

For Members Only

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## THE AMERICAN NEGRO AND THE WAR

The war intensifies all problems facing the fifth national party convention. In most phases of party work, the war has necessitated a concrete analysis of changes in the objective situation, but as yet the party has not put under the programmatic x-ray the relation of the Negro masses to the imperialist war. Of the 63 sections of the N.C. resolution, only the following brief paragraph is devoted to the Negro question: "Labor with a white skin cannot be free so long as labor with a black skin is branded. The great contribution of the Negro workers to the growth of unionism -- in Ford's and other auto plants, in the packing-house plants, in the coal mines, in steel, etc. -- is but the beginning of what can be done if the workers of all races firmly unite. All workers must speak up; against all forms of jim-crowism! Equal rights for Negroes in the armed forces and war industries!"

While all this is correct, a few generalizations are totally inadequate as political analysis or as a directive for the party. A resolution dealing with the role of the Negro masses in the imperialist war must start from the following premises: that the Negroes do not accept the war; that the war has not only precipitated the dissatisfaction of the Negro people with their present plight, but provided them with an opportunity for struggle; and finally, -- that the Negro people have taken the path of independent action. We wish to initiate a discussion on the relation of the party to the Negro struggle with these ideas as our point of departure.

Being at the bottom of the economic and social scale, the Negro masses have no illusions that this is a "War for Democracy." The creation of a war economy struck a severe blow at an already subnormal standard of living. Many who found their only revenue in the relief and works program of the Administration in recent years saw this source of income dried up by the Administration's program of "economy." Seeking new means of sustaining themselves, they have been denied the opportunity of sharing in the prosperity which the opening phases of the war-boom offered the working-class. Their economic misery has been still further aggravated by the continued denial of all the democratic rights which the white workers have won for themselves through decades of bitter struggle.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the South where the majority of Negroes are held in bondage by an arrogant ruling class. The poll-tax, crude racial discrimination, lynchings, and the doctrine of white supremacy are burning reminders to the Negro that he is still the pariah of American society. Even when fighting for "Democracy" in the armed forces, he is denied any share of it. The Negro cannot believe in this "War for Democracy" since he stands outside the framework of this same "Bourgeois Democracy."

The above factors, however, are negative, serving to increase the "normal" dissatisfaction of the Negro masses. What objective conditions convince the Negro people they can conduct a successful struggle? One reason for their self-confidence is the ever-growing shortage of man-power. The capitalists must use Negro workers on an increasing scale. Their importance in the war economy is something

of which the Negroes are very much aware and which they intend to utilize.

Secondly, their role in industry is no longer that of imported scabs but of trade union militants and even trade union leaders. Many have learnt the lessons of the class struggle on the picket line. They are applying their knowledge in the battle for equality. The trade unions lend strength to the struggle of the Negro people by taking up the demands of the Negroes for equal opportunity in industry. One manifestation of this concern with Negro problems is the organization by the CIO of a national committee to combat discrimination in industry. The CIO is forced to consider the question of organizing the South to protect union standards. The necessary inclusion of Negroes on an equal basis in these unions will help sharpen their awareness of the connection between their struggle and the struggles of the working class.

A real source of inspiration to the Negroes is the fight of the colonial peoples. They see the British Empire, greatest slaveholder of the epoch, crumbling. The successes of the Chinese, the opening phases of the Indian Revolution, serve as a source of confidence for the Negro masses. Their sensitivity\* to the struggle of the colonial masses against the imperialist yoke flows from the fact that their role in American society is partially analogous to that of a colonial people. They are comparable to a colonial people in this respect -- that not having as yet achieved the normal democratic rights won by the white workers they are pushed to the forefront in the struggle against the regime that denies them these rights.

#### The March-on-Washington Movement

The continued existence and growth of the March-on-Washington movement is irrefutable proof that the Negro masses have taken the path of independent action. The March-on-Washington movement had its inception in the early part of 1941 with A. Phillip Randolph as its leader. The aim of the M on W movement was to have local groups from all over the country converge on Washington on July 1st and demand an executive order ending discrimination. The response was enthusiastic. Roosevelt alarmed at the scope of the movement came to an agreement with Randolph. In exchange for an Executive Order devoid of real content, Randolph arbitrarily called the March off. The Negro masses voted with their feet. They left the organization. Yet a year later when Randolph called upon the Negro masses to resume the struggle and staged a series of mass meetings, the response was complete. Mass meetings of 25,000 in New York and meetings of comparable size in other parts of the country were held. In one state close to the Mason and Dixon line, thousands of Negroes massed for a march on the State capital.

