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STRONG IN THE STRUGGLE

RESEARCH: NEGRO LIBERATION  
BY JAMES S. ALLEN  
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# NEGRO LIBERATION

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## PREFACE

THE PRESENT PAMPHLET is based upon an earlier brochure under the same title first published in 1932. Since then, important changes in the United States and in the world situation have rendered sections of the old pamphlet inadequate or out of date. In addition, the movement of the Negro people towards unity in the fight for equal rights and the new progressive movement in the country have advanced considerably since 1932.

These developments have brought to the fore a number of new problems and have placed others in a new light. Under these circumstances, I thought it best to revise and elaborate a considerable portion of the earlier pamphlet, keeping particularly in mind various problems raised in the course of numerous discussions during the past few years. The reader will undoubtedly find a number of important problems either treated very briefly or entirely omitted. This is unavoidable in a short pamphlet in which the principal emphasis is placed upon the main forces shaping the movement for Negro liberation.)

JAMES S. ALLEN

June, 1938.

## NEGRO LIBERATION

In the light of a full moon a group of Negro croppers were gathered at the rear of a cabin in Sumter County, South Carolina. They had come from the surrounding plantations to hold a stealthy meeting of what was then only the beginnings of a Croppers Union. A Negro organizer stood in the center of the group. He had sketched a map of the United States in the earth with a twig and marked off those sections of the South in which the Negroes were in the majority.

The croppers were greatly amazed. For the first time they realized that not only in Sumter County, S. C., do the Negroes make up more than half of the population but that there is a continuous stretch of land extending like a crescent moon from southern Maryland to Arkansas in which Negroes outnumber the whites.

Throughout this entire section the Negro farmers and workers face the same poverty and persecutions which the Negro croppers of Sumter County were now preparing to fight. And as the Negro worker and a white worker from a nearby city talked further, the Negro croppers in that dim circle were beginning to gain a full realization of what the struggle for liberation means. It is precisely this understanding that is now gaining ground among the masses of Negro people. Throughout the country, a new awakening is taking place. The people move with greater determination and greater unity towards the solution of their problems.

The chief problem of the Negro people, to state it briefly, is to attain free and equal participation in the life of America. This objective is an integral part of the whole movement of the American people to preserve and extend their democratic rights, to defend democracy and peace against fascism and war. The de-



mands of the Negro people are of an essentially democratic character. The struggle for their fulfillment enriches and develops democracy. Their democratic struggles and aspirations are therefore interwoven with the fight of the whole labor and progressive movement against monopoly capital and reaction.

Reaction and fascism threaten to deprive the Negro even of those democratic rights, as limited as they are, which he has been able to win since the Civil War. To defend the gains already made, to broaden and extend their rights even further, requires the unity of the Negro people. The intimate cooperation of the Negro people with the labor and democratic movement as a whole for the advance of their common struggle for popular democracy is no less essential. If such a unity is to be permanently achieved, the democratic movement needs to pay active attention to the special needs and demands of the Negro people. Particularly does the labor movement face the task of extending that unity between white and Negro workers which is basic to the establishment of a democratic and People's Front against reaction.

To attain these immediate objectives, it is necessary to understand the underlying forces which today determine the course of the struggle for Negro liberation and its relation to the working class and democratic movement.

## THE NEGROES AS AN OPPRESSED NATION

### *What is a Nation?*

It is in the concept of nationality that we are to find the real key to the understanding of the Negro question.

What is a nation? To what degree do the Negro people fulfil the conditions for being a nation?

We can take as our starting point the concise but comprehensive definition of a nation given by Stalin, who together with Lenin developed the theory and practice which made possible the liberation of scores of nations formerly oppressed under tsarism. Stalin says:

A nation is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture.

To elaborate this very concise definition: A nation is an historically developed community of people; this community of people is not temporary, but has existed over a long period and has become stable; the people have a common language, live together on a common territory and have a common economic life. The conditions of life in common during a long period of historical development create more or less uniform ideas, customs and institutions which are manifested in a common culture.

Nations do not begin to arise until the period of the growth and development of capitalism. For capitalism, in the process of destroying feudal conditions of society which obstruct the development of the home market and industry, diminishes or removes entirely sectional barriers and establishes those economic interconnections over a common territory which make possible a national entity. Thus, all those peoples considered nations today only appeared in history as such with the beginning of capitalism. It was the great French Revolution, which destroyed the feudal power of the landed nobility and ushered in the rule of the manufacturers and merchants, that marked the emergence of France as a nation.

If a group of people has only some of the characteristics noted above it is not a nation. Thus, it would be incorrect to consider the Jews in the United States a national entity, although many of them have in common certain cultural and religious traits inherited through the ages, as well as the semblance of a common language. Nor can the numerous immigrant groups in the United States be characterized as national entities within this country, although each has a common language and common customs brought over from their native country. These groups constitute national minorities who are gradually being amalgamated with the American population, just as other groups before them have gone into the melting pot from which has emerged the American nation.

Thus, a community of people can be properly characterized as



a nation only when it fulfils *all* the conditions enumerated in Stalin's definition.

Certain confusions must be guarded against: A state must not be confused with a nation. Certain nations, because capitalism has developed more rapidly for them, are stronger and have been able to subdue weaker peoples and forcibly annex them to their own state. Within the British Empire, for instance, there is the Irish nation. Nor is it necessary for a people to have a language different from that of any other people in order to be a nation. The Irish, the Americans, the inhabitants of England, the Canadians all speak English, yet they are separate nations.

A nation does not drop out of a clear sky ready-made; it has its beginning, develops through various stages, and also may decline. (See Joseph Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," in *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*, pp. 3-61.)

#### Slavery

By the time slavery was abolished the Negroes already had many of the characteristics of nationality.

The Negro slaves came from various parts of Africa, from different tribes in varying stages of economic and social development, speaking different languages and having varied traditions and customs. In order to prevent insurrections, members of the same tribes and families were separated and dispersed over the plantations on their arrival in this country. Their native tongue was prohibited. A foreign language was forced upon them. *English, the language of the slaveholders and a strange tongue to all the slaves, became their common language.* From their birth the slave children knew no other language.

Slavery spread with the development of commercial cotton production and the expansion of the plantation system. Most of the slaves were put to work on the land. Although many of them came from tribes in Africa which had not yet learned to till the soil, the American slaves were forced to learn a new occupation. *The Negroes were transformed into an agricultural people.*

Their common suffering under the slave system, the abuse and

persecution heaped upon them, their common labor on the plantations, created in the Negroes common feelings, thoughts and ideas. *The common aspiration and striving for freedom were powerful factors in welding the Negro people together spiritually.*

All these conditions would not have exerted so powerful an influence in creating a *Negro people*, were it not for the fact that *the Negroes were concentrated in one continuous stretch of territory, the cotton country of the South, where there was a uniform social system based on slavery.* This uniform environment in which the enslaved Negro peasantry developed gave uniformity to the characteristics of the Negro people. Living in close proximity to each other, the Negro slaves developed a common folk-lore and tradition reflecting the condition in which they all found themselves.

Thus the Negroes had many *elements* of nationality by the time of the Civil War.

#### Civil War and Reconstruction

The Civil War and the period of Reconstruction laid the basis for the further development of the Negro people into a nation. The Civil War was a social revolution in which the southern slaveholders were finally ousted from the national government, their economic and political power crushed and destroyed by the rapidly developing capitalism of the North. As a result of the Civil War the northern capitalists won undisputed sway over the country, unified the land, and cleared the way for the further development of the United States as a capitalist nation.

The rising industrialists were interested primarily in accomplishing their own aims which, in general terms, can be stated as clearing the path for the further development of capitalism. But in order to accomplish this they had to fulfil the principal revolutionary task of the period, the abolition of slavery. Lincoln found himself at the head of a coalition, which included the industrialists, the overwhelming section of the free farmers, various sectors of the middle classes and the Negroes. This coalition, expressed politically in the new-born Republican Party, also had



the support of organized labor during the period of the Civil War. The Civil War became transformed into a people's revolution having as its main aim the abolition of slavery. After the first year and a half of vacillation and defeats for the North, revolutionary methods were adopted. Of these, the most important were the declaration of emancipation and the arming of the Negroes, which released a new and vital democratic force. The military defeat of the slavemasters marked the completion of the first phase of the revolution and the fulfillment of its principal task, the abolition of slavery.

During the second phase of the revolution, known in American history as Reconstruction (1865-1877), the principal tasks which faced the country were to prevent a restoration of the power of the ex-slavemasters, to guarantee full democratic rights to the freedmen and to institute democratic forms of government in the Southern states. Under the leadership of the Radical Republicans, whose outstanding men were Thaddeus Stevens, Charles Sumner, Frederick Douglass and Wendell Philipps, revolutionary steps in this direction were taken. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments granted the full rights of citizenship to Negroes; new democratic state governments were established for the first time in the South; leaders of the Confederacy were disfranchised, while the former slaves and the white freeholders, together with their Northern allies, exercised governmental authority.

