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BLACK

NATIONALISM

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The events in Selma, Alabama in late February-early March are another indication of the heroism of the Negro masses. Thousands of Negroes demonstrated day after day, not only for voting rights, but against the entire racist system.

These events are also further proof of the bankruptcy of the pacifist leadership, if any is still needed (and it is, because an alternative to the King leadership has yet to be built in the South). As the Selma struggle continued and deepened, Rev. King did his best to contain the struggle so that it would not pose a real danger to the Southern racists or too much of an embarrassment to the capitalist government in Washington.

King engaged in secret negotiations with Federal representatives, including ex-Governor Leroy Collins of Florida, who has, along with Pres. Johnson himself, turned himself into a "moderate". King testified in Federal Court on March 11 that he had made a secret deal with Federal officials to stop short of challenging the racists and call off the March to Montgomery after marching a short distance to save face and appease the militant rank and file fighters in Selma. On Sunday, March 7, the brutal racist police of Selma had seriously injured many Negroes, and sent dozens to the hospital. On Tuesday, March 9, King and other Negro and white liberal religious leaders came to lead another march, and this is the one that King betrayed, with the knowledge and support, of course, of the religious leaders, but behind the backs of the civil rights fighters of Selma. As the New York Times reported, "...there was widespread speculation here that Dr. King's testimony today had done little to heal the open contempt for his leadership expressed by some more militant Negro and white civil rights spokesmen."

Numerous attempts at marches, even within Selma itself, (including one in memory of the Rev. James Reeb) were halted by the Selma authorities. The Negroes have been forced to retreat further and further since the original brutality on March 7th. Yet after King made his secret deal, he hailed it as a "great victory". To King the "arousing of the conscience of the nation", favorable publicity in the daily press, is the only important thing, and he will compromise the struggle from beginning to end in order to get this favorable "image". The reliance of the Selma Negroes on their own strength in the heart of the Black Belt, where they are a majority or near-majority, is of no importance whatsoever in King's strategy.

The final indignity (or perhaps not the final one, but only the most recent as we went to press) was Pres. Johnson's brazen statement that he "would not be blackjacked" into taking "hasty action" in Alabama. So crude was this

statement, coming down against the militant civil rights activists and not the racists, that even a 16 man delegation of religious leaders who had a 2 hour talk with Johnson were extremely disturbed and upset by what they consider his failure to act in the Selma crisis.

1. BLACK NATIONALISM AND MARXIST THEORY

The Negro People are Neither an Emerging Nation Nor Simply a Race Seeking Assimilation

The last several years have seen a growing theoretical concern with the Negro question on the part of Marxists in this country and elsewhere. This is a very natural and potentially useful reaction to the development of revolutionary trends within the Negro movement itself. Even blatantly anti-Marxist trends among Negro intellectuals have been deeply influenced by Marxism. In most cases these intellectuals received their training within the socialist movement and utilize, in a distorted fashion, a Marxist way of approaching questions, in order to attack Marxism itself.

For all the concern with Marxist analysis there has been very little of the Marxist method in the way the theorists have approached the Negro question. The Marxist analysis generally has been used in a formal way as a justification of a particular political attitude toward the Negro movement rather than as a method for gaining a deeper understanding of the Negro movement itself so as to further develop its revolutionary potential. This has been true both of the uncritical advocates of Black Nationalism and the unqualified opponents of Black Nationalism.

The central theoretical problem is, of course, the achieving of a theoretical understanding of exactly what the Negro people are. Are the Negroes a "nation" or are they a "race"? Is their struggle aimed at the achievement of some form of national self-determination or of some form of integration into "American life" as it is ambiguously labeled? It has been in this way that the discussion has generally been posed on the left. It is our contention that the Negro people are neither strictly a "nation" nor a "race" and are struggling neither for national self-determination as the term is usually meant nor for integration into American society as it exists today.

The problem is essentially one of the Marxist method itself. Each side in this discussion sets up formal categories into which they seek to force the reality of the American Negro -- and not with much success. The other side, then, has little difficulty in tearing to shreds the argument of his opponent. The net effect is a discussion on an extremely low level which in no way equips American Marxists for

serious intervention in the Negro struggle as it is actually unfolding in the United States. The first step towards reaching a theoretical understanding of the Negro question is to break down this formal anti-thesis and to move the discussion beyond this sterile level.

Not a Real Nation

Clearly the Negro people cannot be considered a nation without so distorting the term "nation" as to make it meaningless. The Negroes have no separate language. They have no territory to call their own. While partially differentiated culturally within American culture as a whole they do not possess a separate culture as do the French or Bulgarians or Serbians. Most important of all they are integrated into the very productive fabric of American capitalist society in such a way that their separation and removal to a separate territory or region is utopian.