Today, Randolph continues to temporize and the March has not as yet materialized. But the masses continue to push their recalcitrant leaders to more and more militant statements and on a local scale to militant action. There can be no doubt that the Negro masses are eager to struggle and are willing to follow a militant leadership.

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\* See footnote at end of document for proof of Negroes' sensitivity to international events.

## Roosevelt and the Negro People

The militancy of the Negro masses makes the role of the present leadership more difficult since they act primarily as salesmen for Roosevelt's "liberal" promises. It is doubtful today whether Roosevelt can even pay lip service to the struggle of the Negro people. Certainly he can make no real concessions. Were Roosevelt to even attempt the abolition of Jim-crow in the armed forces, he would lose the support of the Southern ruling class whose economic privileges rest largely on the segregation of the Negro. Under the attack of the Southern Oligarchy, Roosevelt is constrained to scuttle the Committee on Fair Employment Practices. Alarmed at the militancy of the Negro people, and at the incursion of the CIO into the South, the Southern reactionaries are preparing a bloody revenge upon the Negro people of the South. The present wave of violence, the truculence of two Southern Governors towards the Federal Government, the proposed organization of a "League to Maintain White Supremacy", are the defiant answer of the Southern capitalists and landlords to Roosevelt's so-called "Liberal policies." Roosevelt remains silent. The Negro people must defend themselves. All indications point to an intensification, not a weakening, of the struggle.

## The Present Leadership

Only a militant leadership can withstand the blows of the imminent reaction. The present leadership, as symbolized by Randolph, has not distinguished itself by any militancy in action. Instead, the present leadership strives to restrict the energies of the Negro people within the channels of "peaceful protest." They are petty-bourgeois in outlook and suffer from all the vices of their white brethren -- vacillation, indecisiveness, and a dislike of concrete action. They employ the classic methods of the reformists, in dissipating the energy of the masses by ineffectual actions (i.e. The present petition campaign of Randolph substitutes for organized militant mass action.) They seem to suffer from a premature political senility. Either they must move leftward or be replaced by a new leadership if the March-on-Washington movement is to go forward.

## Parties of the Working Class and the Negro People

The Negro masses have experienced complete disillusionment with the only radical party they knew, the C.P. The opportunistic zig-zags of the Stalinist party over a period of years culminating in their present servility to Roosevelt cuts them off today from any chance of leadership. Their betrayals compelled the Negro vanguard to create its own organization with Negro leadership.

The creation by the Negro people of their own organization under Negro leadership, poor as that leadership may be, represents a step forward in the political development of the Negro people. The movement finds one of its mainstays in the Negro trade unions. The seeds of a program of "racism", should it be advocated, would fall on barren soil. The inclusion of class-conscious militants prevents any such backslidings toward chauvinism. The speeches of Frank Crosswithe, a polished demagogue, clearly reflect the pressure of these working-class elements. Crosswithe refers constantly to the struggle of the Negro people as part of the class struggle;

to the need for unity of white and Negro workers. In such an atmosphere, a program of class struggle will receive sympathetic hearing.

### Perspectives for the Party

The Negro masses have remained immune to the virus of patriotism. Striving to attain the same level of social and political development as the white workers, they are compelled to make the first principal breach in National Unity. It is their historic backwardness which compells them to leap to the forefront of the class struggle. Their struggle cannot fail to have a salutary effect upon a working class which is being deprived of its democratic rights. The working class must become more and more restive under the restrictions of a war dictatorship. We cannot exclude the possibility that the Negro masses will be the spearhead in the initial stages of the struggle against the offensive on the part of the ruling class to regiment and impoverish the working class.

### Organizational Tasks of the Party

This general perspective when translated into organizational steps cannot and does not mean that we are for rushing in and trying to win leadership overnight. A bid for leadership cannot be made until the party has fashioned a Negro cadre capable of playing a role in the Negro movement. The fact that we still do not have this cadre is our main problem today. The preparation of a cadre is also preparation for entry into the only field where there is a basis for mass work in a period of general retreat. The following practical steps must be taken if we are to attract to our ranks the most militant elements of the Negro vanguard.

1. The National Negro Committee must be revitalized and broadened. In order to coordinate the work on a national scale, at least one comrade active in Negro work in each of the large Negro centers, Harlem, Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, etc., will be in constant communication with the committee and whenever possible will sit in as an active member.
2. The Committee will conduct research on Negro problems, publish theoretical and agitational articles and pamphlets on the Negro question.
3. The recent policy of the Militant in giving prominence to Negro features and articles is wholeheartedly endorsed by the convention. We believe this policy should be continued.
4. Whenever possible, clubs on the pattern of the Harlem Workers Club should be organized in large Negro centers. This applies particularly to Detroit, a proletarian center, whose 150,000 Negroes not only represent a larger percentage of the population than do the Negroes of New York City, but have a greater weight in the revolutionary scale because of their trade union background.