Reconstruction proved to be the most revolutionary period in the history of the Negro people. Organized in their political clubs (Union Leagues), rifle companies and state militia, they fought for and defended their newly-won civil rights. Together with the representatives of the Northern bourgeoisie (carpetbaggers) and of sections of the Southern white middle classes (scalawags) they formed the people's assemblies of the Southern states during this period. In South Carolina, Mississippi and Louisiana Negroes constituted at various times a majority of the State legislators and in other State governments they played leading roles. During this period a system of public education was established, county and municipal government were democratically reconstituted,

Black Codes were abolished and equal rights legislation was passed, the mode of taxation was revised in favor of the small owners, and some measures of agrarian reform were adopted.

The initial failure of Reconstruction, which contributed so heavily to the eventual victory of reaction, was the retention of the landed estates of the slave system. The expropriation of the lands of the former slavemasters for the benefit of the freedmen would have removed at one stroke the chief material basis for the political restoration of the old ruling class and would have created, in the form of a new and large sector of freeholders, the basis for further democratic development in the South. Throughout the whole period, the Negro people raised the demand for "forty acres and a mule," and refused to accept share-cropping and labor contract arrangements in the belief that the land would be given them. In a number of instances, the freedmen took possession of the plantations, dividing the land among themselves, until ousted by force. Although Stevens, Sumner and others sponsored measures for the confiscation of the landed estates and their division among the freedmen, the Northern bourgeoisie rejected this revolutionary solution of the land question. By the end of the Civil War the new Northern ruling class was occupied with the expropriation of public lands for the benefit of the railroads and mining companies and was ready to support only those demands of the Negroes which contributed to the political defeat of the southern Bourbons.

The non-slaveholding white population, whose rights had been restricted under slavery, was able to gain new democratic privileges during the revolution. In the Black Belt areas, where the Negroes were in the vanguard of the revolution, their white allies were indebted for their newly-won rights to the Negro masses. It was the Negro people, released from years of servitude, who by their eager striving for freedom and the enjoyment of the benefits of democracy made these rights available for the white masses as well.



### *The Restoration of "Home Rule"*

The election of Hayes as President in 1876 came as the result of a "treaty of peace" between the Republican Party leaders and the former Confederate statesmen. This understanding marked the desertion of the Negroes by the northern capitalists.

The Republican Party, which by now was completely dominated by the industrial and financial oligarchy, was faced with revolt among the farmers and with a new upsurge in the labor movement. In order to leave themselves free to face the opposition of the new period, the big capitalists, as represented by the Republicans, sought and obtained peace with the Southern Bourbons. Furthermore, the restoration of the old ruling class to political power in the South would help to assure stability on the cotton plantations and create better conditions for capitalist expansion. Accordingly, in the deal which gave Hayes the presidency in the closely contested elections, the Reconstruction governments in those states where they still held out were removed and new reactionary administrations recognized. This amounted to leaving the Negroes to the tender mercies of their former masters. Thus, the class interests of the northern capitalists led to the severance of the alliance with the Negro people and a new alliance with their former enemies against the people. The counter-revolution, which was more delicately termed the "restoration of home rule," took a bloody toll in the murder of hundreds of Negro and white Reconstructionists.

By 1877, when the northern troops were removed, life was already running in new channels in the South. The northern bourgeoisie had assured its political domination. The South became a tremendous hinterland for Northern capitalism, a source of raw material, chiefly cotton, and an exclusive market for the North's manufactured goods. At the same time the basis was laid for the development of industry in the South.

The Negro had been forced back on the plantations as a farm worker under a labor contract, or as a share-cropper.

The reactionary victory was not accomplished without sharp

resistance by the Negro. With the help of the Ku Klux Klan, the chief counter-revolutionary army of the southern ruling class, the Negroes were forcibly disarmed; the right to vote, to hold office, to jury service, to universal and equal public education were gradually denied them. The establishment of reaction in the South was paralleled by the rise of reaction on a national scale, as exemplified in the brutal suppression of the railroad strike of 1877.

### *The Unfulfilled Tasks of the Revolution*

The era of Civil War and Reconstruction was in every sense the prologue to the struggle for Negro liberation in the present period. A glorious attempt was then made to thoroughly democratize the South and if it failed it was because the class forces which alone can carry through this task were not then matured. But the course of revolutionary development was clearly indicated and it was shown that there already existed the popular forces, in the form of the Negro people and their white allies, which could see it through if properly organized.

It is important to understand in what respect the revolution of that period failed to complete its historic tasks. Considering the period as a whole, the main task of the bourgeois revolution was to destroy chattel slavery. *This aspect of the revolution was completed*, in this first phase, the Civil War.

But in the process of completing this task, new issues immediately arose and new democratic forces were released. It was the democratic aspects of the revolution during its second phase, the period of Reconstruction, which were left incomplete. These tasks, which include the redistribution of the land and the establishment of democracy in the South as it affects the Negroes particularly, still remain to be completed in the present period.

The very failure to fulfill these tasks during Reconstruction also created new problems which have to be taken into consideration today. The retention of the old landed estates led to the establishment of share-cropping and share-tenancy, in forms which today are unique to the Southern plantation system. The form of share-cropping, as it developed in the South, is a remnant of



the old slave system. Share-cropping represents a transition form of labor between chattel slavery on the one hand and free wage-labor or capitalist farm tenancy, on the other. Put in another way, the fact that share-cropping and related forms of tenancy became dominant in the plantation area indicates that the former slave was not permitted to become either a wage-worker, a tenant as in the capitalistically developed farm areas in the rest of the country, or a small owner on any important scale. The failure to redistribute the land, therefore, led to the rooting in the southern agrarian system of economic survivals of the chattel slave system. These important economic survivals of slavery, more firmly imbedded as the years went on, held together the plantation system and practically enserfed the Negro peasant. While it is true that in time share-cropping began to develop rapidly also among the white farm population there is a very important distinction between the status of the white and Negro share-cropper. The plantations are worked almost exclusively by Negro share-croppers; while the white share-croppers are to be found principally in the non-plantation areas and on smaller holdings. If share-cropping increased so rapidly among the white farmers, it was due primarily to the fact that this form of labor had been firmly established on the plantations, from which it radiated out into other sectors of Southern agriculture.

The plantation economy has warped the life of the South as a whole. It has pegged Southern conditions of life at a low level; restricted the development of industry and free farming; conditioned the whole course of uneven economic development of the South which has had the effect of impoverishing the masses of people and retarding their normal development.

These material hangovers of the slave system also served to prolong and intensify the social and ideological hangovers of chattel slavery. The plantation system and the whole superstructure built upon it have resulted from the failure of the revolution to complete its essential democratic tasks. The need to eradicate the survivals of chattel slavery in all their forms is one of the most important

aspects of the working class and democratic movement. This involves primarily the liberation of the Negro people.

### *The Black Belt*

From the very beginnings of the slave system most of the Negro population of the country was to be found in the Southern plantation area, where they constituted the majority of the population. As the plantations spread into the deep South and westward the area of Negro majority traveled with them. At emancipation the Negroes outnumbered the whites overwhelmingly in the cotton areas.

The establishment of the tenant system on the plantations during Reconstruction had the effect of binding the Negro to the land and preventing his free entry into industry and other pursuits. Free migration on any large scale to other sections of the country was prevented until the World War. The migratory movement beginning in 1916, during which over one million Negroes came North, came to an abrupt end in 1923, although some migration continued into succeeding years. Today, the continuous area of Negro majority in the South remains practically the same as during the slave system. The Negro majority has been somewhat reduced, although the absolute number of Negroes living in the Black Belt has not decreased over the past two decades.

The present *Black Belt of the South* is the old cotton country. It sweeps through parts of twelve southern states, from the southern border of Maryland into the Mississippi delta. Today there are 5,000,000 Negroes on this territory proper, constituting the majority of its population. In the immediate environs there are another 2,500,000 Negroes, forming between 25% and 35% of the population. The proportion in which the Negroes outnumber the whites in the Black Belt varies: in large portions of southern Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi they outnumber the whites overwhelmingly; in other sections the Negroes have a very small majority; in still others the whites outnumber the Negroes. If the twelve state and the 350 county boundaries in the Black Belt proper are ignored—they



are, after all, purely mechanical divisions set up for the convenience of state and county administration or for political purposes—and the total Negro and white populations for the territory as a whole are added up, it will be found that the Negroes outnumber the whites. The greater majority of Negroes in one place sets off the majority of whites in another.