The American Negro is not a peasant mass settled primarily in a particular region whose more dispersed sections can be relatively easily reassembled in some kind of homeland. A full half of the American Negroes live in the North and not the South. An increasing number of Southern Negroes now live in cities. The rural Negro of the Southern "black belt" represents but a small minority among the Negro people as a whole.

The Negro today is predominantly an urban dweller who works along with whites in industry and in other urban occupations. This urban Negro may dream of an escape from racial and class oppression through some ill-defined "separation" but he has no intention of returning to the rural South to create a nation nor does he have the material basis for doing so within the Northern urban ghetto. The ghetto environment may foster separatist ideology but it provides no material basis for the realization of the separatist dream.

If whites were barred from entry into the ghetto and all petty business within the ghetto were run by blacks (and there is only petty business there) the ghetto Negro would have no more of a real separation than he has today. He would still have to leave the ghetto for employment and it would be the white-controlled banks who really controlled black petty businesses within the ghetto. The Negro ghetto provides no more of a material basis for the fulfillment of the dream of a Negro nation than did the European Jewish ghettos for the dream of a Jewish nation. But the Negro ghetto like the Jewish ghetto does foster the dream, the dream which cannot be fulfilled.

Nor Simply a Race

It is equally clear that the Negro people are not

simply a "race" either. They are, of course, a race in the anthropological sense, as are the Caucasians and Mongoloids, but they are more than a race. Their physical characteristics which make them objectively a race wherever they may dwell in the world make them socially something far more than a race within the United States. The American Negro who lives in Europe or Asia remains a member of the Negro race, but his social relationships in the country he now resides in are different. He is no longer an American Negro, except insofar as he can never really overcome the social conditioning of having been brought up as an American Negro. One can look at Hawaii as an example. There we have a considerable mingling of racial stocks -- Polynesian, Mongoloid, Caucasian -- but these physical differences do not play the same role that they do in the United States. Certainly an American Negro is in a socially more distinct situation in the Mainland U.S. than a Polynesian or Oriental is in Hawaii.

The American Negroes are thus a people, some of whom have vague national aspirations but who cannot become a nation, who do not really want to become a nation. Their mixed feelings about "integration" arise from the fact that they are already economically integrated into American society to a point where they cannot really disengage themselves. But they are integrated as an exploited, depressed and discriminated against minority. Obviously the Negro mass wants more than the removal of legal restrictions which leaves intact this exploitative relationship. It bears this exploitative relationship along with the mass of the white working class and thus lacks even a special position within the economy which it had as slaves in pre-Civil War America. But it has been kept separate from and treated worse than the white workers and thus has developed a certain separate identity which distinguishes it not only from its oppressor but from the white workers as well.

The Jews as a 'People-Class'

No doubt many readers will find the above too vague, too lacking in precise labelling for their taste. So be it: much of reality is this way. Reality is always changing, and thus at any one moment highly contradictory and unfinished developments exist which defy clear categorization.

Let us, for example, look at the Jewish people. The brilliant young Belgian Marxist, A. Leon, who died during World War II in a Nazi concentration camp, produced an insightful study of the Jewish people called The Jewish Question -- A Marxist Interpretation (published in English in Mexico in 1950). Leon wrestled with the question as to whether the Jewish people were a nation or not. Clearly their historical role in Europe for 2000 years was more than that of a religious grouping. In fact they played a very definite economic role in medieval society as the money-

Therein lies the principal obstacle to the realization of Zionism. Capitalist decay--basis for the growth of Zionism--is also the cause of the impossibility of its realization.

The Jewish bourgeoisie is compelled to create a national state, to assure itself of the objective framework for the development of its productive forces, precisely in the period when the conditions for such a development have long since disappeared. The conditions of the decline of capitalism which have posed so sharply the Jewish question make its solution equally impossible along the Zionist road. And there is nothing astonishing in that. An evil cannot be suppressed without destroying its causes. But Zionism wishes to resolve the Jewish question without destroying capitalism, which is the principal source of the suffering of the Jews.

-The Jewish Question, by
A. Leon

lenders and bankers. A Christian who took up this occupation was many times forced to convert to Judaism and a Jew who gave it up was in time assimilated into Christianity.

Leon concluded that historically the Jews were a "people-class": that is, a group of people with a distinct culture and religion who played a special economic function in feudal society. With the birth of capitalism in Europe the Jewish people's economic role was removed from them. Large sections of them were ghettoized and proletarianized and they developed a national mystique -- Zionism: a utopian desire to escape from their oppressive and untenable position within the new capitalist society. Thus they were a people-class in the process of disintegration and at least partial assimilation.