(The Harlem Workers Club is a group organized a few months ago by the Harlem Branch, N.Y. local, as an intermediary step to the party. It conducts educational lectures, forums, debates and provides a social center for its members. It supports and distributes

the Militant. It actively supports all progressive Negro movements-- the March-on-Washington, Odell Waller Committee, etc.

In its brief existence it has already proven itself successful. A party member of excellent quality has been recruited from its ranks; several more may be recruited soon. It has a contact list of about 200 Negroes who have expressed interest or attended meetings.

To conclude: It might be argued by a few formalists who think in terms of statistics that a ten percent minority cannot have such weight as we attribute to it. The answer was given in something the Old Man said in 1939, which is even more applicable today:

"If the worker's aristocracy is the basis of opportunism, one of the sources of adaptation to capitalist society, then the most oppressed, most discriminated class, of which the Negroes are the most oppressed and discriminated, are the most dynamic milieu of the working class. We must say to the conscious elements of the Negroes that they are convoked by historic development to become a vanguard of the working class. What serves as the brake on the higher strata? It is the privileges, the comforts that hinder them from becoming revolutionists. It does not exist for the Negroes. What can transform a certain strata -- make it more capable of courage and sacrifice? It is concentrated in the Negroes. If it happens that we in the S.W.P. are not able to find the road to this strata, then we are not worthy at all. The permanent revolution and all the rest would be only a lie."\*\*

The analysis, perspectives, and program are herein presented for discussion and approval by the delegates to the National convention.

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\*\* Note -- discussion in internal bulletin, No. 9, June, 1939.

-- On Negroes' Internationalism - and sensitivity to colonial questions. In 1938-39 the Communist Party lost 79% (1,579) of its N.Y. state Negro membership largely as a result of the C.P. attitude on the Ethiopian question. The Soviet Union sold oil to Italy. The C.P. did not agitate for defense of Ethiopia.

S. Russel  
B. Lenz  
A. Stein

ON REVOLUTIONARY DEFEATISM

By M. Morrison

We shall, I am afraid, never be rid of the problem of revolutionary defeatism until socialism is firmly established all over the world. For there will always be comrades who will read Lenin for the first or the tenth time and confront us with quotations which apparently prove the sectarian's position on revolutionary defeatism, namely, that a revolutionary party must take a position in favor of a defeat of its own imperialist government at the hands of an enemy imperialist government.

The question of the meaning of revolutionary defeatism has not been a serious one in our ranks. A party that is not affected by a strong ultra leftist tendency, a party that is concentrating its efforts on work in mass organizations, has nothing to fear if any one does raise the question. The experience of the Trotskyist group in England shows, however, how avidly the ultra-left sectarians seize upon this question and what havoc it can create in a party if the problem is not correctly analyzed and understood.

It is necessary in the first instance to state the basic position of a revolutionary Marxist party on imperialist war and then see if the formulation of Lenin on revolutionary defeatism adds anything to that position.

A revolutionary party, in the first place, must reach a conclusion as to the character of the war; if it is a reactionary war then it refuses any kind of support for that war. An imperialist war is of course a reactionary war and a Marxist cannot give any support to such a war. Furthermore, a revolutionary party, during such a war, carries on the struggle for socialism just as it did up to the time when war broke out. Naturally the party utilizes the war and the sufferings it brings to the people to emphasize the need for socialism. In that way the party takes advantage of the war to further the interests of socialism. In a general way, however, it is correct to state that the position of the party with reference to an imperialist war is that it does not support it and carries on the struggle for socialism.

This was the basic Leninist position on the First World War. He refused to support any government in that war because they were all waging a reactionary imperialist war. It did not matter to him whether the governments were monarchies or republics, autocratic or democratic. So long as they were waging a reactionary war no support should be forthcoming on the part of a revolutionary socialist.

In the present war any one who refuses to support an imperialist government and advocates the continuance of the struggle for socialism is adopting the essence of Lenin's position towards an imperialist war. A formally correct attitude on the war is not sufficient, of course, in and by itself, to make one a Leninist. There are other essential factors of Leninism but we are not concerned with them in this article.

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What, if anything, do Lenin's formulations on revolutionary defeatism add to his essential position on imperialist war as indicated above?