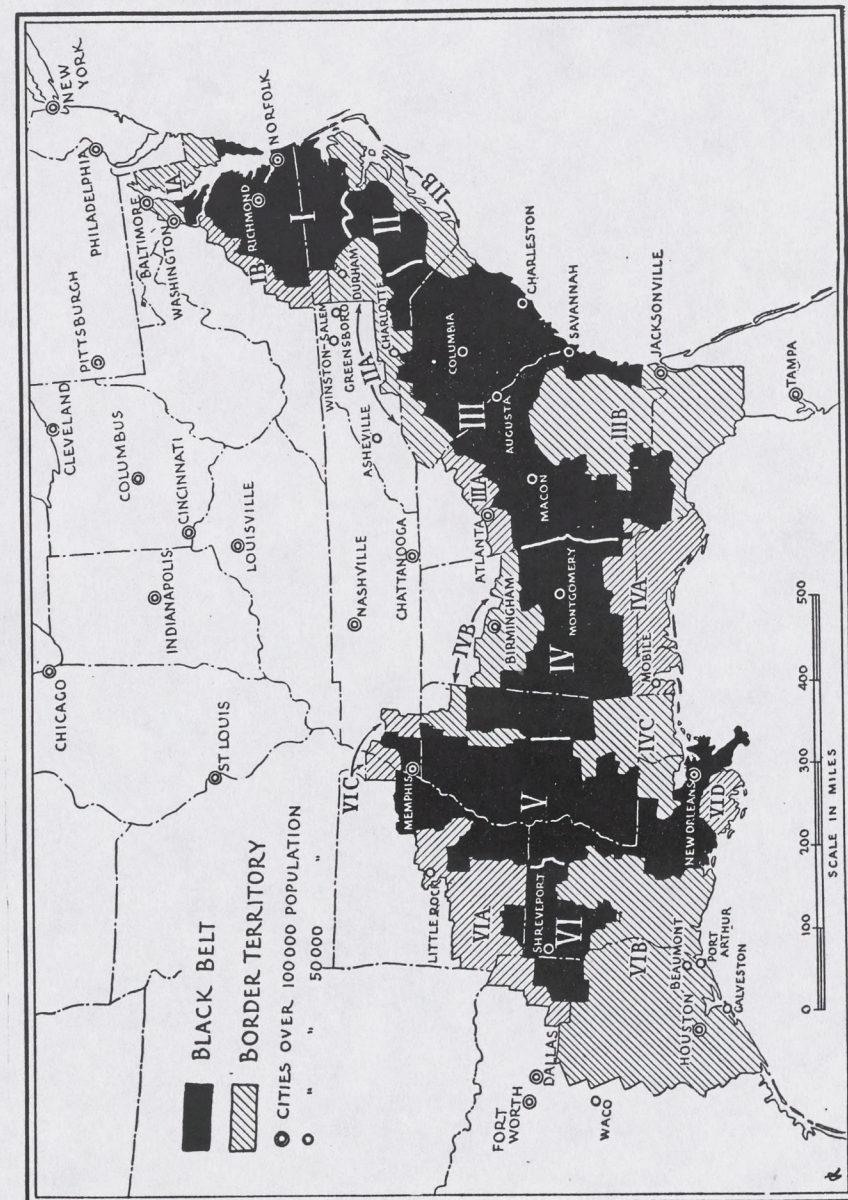
If we draw a tentative border for this country, ignoring the mechanical divisions of the existing states, we will obtain a clear picture of the territory common to the Negroes. If there is anyone alarmed by the sweeping away of old established boundary lines and their replacement by new ones, let him remember that in this very territory in the period after Reconstruction, the southern states reshifted the county borders in an effort to minimize the majority of Negroes in any one county and thus decrease their political effectiveness.

Today, over 60% of the Negro population of the United States lives in the Black Belt and its immediate environs. This large sector of the Negro people is subjected most directly to the hangovers of the slave system. Another 15% of the people live in the non-Black Belt portions of the South, which suffers from the radiating influences of the plantation economy. Only 25% of the people live in the North, in an area totally free from the direct restrictions of the semi-feudal agrarian South.

It is important to understand that the Black Belt, as an area of Negro majority, is at the same time the plantation area of the South. In terms of historical development, this means that the survivals of the slave system, principally in the form of the tenant-plantation system, have had the effect of maintaining the Black Belt as an area of Negro majority. In this respect, it is also important to know that the present area of Negro majority is practically the same in form and extent as the plantation area under slavery.\*

The failure of the revolution of 1860-1877 to solve the democratic tasks of the period has therefore led to the persistence of

\* See maps in James S. Allen, *The Negro Question in the United States*, pp. 25 and 39.



BLACK BELT AND BORDER TERRITORY

More than half of the population in the Black Belt is Negro; in the Border Territory as a whole the Negroes constitute 29% of the population. (For detailed explanation of map see J. S. Allen, *The Negro Question in the United States*, Chapter I.)



the survivals of the slave system in such a form as to lay the economic and social basis for the Negro question as it exists today.

*"White Superiority" in a New Garb*

The ideological hangovers of slavery, buttressed by the economic and social changes which we have discussed, played an important role in the oppression of the Negro under the new conditions. The doctrines of "white superiority" had been used as "moral" justification for the slave system and its practises. The non-slaveholding whites were consoled by the slavemasters with the thought that they were, at least, members of a "superior race" and that their unhappy condition was due not to the slave system but to the slaves.

This ideology was the principal stock-in-trade of the Bourbons during Reconstruction. They raised the bugaboo of "Black Domination" and called upon the white masses to preserve the "purity" of their race. "White superiority" became the political program of reaction, and it was principally on this ideological basis that the Bourbons were able to split the white masses away from their Negro allies.

With the reactionary restoration in the South following the elections of 1876, the Bourbon ruling class adopted extreme measures of oppression to "keep the Negro in his place" and prevent a new alliance of the white and Negro masses. The old doctrines of slavery were further embellished to justify the new conditions of exploitation. The racial characteristics of the Negroes served as convenient marks with which to set them off from the rest of the population. A drop of "Negro blood" became enough to brand a person as a member of the specially oppressed group. The characteristics of race, on the one hand, aided the oppressors in welding the chains of slavery, on the other, resulted in further coalescing the Negro people under their common "stigma" of color.

The ruling class was forced to the greatest extremes of oppression by the fact that the white masses, living in such close contact with the Negroes, had matters to settle with the ruling class on their own score. During the Civil War and early Recon-

struction sections of the white masses had demonstrated that they would fight shoulder to shoulder with the Negroes against the slavemasters; again during the latter part of the nineteenth century the white farmers had shown a marked tendency to ally themselves with the Negroes in a struggle against the capitalists and landowners when the oppression of the bankers, credit-merchants and large landowners became unbearable. When the Populist movement (the Southern Farmers Alliance and the People's Party) passed into the hands of the exalters of "race purity" that promising movement was doomed to defeat. The capitalist-landlord combination in the Southern Democratic Party disrupted the People's Party largely on this issue. The slogans and tactics of the reaction during Reconstruction were again utilized to break Negro and white unity.

This division could only be brought about with sledge-hammer tactics. Segregation and Jim-Crow were enforced by lynch law and legal law; in every phase of life the Negroes were separated from the whites. Socially and politically, as well as economically, the Negro people were forced to the lowest position. By 1900-04 this situation was given a more complete legal status in the new constitutions of the southern states, which disfranchised the Negroes by setting limitations on the right to vote such as the grandfather clause (later declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court), requirements of property, literacy, etc. These restrictions were enforced almost entirely at first against the Negroes alone.

At the state legislatures where the new constitutions were passed it was frankly admitted that *their purpose was to disfranchise the Negroes, but at the same time to guarantee the franchise to the poor whites*. Thus by giving the white toilers those rights denied the Negro people, the reaction hoped to win them to the policy of oppression of the Negroes.

If the history of segregation and the social degradation of the Negro is largely Southern history, this is due to the fact that these practices were established there. It could not be otherwise than that these practices and attitudes should percolate into the North. It is also true that while the suppressive acts of the South-



ern ruling class were aimed principally at the Negro it was inevitable that they should in time also affect adversely the conditions of the white masses.\* It is equally true, as we have seen from our brief survey of Southern history, that with each new social crisis, the white masses have tended to break away from the dominant ideology, and the representatives of reaction have on such occasions attempted to reestablish "white superiority" as a political program.

#### *The Growth of New Classes*

The development of the Negro as a people since Reconstruction was retarded largely by the plantation economy and the oppressive measures which arose from the new situation. These restrictions had the effect of delaying clearer class stratification among the Negro people and hampered the evolution of a basic proletariat and of a middle class.