The bulk of the Jews lived in the more backward sections of Eastern Europe like Russia and Poland. The capitalist economic revolution took place later in these regions, at a time when as a world system capitalism was already in decay. Thus rather than absorbing these people who had traditionally been so identified with money relations into a

money-oriented system, large numbers of Jews were forced down into the proletariat and utilized as were the peasants as cheap labor in industry. In addition their separateness was forcefully maintained in order to justify their inferior status and as a method of fostering divisions within the working class.

In the United States the Jewish immigrant first played the same role in garment and other industries. But as time passed many were absorbed into at least middle layers of business and the professions. Furthermore the role of the Jews was taken over by another minority, the Negroes.

The Negro as a Race-Class

The evolution of the American Negro people has much

in common with that of the Jews in Europe. Like the Jews in the Middle Ages they were a people who played a definite economic and social role in American society reserved solely for them -- as slaves. The condition of slavery was reserved exclusively for Negroes just as usury was for Jews. This position in society gave them a cohesiveness and a certain consciousness. Thus we can characterize the pre-Civil War Negro as a race-class.

With the destruction of the slavery system capitalist society, rather than fully integrating the Negro into American life, continued to oppress the Negro in the South where the Negro continued to play an economic role similar to that of the slave. Through the system of sharecropping combined with the police oppression of the post-Reconstruction period, the Negro maintained its race-class character.

The urbanization of the Negro and his entrance in large numbers into the ranks of the industrial proletariat, especially in the twentieth century, should have removed the economic props from under the special separate and inferior class position of the Negro as a race. But this did not happen. Just as with the Jews, capitalist society continued to enforce a separate existence upon the Negro artificially and to exert its every effort to keep the Negro from fully becoming a part, culturally and socially, of the working class as a whole.

The reasons for this continued separation of the Negro were basically the same as for the Jew in Europe. Capitalism in the United States, while it had the capacity for an impressive degree of industrialization, could carry through this industrialization only on a limited and distorted basis. Thus the old social relations in the South were kept pretty much intact while the industrial revolution continued full sway in the Northeast. The South became an internal colony and the Negro continued to play the same role within this colony as it had within the old slave system. The overwhelming bulk of the American Negroes lived this sort of life up to World War I.

During and following the war began a steady migration to the North and entrance of large numbers of Negroes into Northern industry, combined with regional emigration to the Southern cities and a limited industrial development around these cities (e.g. steel in Birmingham). While this basic transformation of the relationship of millions of Negroes to the organization of production in the United States should have been accompanied by a concomitant breaking down of the old class-race separateness, this did not take place because of the decay of the system as a whole. The capitalist system continued to need the Negro for a new social and economic function -- a source of cheaper than white labor for industry and for marginal

industries, which continued to employ millions -- small sweatshops, service industries, domestic workers, menial labor, etc. It also needed to keep the working class divided. So the separateness of the Negro was preserved through the ghetto system and the old prejudices against the Negro from slave society were carried over. The Negro now played a new, totally irrational, separate economic role within capitalist society, thus remaining a race-class in the throes of disintegration and transformation.

Thus we can view the Negro people as essentially a race-class which has been forced to continue its separate existence way beyond the time when the original economic reasons for this position had disappeared. This terrible barbarity has been forced upon the Negro by the decay of the capitalist system itself, which can no longer absorb and integrate such groupings in a healthy way into social life.

A Program for the Negro Struggle

The program for the Negro struggle must flow from this kind of theoretical understanding. To encourage the Negro to struggle for a nationhood which is utopian is to mislead the Negro and to direct his revolutionary energies down a safe path -- safe for the capitalist class which is responsible for his inferior position. To deny that the Negro people have both a separateness and an independent consciousness is to make it impossible for Marxists to reach the Negro as he exists today.

The Negro people can fully be absorbed into American society as a totally equal and free people only through the destruction of the capitalist system itself which perpetuates the Negro's inferior position. The Negro is still part-slave and he can only be free by overthrowing the new slave-owners, the capitalists who enslave the working class as a whole through their stranglehold on the means of production, the great industrial power of the United States.

The Negro must not retreat from American society but struggle to take it over as its rightful heirs along with the working class as a whole. This requires a common struggle with the white working class and the breaking down of the barriers between black and white workers which are fostered by the capitalist class.

The present crisis of leadership of the Negro movement is caused by the futility on the one hand of the nationalists in their utopian struggle for an impossible nation and of the "integrationists" on the other hand who seek to achieve integration within a capitalist society which no longer has room for them except at the bottom. A new leadership must be created by the Negro people themselves which carries forward the struggle along class lines in common with the working class as a whole.