Let us first present three of these formulations:

1. "A revolutionary class in a reactionary war cannot help wishing the defeat of its own government, it cannot fail to see the connection between the government's military reverses and the increased opportunity for overthrowing it!"
2. "Under given conditions, it is impossible to determine from the standpoint of the international proletariat which is the lesser evil for Socialism: the defeat of one or the defeat of the other group of belligerent nations. For us Russian Social-Democrats, however, there cannot exist the least doubt that from the standpoint of the working class and the labouring masses of all the peoples of Russia, the lesser evil would be the defeat of the tsarist monarchy, the most reactionary and barbarous government oppressing the greatest number of nations and the greatest mass of the populations of Europe and Asia." (The Imperialist War, p.81)
3. "For us Russians, from the point of view of the interests of the labouring masses and the working class of Russia, there cannot be the slightest doubt, absolutely no doubt whatever, that the lesser evil would be, here and now, the defeat of tsarism in the present war. For tsarism is a hundred times worse than Kaiserism."  
(The Imperialist War, p. 74)

As is well-known, Lenin did not propose to bring about the defeat of any imperialist government by supporting another imperialist government. Not even in the case of Russia which he wanted defeated because tsarism was more reactionary than Kaiserism. In fact Lenin specifically warned against sabotaging the war or committing an individual act of terror against any officer, in order to bring about the defeat of the tsarist army.

By his sharp formulations on defeatism he did not propose an iota more than is implied in the basic position of revolutionary socialism on war: not to support an imperialist war and to continue the class struggle. If he had not said anything about defeatism it would not have changed his essential position; having said the things that he did about defeatism, he has not in any way added to or modified the basic position of revolutionary Marxism on imperialist war.

Whatever actions Lenin proposed for the revolutionary socialists during the war were a result of his basic position to continue the class struggle and not to bring about the defeat of their own government.

Lenin's desire to see the defeat of his own imperialist government was altogether platonic insofar as that desire did not lead him to propose any action other than that which flowed from the basic position of non-support to the war and carrying on the class struggle.















While recognizing that the masses are for the war and for the Roosevelt administration, and that their participation in struggle is of a defensive character and of a sporadic nature, our conceptions of the present period and the period immediately ahead must necessarily be of continued movement upward, or continued slow rise. It must be understood, however, that the early stage of the participation of the United States in the shooting war means that a major military defeat could and probably would arrest and hurl the workers back into the passivity and back into the arms of the "Union Sacre" which prevailed in the months immediately after Pearl Harbor. As dialecticians we know that the long range perspective of defeat can only serve to discredit the ruling class; but precisely because we are dialecticians we understand that a major military defeat entailing huge casualty lists during what is still the early stages of American participation would arrest and delay the awakening of the workers. On the other hand we have the most favorable perspectives that the unfolding of the struggle of the masses of India for their freedom, and the developing tempo of the revolutionary class consciousness of the workers of England will have the most favorable kind of repercussions within the minds of the American working class. A unified conception of these two alternatives must be the basis of our participation in the present struggles. The struggle in India cannot help but tend to reveal the entire world bourgeoisie in all their naked rapacious greed. The example of the English workers, to whom the American masses are bound by tradition, heritage, a common tongue, and close sanguinary bonds will place revolutionary independent class action in an entirely new light in the minds of the American masses.

Our party, while recognizing the dangers inherent in the unauthorized strike, must not take beforehand a position of absolute non-participation and abstentionism, but must seriously consider participation on the basis of the specific situation. Our position is not based on moral considerations but rather by the grim necessities of the present period. All the conditions which must be observed in time of peace when considering the unauthorized strike or any strike -- degree of solidarity among the workers involved, the nature of the issues involved, etc., etc., etc., -- must bear triple weight and consideration in time of war. Inasmuch as the unauthorized strike is practically the only possible strike in large scale industry at the present time, sufficient care must be given to the organization of the strike, and to the selection of the best time. On the one hand careful guard must be maintained against any tendencies of opportunistic adaptation to the "no strike policy" of the reactionary trade union officialdom; and on the other hand we must guard with equal vigilance against any ultra-left tendencies towards strikes by small minorities whether within a given plant, or even in an industry should the objective conditions point to its decapitation by the forces of reaction due to the unfavorable relationship of forces.

The crux of the entire trade union question for our party on the basis of the Political Resolution during the war is the conduct and the role of the proletarian revolutionists in the trade unions and the present struggles of the workers, limited and circumscribed as these struggles are at present. Any tendency within the party toward abstentionism which seeks to hide its opportunistic character under the idea that because the workers as an entire class are not