However, the destruction of chattel slavery which acted as a chief barrier to free development, created the conditions, altho restricted, for the evolution of the people upon the basis of capitalism. Out of a nucleus of Negroes who had been free during slavery there had already developed in the northern cities, and to a lesser extent in the South, a small group of Negro workmen. From this same nucleus began to evolve a small Negro professional and petty business group. The further development of these classes among the Negro people was made possible by the accelerated growth of capitalism in the United States following the Civil War.

The peculiar conditions of capitalist development in the South, which have already been noted, provided the restricted basis for

\*To take but one example: the disfranchisement of white citizens in those states where discriminatory electoral practices were primarily intended for Negroes. In South Carolina only 13% of the population over 21 years of age voted in the 1936 general elections, in Mississippi 16%, in Arkansas 17%, in Alabama 19%, in Georgia 19%, in Virginia 24%, in Texas 25%, and in Tennessee 31%. The average for the United States was 62%. In West Virginia, where no special bars have been erected, 88% participated in the elections.

the gradual evolution of a Negro working class. The plantation economy, as we have seen, hindered the spread of industry in the South. Industry was located in the non-Black Belt regions and from the beginning drew its labor supply principally from the white toiling population. Textiles, for example, which came to be the principal large-scale industry in the South employs white workers almost exclusively. Out of 350,000 Southern textile workers, only 20,000 are Negro and these are employed only as maintenance men, haulers, etc. The dominant principle of industrial development in the South was to leave untouched the Negro labor supply of the Black Belt. As late as 1934, the Greenville (S.C.) *Piedmont* could write editorially:

One thing is certain, that while labor and capital may differ, and have their differences in a marked manner, the textile industry will continue to be operated by and for the white race.

In the mining and steel industries at Birmingham and in the scattered smaller industries such as tobacco, furniture and metal, increasing numbers of Negro workers were employed. Most of the Negro workers, however, were employed in the industries more closely associated with agriculture, such as saw and planing mills, naval stores, cotton ginning and transportation, which adopted many of the conditions typical of plantation methods. Of 2,500,000 child and adult Negro wage-workers in the 12 Southern states where the Black Belt is located, 20% are agricultural laborers and 36% are engaged in domestic and personal service. Thus, more than half of the Negro wage-workers in the South are to be found in occupations of the lowest economic category. Of the remaining Negro workers, 590,000 are in manufacturing and mechanical industries and 240,000 are in transportation and communication.

The migration of 1916-1923, although a temporary process, produced changes of an important and permanent character. During the course of a few years, over one million Negroes shifted from a semi-feudal region into the very heart of highly developed capitalist industry. The principal significance of this movement



was the creation of a relatively large Negro industrial proletariat in the North. Negro migrants appeared in practically every branch of decisive industry. Over 75% of the Negro population of the North is situated in the principal industrial areas. This had the effect of locating the most basic section of the Negro proletariat in close working contact with the most strategic sections of the industrial proletariat as a whole.

Whether in the North or the South, however, the Negro worker did not enter industry on the same plane as the white. He was forced to work and live at the lowest economic level, under conditions of social ostracism. Advancement into the skilled and better-paid jobs was almost impossible.

The same forces which have prevented the Negro people as a whole from enjoying equality of conditions and of rights have also retarded the growth of the Negro middle class. Because of the restrictions of the plantation and tenancy systems in the South a sizeable middle class, in the form of farmowners, could not develop in the South, much less exist on any stable basis in the face of recurring agrarian crises.

Negro business, limited to the impoverished Negro community by Jim-Crow practices, could establish itself mainly as small-scale and unstable enterprise. Business aspirations were necessarily kindled by the abolition of slavery and advances were made in this field. While in 1867 only 400 Negroes were engaged in about 40 lines of business, on the eve of the World War Negroes were engaged in 200 lines of business in which they had invested \$50,000,000. However, Negro enterprise could not make progress against the trusts and monopolies which already began to dominate the country at the turn of the century. Even in the field where Negro business attained some expansion, as in insurance, real estate and banking, some of the largest institutions were unable to survive the economic crisis of 1929-1934. At no time did a Negro industrial bourgeoisie develop. Generally speaking, a thin layer of bigger Negro businessmen could arise only in a parasitic capacity within the segregated Negro community. This relatively small group existed by taking advantage of segregation

to build some fortunes in real estate, or by feeding upon the limited earnings of the Negro masses through rent, insurance and interest. The Northern migration created a more advantageous base for the development of the Negro middle class, for it provided a Negro market with greater purchasing power than existed in the South.

The restrictions of the segregated community also hampered the free development of the professions among the Negro people. Inadequate educational facilities, discrimination in hospitals and institutions of learning, and the ostracism generally practiced against Negroes, have proven almost insurmountable obstacles to the Negro teacher, doctor, dentist, lawyer, writer and other professional workers.

From this brief statement of the evolution of the Negro people, we can now return to the question posed at the beginning of this section.

We set out to show that in the process of historical development, under the specific conditions characteristic of American history, the Negro has been evolving as a nation. During the period of slavery, the Negroes who had been transported from different social environments and from societies of varied stages of development, were submitted to totally new but uniform conditions on the Southern slave plantations. The fact that the slave system was concentrated in the plantation area, facilitated the development of the Negro as a people because it made possible a common historical experience. Slavery contributed a common language, a common territory, a common historical background and the beginnings of a common ideology, characterized chiefly by aspirations for freedom. In the period of capitalist development, unhindered by chattel slavery, the conditions arose which made it possible for the Negro people to develop more fully along the lines of nationhood. The Negroes were drawn more directly within the processes of capitalism, thus evolving the class relationships characteristic of all modern nations. There were at hand the economic and class interconnections already established by the advanced development



of capitalism in the country as a whole, and these relationships arose among the Negroes also, although on a restricted and hampered scale. With the growth of the working and middle classes a more stable and lasting identity of culture was developed, expressed in literature, art, music, the Negro church, the press—a culture strongly influenced by, although containing many currents of revolt against, American bourgeois culture. The thorough segregation of the Negro prevented amalgamation with the white population, and forced the Negro to develop as a distinct entity. The hangovers of the chattel slave system, which resulted from the failure of the bourgeois-democratic revolution to run its full course, retarded free development of the Negro people, and reduced them to the status of an oppressed nation.

In the present phase of their development, the Negro people are still in the process of becoming a nation. Their struggle for liberation from all the forces which have prevented fuller and freer development and which have denied them equal rights, is a struggle for nationhood. It is this national aspect of the Negro question, which endows the Negro people with tremendous power for progress and for revolutionary change.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONS

To what extent does the position of the Negroes as a nation resemble the position of other oppressed nations? Only by realizing the peculiarities of the national question as applied to the Negro people can we determine correctly what course to pursue in the struggle for liberation.

Lenin distinguished three epochs in relation to the development of nations. The first epoch, 1789-1871, from the great French Revolution to the Franco-Prussian War (marking the establishment of a united Germany), was the epoch of the rise of the bourgeoisie, when feudal society and its institutions were destroyed. In this period the only revolutionary class able to gain victory over the old class, the landed nobility, was the bourgeoisie. During this period it was a revolutionary class, for it

carried through a social revolution against the old, the outworn system of society, and laid the basis for the new capitalist system. It was during this period that the powerful capitalist nations of today established themselves. It was during this period that the second American revolution was carried through to victory by the northern bourgeoisie and its allies. The Negro slaves could only obtain their freedom from chattel slavery by an alliance with the then revolutionary class, the northern bourgeoisie, against the slaveholders. There was no other revolutionary class, for the working class was still small and weak.

The second epoch, 1871-1914, to the outbreak of the World War, is the period in which the bourgeoisie had reached its full growth and had already begun to decline. It is in this period that the bourgeoisie as a class lost its progressive character, that wealth and domination were concentrated into the hands of a few large magnates, that one national bourgeoisie struggled with another for the distribution of the world and for world domination. Capitalism entered the stage of imperialism, fattened on the subjugation and exploitation of the colonial peoples. At the same time there developed within each capitalist nation the class destined to supplant the bourgeoisie as the ruling class. The working class grew, became stronger and gathered its power.

#### *The Period in Which We Live*

The period since the World War is the epoch of the decline of imperialism, the final stage of capitalism. It is a revolutionary epoch in which the bourgeoisie is placed in the same position as the landed nobility during the first period. In our era the working class is the most progressive class, the only class able to carry through a successful socialist reconstitution of the old, outworn capitalist system, which spells starvation and mass misery for wider and wider masses of the population. It is the only class able to create the new, the socialist society, in which there will be no classes, in which the producers are also the owners, in which it will be impossible for one class to oppress another. Conditions are created for the unhampered, universal and unprecedented de-



velopment of all peoples to a point never yet achieved by humanity.

