, it attempts to achieve by electing Mr. Garvey as the "Provisional President of Africa," at \$50,000 per year. This gentleman, dubbing himself "the Moses of the Negro Race" has instituted a "government," with royal titles, Potentates, High Chancellors, etc. He speaks about diplomatic representation, commissioners, courts of reception, knighting knights, decorations and Bureaus of Passports and Identifications. Of course, all the high chieftains get big salaries. Apparently this method of liberating the Negroes suits the powers-that-be and the kings of finance hold Mr. Garvey in great esteem for the work he has done in keeping the Negro's mind off the real problems before him and busying him with such tomfoolery as knighthoods and court receptions. Moreover, Mr. Garvey was kind enough to pledge the Negro's loyalty to the United States and approve all future wars of the United States. To assure the good will of the other capitalist governments he extended them a similar pledge despite his talk of freeing Africa from their control. All of his bombastic displays are being financed, not by his toy government which does not have sovereignty over a single square mile of territory, but by constant collections ostensibly for commercial enterprises, the creation of which will, according to Garvey, solve the unemployment problem for the Negro. Needless to say, the major portion of these funds goes to pay the salaries and "traveling expenses" of the adventurers and jokers who are misusing an ideal cause in behalf their own selfish ends.

Dr. DuBois' organization has as its main objective full civil rights for the Negro and racial equality. His organization has considerable hold upon the petty bourgeois element. It is, in fact, completely dominated by that element in conjunction with a group of white "Liberals" who are represented on the Board of Directors. DuBois' methods are petitions and protests. Pacifist and without backbone!

The African Blood Brotherhood, headed by Briggs, is more militant than any of the others. Its slogan is "Immediate protection and ultimate liberation for Negroes everywhere." It preaches co-operation with white radical forces. It is an organization of defense against lynching and terrorism.

The Present Situation

The bourgeoisie is in control of most of the organizations that mold the mind of the Negro. It has succeeded in driving the Negro thoroughly into the racial camp by playing upon race antagonism and the bitter treatment of the Negro at the hands of the whites. By thus obscuring the real cause and source of his oppression

and exploitation the average Negro is prevented from understanding the identity of his interests with the rest of the working class.

The Negro has drawn close to his church which, unlike, the White, is still a "mass-church" where the great majority of the Negroes seek help and advice. Its role is to an extent comparable to that of the Jewish synagogue. In encouraging discussion and lectures it goes further than any section of the white church. The Negro Church ostensibly sponsors the Negro race interests, gets together with him on his problems and guides him in his daily troubles. The Negro church is more free from the control of big capital than is the white church. It understands how to keep in touch with and influence the masses. Being a "mass-church" of a mass dissatisfied with things as they are, it can, through proper tactics, very well be used by us to conduct an ideological struggle that will undermine its influence.

Bearing in mind all these factors it is easy to account for the racialism of the Negro and the almost complete lack of class consciousness or even such class organizations as labor unions. Indeed, the white bourgeoisie, aided by the reactionary labor leaders, has played its cards well and has succeeded in greatly estranging the negro from the white worker.

The Negro to-day considerably augments the strike-breaking armies of the capitalists. He is available for that purpose in great numbers and on short notice, North or South. His strike-breaking is, in a no small measure, a matter of revenge against the white workers who bar him from their labor unions and interfere with

his opportunities for more gainful occupations and better wages.

A Great Danger

The bourgeoisie is taking full advantage of the negro's readiness to be used as a strike-breaker. Through a few sops from the government, ably aided by his present leadership, the Negro can be made the staunchest and most valuable supporter of reaction in this country. His leaders have already told him that his friends are the capitalists. They cite the example of capitalist-supported schools like Tuskegee in the South and North as proof of that friendship. The Negro, then, is in danger of becoming the backbone of a vicious White Guard system. We need but reflect, for a moment, on the fact that the backbone of the reactionary French Government to-day is represented by the colored colonial troops garrisoning not only the occupied portions of Germany but many places in France itself. The situation confronting us in the United States is replete with no less awful possibilities.

We must arouse the class-consciousness of the Negro and bring him into our ranks. The Negroes of America have hardly been touched by our propaganda. Of all the races and nationalities of this country they are the farthest removed from class concepts and class organization. But they are dissatisfied and potentially rebellious. How can we give a class character to their dissatisfaction and protest? How can we draw the Negro masses into the struggle against the oppressors of all workers? What shall the Party do to win the Negroes for Communism? These are pertinent questions. The writer will attempt to answer them in an article to follow.