This is, in brief, the history of the development of nations, the final goal of which is the wiping out of all classes within nations and all antagonisms between nations, the amalgamation of the peoples of the whole world.

In the period in which we live the nations and colonial peoples oppressed by monopoly capitalism, can achieve independence only through alliance with the world working class and democratic movements.

This final epoch in the life of capitalism and the new era in the life of humanity is far beyond its initial stages. In the Soviet Union, where capitalism has been destroyed, the peoples are constructing a socialist society. The general crisis which has shaken the whole capitalist world to its very roots has given rise to fascism, which represents the supreme effort of the most reactionary and oppressive sections of the bourgeoisie to crush all democratic rights and organizations of the people in order to prevent historically progressive changes. The working classes are establishing unity and gathering around themselves all democratic sectors of the population to defeat reaction and fascism. The colonial and semi-colonial peoples are fighting to preserve themselves from the renewed onslaughts of the fascist and militarist powers.

In the world today there are nations in various stages of development. In the advanced capitalist countries, which long ago have completed their bourgeois-democratic revolutions, there is raging both internally and among them a struggle between the forces of fascism and of democracy. The smaller and weaker capitalist countries face the danger of being engulfed and having their national independence destroyed by the fascist alliance of Germany, Italy and Japan. These same powers, engaged in a crusade against democracy and peace, also constitute the chief threat to the existing liberties and the degree of autonomy and development already achieved by the colonial and semi-colonial peoples, as shown particularly by Italy's conquest of Ethiopia and Japan's war against China, and by the intervention of the fascist

powers in the internal affairs of a number of African, South American and Asiatic countries. Under these circumstances, the smaller nations and the colonial peoples can find the best path towards national salvation through collaboration in a system of collective security with the forces of world democracy.

### *The Negroes in Relation to Other Nations*

The position of the Negroes as an oppressed nation in the United States basically resembles the position of the oppressed colonial peoples, with certain differences arising from the peculiar historical conditions of their development.

Within this short pamphlet we can only indicate these differences:

(1.) Unlike other oppressed peoples today, the American Negroes were the chattel slaves of the oppressing nation. This historical factor strengthens the persistency of the "white superiority" idea and heightens the atmosphere of social ostracism.

(2.) The Black Belt is situated within the territory of the United States as a whole and the masses of the oppressing nation live in close proximity to the oppressed Negroes. The ruling classes, therefore, adopted specially severe methods to separate the white toiling masses from the Negroes in order to prevent a fighting alliance. This, together with the first factor, explains the special sharpness of all methods of oppression—Jim-Crow, segregation, lynching, etc.

(3.) Industrialization has affected the Black Belt (directly and indirectly) more than it has affected most colonial countries, creating a proportionately large Negro proletariat, which together with the white proletariat, is in a favorable position to influence and lead the Negro people as a whole.

(4.) The monopoly capitalists, through the credit system and their trusts, have complete control of agriculture and industry in the Black Belt and retard the development of a Negro bourgeoisie, much more completely and more easily than in colonial countries.

(5.) As a result, the Negro bourgeoisie has no major industries of its own and but few large landowners. Its upper section can



exist only in a parasitic capacity within the Negro community.

(6.) The mass migrations of Negroes from the South during and after the World War have resulted in the formation of a large Negro minority in the North, which is treated as an oppressed national minority. A powerful section of the Negro working class is located in the North. This results, on the one hand, in widening the base of the Negro middle class; on the other hand, because of close association with the more developed northern working class and the growth of class solidarity, it results in strengthening the decisive revolutionary class in the struggle for Negro liberation.

These specific features of the Negro question necessarily affect the course of the movement for Negro liberation. While it is true that the practice and ideology of segregation, established over a long period of time, provide great obstacles in the path of unity, it is also true that the interweaving of the needs and demands of the Negro and white masses offers a strong base for amalgamation of the Negro liberation and progressive movements of the day. For example: the labor movement cannot successfully continue its rapid growth without at the same time extending its fight for equal rights for Negroes; the struggle against the Southern reactionaries within the Democratic Party involves, among other things, the fight for a federal anti-lynching bill; the task of winning full democratic rights for Negroes is essentially part and parcel of the fight against reaction.

There exists, then, the closest connection between the struggles and demands of the Negro people and the struggles and demands of the labor and progressive movements. This vital connection serves to overcome separatism. It creates a favorable basis for the closest unity between the Negro people and the working class and its allies.

#### THE PROGRAM OF NEGRO LIBERATION

It is on the basis of the specific conditions established by historical development that the problem of Negro liberation must be posed and answered. We are now ready to turn to the considera-

tion of a long range program for the liberation of the Negro people, based upon the actualities of present conditions and tendencies.

#### *The Movement for Equal Rights*

It is a misconception still too common in the labor movement that the solution of the Negro question differs in no essential respects from the solution of the labor problem as such, and that if the demands of the white workers are met, those of the Negro workers will also be satisfied at the same time. There could be nothing further than the truth. In every phase of life, whether it be in the shop or in the social or political sphere, the Negro does not have the same privileges as the white. The Negro in all cases starts with less than the white and, therefore, to achieve equality, he rightly demands more than the white in a corresponding situation. To adopt the view that the Negro problem is simply a labor problem (a view typical of the Socialist Party and various sectarian and renegade grouplets) is to evade the essential thing, namely, that the Negroes are an extra-exploited and especially oppressed people. When applied in practise this view unavoidably leads to deserting the fight of the Negroes for equal rights and to capitulating to white chauvinism. For such a placing of the question ignores those extra demands, *over and above those of white workers*, which arise from the super-exploited conditions of the Negro masses.

These extra demands are summed up by the demand for equal rights in all phases of life. In industry this demand takes the form of equal wages, equal conditions of work, etc.; in social life, the wiping out of all Jim-Crow and segregation, and the right to be treated on a plane of equality with the whites; in political life, the right to vote, to hold office, etc.

Many of these rights, of course, are not enjoyed by the white workers either, or are enjoyed in a very restricted way. White workers must often struggle for the right to hold meetings, to organize and strike, against the restrictions placed on voting, for the right to run their own candidates in elections, etc. To demand



equal rights for Negroes means to demand also those rights which the white workers do not have and for which they are also fighting.

In the face of the aggression of the fascist powers and the internal threat of fascism, the struggle to defend and extend democracy assumes paramount importance. In those countries where fascism rules, all democratic rights are denied the masses and the government becomes a dictatorship of the most reactionary section of the bourgeoisie. The course followed by Big Business in the United States, in its struggle against all progressive tendencies, if not successfully blocked by the people, will lead from the abrogation of one democratic right after another to the establishment of fascism. The suffering of the Jews in Germany, of the Ethiopians under Italian fascist rule, and of the Chinese under the military-fascist aggression of Japan, indicates the extreme danger to the Negro in the development of fascism. Under these circumstances, the fight to preserve and extend democratic rights, particularly with regard to the Negro, becomes more than ever the concern of all labor and of all progressives.

In the struggle to obtain and preserve democratic rights, the working class strengthens its own position within capitalism, solidifies its ranks and develops the offensive against the bourgeoisie. "Just as victorious Socialism is impossible without the achievement of complete democracy, so the proletariat will be unable to prepare for victory over the bourgeoisie unless it wages a many-sided, consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy," said Lenin.

While the demand for equal rights meets all the *special* demands of the Negroes in the North, it but partially fulfils the urgent need of the Negroes in the South. For it is in the South that the majority of Negroes live and in the Black Belt where they form the majority of the population. It is here that the masses of Negroes are farm workers and croppers, living under conditions of semi-serfdom, virtually reenslaved on the soil which they have tilled for a century.

The oppression of the Negroes in the North, in the final analysis, finds its roots in the position of the Negroes in the Black

Belt. For it was from this super-exploited and oppressed area that the capitalists recruited their "cheapest" workers for northern industry and obtained and continue to obtain from the labor of the Negroes on the cotton plantations some of the surplus profit used in strengthening the power of capital generally. The social and political discrimination of the Negroes in the South serves as a pattern for similar discrimination in the North. As long as the Negroes in the South remain oppressed and exploited within the semi-feudal tenant system of agriculture and the industries closely related to it, the Negroes in the North will remain an oppressed national minority, suffering all the economic, social and political discrimination of such a group.

In the South, and therefore in the North too, the Negroes can only be assured true equality by winning the demand of the right of self-determination, the most important of all democratic political rights.

### *The Right of Self-Determination*

In general, the demand for the right of oppressed nations to self-determination means the right to free political separation from the oppressing nation. It does not necessarily mean that separation need be carried out. But it does mean that an oppressed people has the right to decide for itself whether it wishes to live as an independent political unit, or be federated with other nations within one state. It means that no people be politically oppressed by another or kept within a state by coercion.

We demand the freedom of self-determination—says Lenin—not because we dream of an economically atomised world, not because we cherish the ideal of small states, but on the contrary because we are for large states and for a coming closer, even a fusion of nations, but on a truly democratic, truly international basis, which is *unthinkable* without the freedom of separation. . . . [The working class] strives to bring the nations closely together, to fuse them, but it intends to bring that about not by the use of force, but only by a free, brotherly union of the workers and the toiling masses of all nations.

Before a people can have equal rights with other peoples of the world, it must have the right itself to determine its relations



with other nations. We can in no sense speak of the Negro people having achieved full equal rights until it has won the right of self-determination.

Communism strives to bring the peoples of the world closer together, to unite them into larger and larger states. The Communist Party of the U. S. A. strives to unite the Negro toilers and the white masses of the country, but this objective cannot be reached until the Negroes have the freedom—which they do not have now—to enter of their own free will and without coercion into such a union. They must first have the *right* to choose before we can say that they have chosen freely.

The right of self-determination as applied to the Negro people in the United States means: that the Negro people in the Black Belt, where they have formed the majority of the population for many generations, have the right to set up a new political entity corresponding to the area in which they constitute the majority of the population; that in this new political entity the Negro people enjoy governmental authority, with full equal rights enjoyed also by the significant white minority in this area; and that the Negro people have the right to determine for themselves whether their new political state should be federated to the United States, upon a free and voluntary basis, or have complete political independence.

The right of self-determination does not necessarily imply separation. It includes the right to choose between separation from or federation with the United States. The basis upon which either separation or federation may take place would vary with the time and circumstances. What course Communists and progressives among both the Negro and white peoples would favor, necessarily depends upon both national and international circumstances, at the time when such a choice has to be made.

The problem of Philippine independence offers a good illustration of this point. Ever since their revolution against Spain and their heroic war against American occupation, the Filipino people have been fighting for independence from American domination. In the course of this struggle for independence, they have been

able to win many political rights and a greater degree of political autonomy. Since the beginning of Japan's war of aggression against China, it has been recognized that Japan constitutes the greatest danger to the existing liberties and the present degree of autonomy of the Filipinos. The question of independence, therefore, has become an integral part of the problem of preserving Philippine autonomy and of stopping the forces of fascist aggression. For these reasons, the Filipino people are seriously considering the alternative of entering into a democratic political relationship with the United States, upon a free and voluntary basis. If the will of the people, expressed through a plebiscite, favors a free form of union with the United States as against complete independence, the Filipino people may be said to enjoy the right of self-determination, no less than if they had chosen complete independence. The important thing is that they have the right to choose freely.

#### *Some Misconceptions*

In attacking the right of self-determination as the aim of the movement for Negro liberation, critics often distort the real meaning of this slogan. The most common distortion is that self-determination would mean the encouragement of a separatist movement and the setting up of a Jim-Crow state, consisting only of Negroes and under their exclusive domination. These opponents attempt to place the Communist program in the same category with the bourgeois nationalist schemes advanced at various times, such as the Back-to-Africa movement and, more recently, the "49th Staters." These programs take segregation as their starting point and seek to evade it by Utopian schemes of migration to a land of "milk and honey."

Part of the difficulty lies in failure to understand the real meaning of segregation. The very essence of segregation as practiced against the Negro is force. He is segregated against his will by a dominating nation, and should he as an individual seek to overstep the limits set down by Jim-Crow practice particularly



in the South he is met with violent repression. Segregation bears the stigma of "inferiority," of degradation and of insult.

The program which is summarized in the slogan of the right of self-determination seeks to remove precisely this kind of oppressive and forced separation between the white and Negro people and places chief emphasis upon the need to struggle against all forms of Jim-Crow. Self-determination seeks to establish the basis of a free choice, which is the necessary condition for harmonious relations between peoples.

Nor do Communists envision the setting up of a government in the Black Belt consisting only of Negroes. There are large numbers of white people in this territory and real democracy cannot be established here without the alliance between the Negro people and the white masses, particularly the workers, sharecroppers and small farmers, against the plantation owners and the finance capitalists. It would be inconceivable, for example, to develop a democratic and progressive movement in the South which would not at the same time have as one of its main objectives the winning of the franchise for the Negro. And if democracy develops particularly in the Black Belt area of the South, it would bring along with it land reform and other partial steps in the direction of a bourgeois-democratic transformation of the half-slave plantation area, in which the white masses would inevitably also be involved. In the Black Belt, by the very nature of its population and economic structure, it would be the Negro who would emerge as the predominant political force.

Finally, it must be clearly realized that the right of self-determination for the Negro people can come only as the culmination of an historical process. This process includes the struggle for agrarian changes and for land, the numerous aspects of the fight for democratic rights for the Negro in the South, the growth of the labor movement throughout the South to a higher level of organization, solidarity and political consciousness. As these various struggles develop further and merge into a main stream, the very peculiarities of Southern conditions will make possible the emergence of a political entity comprising the territory approxi-

mately at present in the Black Belt. Only when this stage has been reached, even under capitalism, can self-determination become a practical question of the moment. For only then can the question of choosing between federation with or separation from the existing Federal Government of the United States be placed as a practical matter needing immediate solution.

### *Is Self-Determination Necessary?*

A type of criticism, which has been carried to extreme lengths of accusation by Trotskyites and Lovestoneites, and which is also expressed by the Socialist leader Norman Thomas, is that Communists have "mechanically" applied the European national formula to the Negro and that in no case, particularly under socialism, is self-determination necessary. Those sincere and honest people who accept this position, evidently do not fully realize the magnitude of the Negro question in this country.

The right of self-determination will be an indispensable step towards overcoming the separatism and enmity between white and Negro masses which has resulted from centuries of extreme exploitation and oppression of the Negro. The white masses have imbibed in varying degree the age-old atmosphere of white chauvinism, and this cannot be eradicated overnight. No one who has thought about the question seriously can say that with the coming of socialism will all prejudice automatically disappear, nor that the Negro immediately will be able to step into a condition of complete and assured equality, either in the economic or social sense. On the other hand, the conditions of Negro oppression have led to a very deep distrust of the white masses by the Negro, a feeling arising from innumerable experiences and practices. The vast majority of the Negro people still do not see why the white workers, even their advanced sector, should be accorded any special trust. Great advances towards overcoming these prejudices among both white and Negro are being made and can be made in the course of the development of our movement. But even under socialism, actual economic disparities between the position of the white and Negro masses will be inherited from capitalism,



and the old ideologies will have strong carry-overs. The fulfillment of the right of self-determination will offer the most effective means for establishing the fullest freedom of relationship between the Negro and white peoples and, equally as important, will create the best conditions for the unhampered growth and development of the Negro nation.

A point which has caused much misunderstanding is what Communists conceive to be the relationship between the demand for the right of self-determination and the present phase of the movement. It should be clearly understood by this time that Communists do not pose agreement with their ultimate program as a condition for their participation in any united front of democratic forces. It is clear that the political struggle in the country as a whole has not reached the level where the masses can be expected to rally either to socialism or, specifically, to the principal slogan of Negro liberation. The Communists, however, are ready to cooperate with all those with whom they are in substantial agreement on the immediate problems facing the people.

This, of course, does not mean that the Communist Party has given up the perspective of the development of the movement for Negro liberation in the direction of the fulfillment of the right of self-determination. The Negro question in this country can be solved, whether under capitalism or under socialism, only by the completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in the South, the most important and culminating aspect of which is the guarantee of the right of self-determination for the Negro people.

#### *The Soviet Solution of the National Question*

That the solution of the Negro question in the United States lies along the lines of the program summarized in the slogan of the right of self-determination is shown by the history of the Soviet Union. During the whole period preceding the revolution of 1917, the Russian Communists established the principle of alliance of the working class with the oppressed peoples of the Russian empire, and it was this which made possible the successful revolution of 1917 and the subsequent solution of the extremely

complicated national problems. One year before the revolution, in summing up the Communist position, Lenin wrote:

The social revolution cannot come about except as an epoch of proletarian civil war against the bourgeoisie in the advanced countries, combined with a *whole series* of democratic and revolutionary movements, including movements for national liberation in the undeveloped, backward and oppressed nations.

The Russian Revolution bore out these words of Lenin. Tsarist absolutism was overthrown as a result of the popular democratic revolution of March, 1917, which was led by the workers in alliance with the soldiers, most of them peasants. But the Russian bourgeoisie took power; it was in its interest to continue the World War and maintain capitalism in Russia. When the revolutionary proletariat, led by the Communist Party, grew rapidly in numbers and influence and it was seen by the broad toiling masses that it was the only force which could provide peace, bread and land, the peasant masses and the oppressed nationalities joined forces with it and put an end to capitalism in the successful proletarian revolution in November, 1917. Under the leadership of the proletariat and its Party, seemingly unsurpassable difficulties were overcome and socialism was established in the Soviet Union.

The proletarian revolution solved the national problem in Russia, the country which had been known as "the prison of nations," where close to 200 nationalities had been oppressed by tsarism, where national hatred and prejudice had run rife, where the Tsar's methods of mass murder and brutal persecution had threatened whole peoples with extinction or forced assimilation. The revolution, by destroying tsarism and overthrowing the bourgeoisie, made possible the economic and cultural development of the formerly oppressed nations and national minorities. The program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union states:

In order to overcome the distrust felt by the working masses of the oppressed countries towards the proletariat of states which used to oppress those countries, it is necessary to abolish all and sundry the privileges enjoyed by any national group, and to establish complete



equality before the law for all nationalities, and to recognize the right of colonies and subject nations to separation.

This program has been carried out by the Soviet government and the Communist Party. All remnants of chauvinism inherited by the people from tsarism are energetically fought by the government and by the Party and are being wiped out.

The prime, the most important basis for national oppression—the economic, social and cultural retardation of a people—is being swiftly removed. While the policy of tsarism, like that of Wall Street towards the American Negroes, was to forcibly retard development of the non-Russian nationalities, the Soviet government and the Russian proletariat encourages, helps and gives special attention to the all-around development of the formerly oppressed peoples. In the economic and social growth of many of these peoples *the stage of capitalist development has been skipped and they are developing along the lines of Socialism.*

All this was done in a very practical way, by organizing industries and collectivizing and modernizing agriculture in the backward national areas *at even a greater rate than in Central Russia.* For example: under the first Five-Year Plan, which established a large-scale industrial base, the average growth of industrial capital for the Soviet Union as a whole reached 289%; but the rate of development in the backward national republics was even greater, reaching 350% and in some cases even 1,000%! Retardation is replaced by extra-rapid development.

The rate of collectivization (combining the small peasant holdings into large collective farms) in the national areas was greater than in Central Russia. In a number of national republics collectivization was completed much earlier than in Russia proper. Hand in hand with this process, the old and out-dated methods of agriculture were being done away with. It is interesting and instructive to draw a parallel here with agriculture in the Black Belt of the United States. In the South, the croppers and poor farmers are made to grow cotton as a money crop, as raw material to be sold by big landlord, merchant and banker for profit. There is no effort made to preserve the soil, to avoid planting in small patches by

inefficient methods. As a result there is a definite retrogression in the agriculture of the deep South which, of course, spells even greater ruin and misery for the Negro peasantry and small white farmers and tenants. Through socialist re-organization in the Soviet Union, the government and the Party of the proletariat helped the backward nationalities in many ways to restore their agriculture, which had been ruined by tsarist oppression. The retrogression of Southern agriculture, which is bewailed as hopeless by many experts, which is believed by some to doom the Negroes to perpetual poverty, can be most effectively stopped, and by collectivization under a system of socialism the Black Belt can be made one of the most productive and efficient agricultural areas in the country. Together with complete industrial development in the South, where until now much of it has been restricted to territory outside of the Black Belt, the whole economic level of the Negro people can be raised, serving as a basis for full social and cultural growth for the masses.

Culturally the nationalities in the Soviet Union have made tremendous strides forward. While tsarism had retarded cultural development even more thoroughly than economic—not permitting activities in the native tongue, enforcing almost complete illiteracy, etc.—illiteracy today is being rapidly wiped out. Native newspapers appear by the hundred where there were none or but a few before. New publishing houses cannot turn out enough to meet the needs of the masses. By 1933, all the children of school age were attending the public schools (compare with the Negro children in the South, 30% of whom do not go to school at all and most of the others only for short terms of two or three months a year). A new rich and varied culture, “national in form and socialist in content,” is being rapidly developed.

These advances were made despite the tremendous difficulties which arose from the comparatively backward state of the country on the eve of the period of socialist construction, despite the difficulties arising from the fact that the Soviet Union is the only socialist country in a generally hostile capitalist world, and despite the obstacles and sabotage created by the Trotskyite-Bucharin



espionage and wrecking, which was concentrated especially in the national non-Russian republics. The Soviet Union could not have withstood the combined counter-revolutionary activities of all the hostile elements unless socialism had successfully and permanently solved the national question, thus removing the basis for any mass support to the intrigues of hostile powers which are aimed at disrupting and partitioning the Union of Socialist Republics.

Soviet successes in the sphere of the national question show that the Communist program of national liberation is best able to achieve both the equality of peoples and the most favorable conditions for the advance of socialism. It is with this in mind that we now turn to the examination of the concrete American conditions under which the movement for the liberation of the Negro people grows and develops.

#### THE ROAD TO NEGRO LIBERATION

Negro liberation, in the form of the enjoyment of the right of self-determination, can come only as a result of a maturing and ever-growing movement, based upon the alliance of the Negro people with the working class. The ultimate solution of the question, towards which the movement develops, is itself the result of varied struggles and combinations of struggles. The movement for Negro liberation therefore comprises at the present time all those mass currents and struggles around issues which are most immediate to the masses. Thus, the fight for Negro rights, in its present phase, is essentially a struggle for the extension of democracy, and is carried on in conjunction with all those progressive forces engaged in the struggle against reaction and fascism.

A growing Negro people's movement, which includes the masses of the Negroes and which is allied with the other progressive masses of the American population, must move continually towards the achievement of greater democracy, including the right of self-determination. Every development of the fight for democracy as it applies specifically to the Negro and to the South, is a step in this direction. Such for example is the organized movement of the

Southern agrarian toilers as well as measures of agrarian reform which tend to weaken the plantation system. The fight for a federal anti-lynching bill, the fight for Negro suffrage, as well as the unionization of the white and Negro proletariat in the South, and other movements of a similar character contribute to strengthening the forces of popular democracy. The winning of Negro suffrage in the South, for example, can result only from a coalition of the most progressive forces with the Negro and would, in turn, create very favorable conditions for the defeat of reaction, which has a strong base in the South. More concretely, should the Negro win complete enfranchisement in Alabama, or in South Carolina, or in Georgia, as a result of a coalition of democratic forces, the social and political scene in the South would be rapidly transformed. Through the creation of a People's Front, reaction can be defeated and the most favorable conditions for the further maturing of the movement created.

#### *Changes in Old Programs*

The peculiar position of the Negro middle class has inspired the old bourgeois nationalist ideas, which until recently had dominated practically all sectors of the Negro population. One school of thought, represented by Booker T. Washington and those gathered around him at Tuskegee Institute, started from the premise of accepting the system of segregation and upon this basis sought economic advancement, chiefly in the field of small-scale land-ownership and business. These leaders held that the future of the Negro depended upon his personal advancement and since they accepted the segregated Negro community as their field of operation, they tended to work against all movements which threatened Jim-Crow. In their efforts to preserve and extend the segregated market, a number of leaders of this school became the outstanding opponents of the organized labor movement among the Negro people.

The Tuskegee idea was effectively challenged on the eve of the World War by a new equal rights movement under the leadership of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored



People. While making its main objective the fight against discrimination, this organization in time came to place principal emphasis upon test cases in the courts and shied away from any actions which would stimulate mass movements.

The aloofness of these middle class organizations from the struggles of the masses, the large-scale migration of Negroes during the war years into the North where they entered industry under the most unfavorable conditions, combined with the intensification of discrimination against Negroes and the failure of the labor movement to take quick steps for the organization of the new Negro workers, contributed to the rapid development of the mass nationalist movement under the leadership of Marcus Garvey. For a time, this movement, built largely upon the nationalist aspirations of the Negro people which were inspired by the rise of the middle class, proved to be a powerful force. If it died out, it was largely because of the Utopian nature of its program, its strong separatist and anti-labor tendencies.

The economic crisis of 1929-1934, which had especially devastating results among the Negroes, combined with the growing activities of the Communist Party, has brought about a gradual change in traditional conceptions and methods. The growth of fascism abroad and the danger of reactionary developments in this country have also had the effect of turning the attention of the Negro middle class masses to the necessity of a united front against reaction. The older Negro organizations are now tending to place their principal emphasis more on the struggle against discrimination and less upon the business expansionism and anti-white sentiments characteristic of the bourgeois nationalist movements. Through the National Negro Congress many labor and middle class organizations (including the N. A. A. C. P., the Urban League, YMCA, youth and church groups) are beginning to cooperate in a movement for Negro rights and in an effort to establish close working bonds with the labor and progressive movements of the country. This turn of events has been largely encouraged by the advances in the labor movement, particularly in

the organization by the C.I.O. of millions of workers in the basic industries, many of whom are Negroes.

In view of the growth of reactionary tendencies in this country and the threat of war instigated by the fascist powers, Communists place even greater emphasis upon the need to defend democratic gains. They, therefore, seek to establish the unity of all democratic and progressive forces in a People's Front dedicated to the defense of the people's standard of living and their rights against the attack of the big monopoly groups, which are the inspirers and carriers of fascism. The National Negro Congress is a vital step in this direction, since, among other things, it offers the opportunity for uniting the vast majority of the Negro people in an anti-fascist democratic front together with labor, the farmers and middle class progressives.

#### *The Role of the Farmers*

Certainly, a democratic front of the Negro people must include as among its most important sectors the Negroes engaged in agriculture of whom there are nearly 2,000,000, almost entirely in the South. The tenants and share-croppers particularly in the Black Belt are exploited virtually as peons by the large planters. The number of Negro farm owners has fallen drastically during the last 25 years and the farm acreage owned by Negroes has decreased almost by half during the same period. Negro farm laborers in the South receive less pay than farm workers elsewhere, and the exploitation of the farmers' children is greater in the South than in any other part of the country.

The real exploiters of the Negro farmers are the monopoly capitalists of Wall Street who, through the financing of Southern large-scale agriculture, realize the main profits of the plantation system. The large planters and the credit merchants are but foremen for Wall Street, and "horn in" on the profits gained from the super-exploitation of the Negro peasantry. In their movement against the bondage of the plantation and tenant system, the tillers of the soil constitute a basic force in the struggle against the most reactionary sections of the bourgeoisie. Their struggle



necessarily moves towards the removal of the share-cropping and plantation system, which is the principal economic obstacle to political liberty in the South.

The need to eradicate the survivals of slavery is interlinked with the whole movement for the preservation and extension of democracy. One of the principal strongholds of reaction in the country is based upon the alliance between the large plantation owners and monopoly capital. This alliance rests primarily upon the super-exploitation of the Negro masses. In the present period the struggle for agrarian reform and for the establishment of democracy in the South are indispensable to the creation of a democratic front for the curbing of fascist tendencies and the defeat of reaction.

Such recent developments as the growth of the C.I.O. in the South's industrial centers, and the increasing strength of farmers' and tenants' unions in some important sections of the South, combined with the beginnings of progressive groupings within as well as outside of the old Democratic Party, may bring about in the near future a new people's movement which will carry on in the best traditions of the old Populist Party and Farmers Alliance. This time, however, it should be able to avoid the old pitfalls which wrecked the movement of the 'nineties, principally because it has a more substantial and more experienced working class base and is more integrally part of a national progressive movement.

#### *The Working Class and the Struggle for Negro Liberation*

Both the Negro workers and the white workers have special tasks to perform in relation to the struggle of the Negro people for liberation. While the interests of the working class of all peoples and nations are essentially the same, the conditions of the oppression of the Negro people have created a difference in the approach and necessary activity of the white and Negro workers.

The differences in the position of the white and Negro workers may be briefly summarized as follows:

(1.) Sections of the white workers have benefited indirectly from the super-exploitation of the Negroes. Out of profits made

from the robbing of the Negro peasantry and workers as well as from those obtained by the exploitation of the colonies, the capitalists could pay higher wages to a section of the white workers, creating a larger labor aristocracy, which is used against both the mass of white and Negro unskilled and unorganized workers. Thus the American Federation of Labor—which organized only the skilled workers, the upper strata of the working class—constituted only a relatively small section of the wage-earners, while the overwhelming mass of unskilled workers in the mass production industries remained unorganized. A number of important A.F. of L. unions, as well as the railroad brotherhoods closed their doors to Negro workers, who were consequently barred from the organized labor movement as well as from the skilled occupations. Thus, the dominant sector of organized labor until recently discouraged the advancement of Negro workers and hindered their participation in the labor movement.

The crisis of 1929-34, combined with further mechanization and rationalization of industry, drastically reduced the need for skilled workers and began to undermine the base of craft unionism. In the years immediately following, large numbers of workers in the basic industries were organized into industrial unions by the C.I.O. This was the first major break in the wall of labor exclusiveness and many Negro workers joined the new unions. A new and enlightened relationship has been established between the Negroes and the organized labor movement. However, old attitudes persist and the Negro worker must still gain full equality in the labor organizations. The fight to remove bars to Negro membership in A.F. of L. unions and the railroad brotherhoods still goes on and the Negro worker still faces his greatest problem—to assure for himself in all industry conditions equal to those enjoyed by the white workers.

(2.) In a political sense, the white workers occupy a privileged position as compared with the Negro workers.

(3.) The white workers have been taught in school and in everyday life to look with disdain and contempt upon the Negro. Having been polluted by white chauvinism, they participate in many



ways, often unwittingly, in the practices of social ostracism and discrimination against Negroes.

The masses of Negro workers, remembering what they have suffered from the hands of whites without distinction to class, look with deep distrust upon all whites, including white workers. This deep distrust against *all* whites has been nurtured by the prevailing atmosphere of "white superiority" which reaches even into the labor movement. It has also been encouraged by a number of Negro bourgeois leaders, from Booker T. Washington to Marcus Garvey and Dr. DuBois who have counseled the Negro people against relying upon the white working class. Counselors of this type point, for example, to the mob of 10,000 poor and backward whites outside the courthouse in Scottsboro when the eight Negro boys were sentenced to the electric chair, but take care not to rest the blame where it belongs: with the big white landowners, bankers and credit merchants of this drought-stricken area who were starving the poor whites to death and, fearing revolt, attempted to shift the hatred of the poor whites from themselves to the even more exploited Negroes. They forget to mention that this mob was organized by the merchant- and landlord-owned newspapers of the vicinity and nearby cities, which carried the vilest slander against the Negroes and whipped up the lynch spirit.

#### *The Special Task of the White Workers*

The greatest responsibility in eradicating separatism in the labor movement rests with the *white workers*. Only the white workers—by example—can overcome the deep distrust in the Negro workers. "No people can be free which oppresses another people," said Karl Marx.

And words alone will not do. Only by deeds can the white workers show that they have cast from them the filth of oppression and prejudice. They must wipe out all traces of the "white superiority" idea in themselves and be the first to demand and fight for the special demands of the Negro people, for equal rights for Negroes, for full economic, social and political equality.

Wherever white workers have taken up the fight for the special

demands of the Negroes, distrust among them has been dispelled. Negro workers have been only too willing to join labor organizations and have shown themselves the most militant of fighters for the rights of labor. The growing unity of white and Negro workers in daily struggles to improve their conditions, shows the powerful force of such a unity, without which the working class as a whole can make no progress against monopoly capital and reaction. The chief essential condition for establishing a permanent alliance with the Negro people, is that the white workers incorporate into their own trade union or political programs and activities the vital demands of the Negro.

#### *The Special Task of the Negro Workers*

The Negro workers, on the other hand, should attempt to overcome distrust of white workers among the Negro masses by making them understand why and how the white workers as a class are their reliable friends and allies. In this connection, they should above all expose the reactionary separatists and nationalists among their own people, some of whom have inverted the Nazi race dribble into a kind of super black nationalism, while others are engaged in the even more dangerous game of expounding Japan's Pan-Asiatic race program among the Negro masses. The recent race theories and programs, inspired by fascism, are grafted upon the older reactionary nationalist programs which have been propagated among the Negro people. These separatist race tendencies play into the hands of reaction and fascism and need to be strenuously combated by the Negro workers.

One of the great obstacles which needs to be overcome among the Negro people is a sense of isolation, a tendency to consider the special problems of the Negro as separate from the general progressive movement of the working class and its allies. The fight for democratic rights for Negroes, to take one example, is part of the struggle of the American people to preserve and broaden democracy, and cannot be successful if carried on in isolation from the broad mass movement. Further, the liberation of the Negro people cannot be considered apart from the historic mis-



sion of the working class to reconstitute society and establish socialism. Greater democracy can be won under capitalism, but only within the limitations inherent in a system of exploitation based upon the ownership of the means of production and of its chief benefits by a small class of large property owners. The full guarantee of complete equal rights and liberation of the Negro people can be provided only by socialism, which is the highest form of democracy.

In the movement gathered around the National Negro Congress there is at hand the best instrument for forging the unity of the Negro people and linking them with the broad movement towards a People's Front. Our immediate struggle to defeat all reactionary forces offers the best and most direct path towards Negro liberation.

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