2. BLACK NATIONALISM AND THE WORKING CLASS

An Analysis of What Negroes are Really Struggling For

The struggle of the Negro people in the last decade has presented the U.S. ruling class with one "crisis" after another. Today while Johnson and his advisors are preoccupied with finding a "solution" to the Vietnamese crisis, he is forced to turn his attention to the embarrassment of the first civil-rights sit-in ever to hit the White House. Johnson, like Kennedy and Eisenhower before him, has however, survived innumerable "embarrassments" over the issue of civil rights. Since the "historic Supreme Court decision" of 1954, and after countless thousands of sit-ins, freedom rides and peaceful demonstrations, the social and economic position of the great bulk of American Negroes is, if anything, more miserable than before. The major change in the status of the Negro has been a token integration and a small growth of the Negro middle class of white collar workers and professional people. On this level, the civil rights struggle has resulted in a growing frustration and disillusionment of the Negro masses with the middle class dominated civil rights organizations and leadership.

Enter Black Nationalism

Out of this frustration and disillusionment has emerged the revived black nationalist movement as a competitor of the reformist civil rights leadership. Instead of a miserable "token" and a "crumb from the white man's table" they have put forward the goal, in one form or another, of separation or black control of the economics, politics, etc. of the black community. Reflecting and promoting the feelings of racial pride and self assurance of the masses of the northern urban ghetto, some of the nationalist groups have been able to gain a limited base in these ghettos. This development is furthered by the great fear by the reformist civil rights leaders of any struggle in which the black masses confront the system to any extent. It is also the result of the failure of any revolutionary socialist movement to gain a base among the black workers. The emergence of the nationalists as an alternative, however, is limited and crisis-ridden because the nationalists offer a utopian dream of separation (see the article "Black Nationalism and Marxist Theory" in this issue)-- rather than a program of action and struggle against the concrete conditions of Negro oppression.

The thrust of the nationalist activity among the masses is a purely propagandistic campaign to gain converts to the creed of separatism. Their main "transitional" activity consists of efforts to establish and develop "black business". But campaigns to "buy black" are not going to mean

much to the black worker who still has to pay the same high prices, exorbitant rents for rotting slums, and face the fear of layoff if he is fortunate enough to have a job at all!!

The Muslims and the other nationalist groups are middle class in character whether or not they have a following among the masses. This is not to ignore the fact that some groups are more radical than others. But even to the extent they attack "imperialism" and "capitalism", it is on the basis of a race or color theory of social reality-- the most radical of these groups may be "anti-imperialist", but never "pro-working class". The race theory and religious or quasi-religious ideology is consistent with the lack of program and struggle around social and economic issues which are fundamentally working class in nature.

The Negro Perceives Class As Well As Color Distinctions

We agree with the editors of the journal, Black Flag ("The Crisis on the Left", Jan. 21, 1965) when they say that the left "must recognize that nationalism is a force in the black man's thinking." The development of a revolutionary program for a minority group or section of the working class-- must always relate to the immediate moods and understanding-- both the consciousness and the "false-consciousness" of the movement. But in castigating the left "because they appear to forget that the black masses view the same society from a color rather than a class standpoint" the article sees only one element of consciousness, color, and overlooks the other, more fundamental if less obvious element--class.

The discrimination and segregation of Negroes is a form for the economic exploitation of the Negro worker who comprises 90% of the Negro population. As such, it is also a form to create division within the working class along racial lines in the interests of the capitalist exploitation of the class as a whole. The program of the middle class reformist Negro leadership emphasizes that both the "respectable" Negro doctor or lawyer and the black New York sweatshop garment worker are not allowed in certain restaurants or to live in restricted residential areas. But it is not very concerned that one cannot afford to eat in the same restaurants or live in the same apartment as the other. Certainly, the Negro worker does not see these problems as simply "color" questions and is also aware of the basic class differentiations in society.

The last few years have seen the growth of struggle by Negroes, especially the youth, against features of oppression which are fundamentally class issues facing the Negro worker and his family--housing, education, unemployment. The growing self-assertiveness of the young Negro in the northern cities over the class issues brings him into increasing conflict with the system itself and frequent confrontations with the police. Every action or demonstration over the questions of housing or education runs into repression and tends to develop into an issue of

police brutality. Every demonstration against police brutality (the brunt of which is borne by the black worker and unemployed youth) tends to become a general revolt against the poverty, unemployment and miserable housing in the ghetto as was the case with last summer's explosion in Harlem.

The Black Revolt
Against Unemployment

Behind the dynamism of such explosions is the stark reality of unemployment. The very first issue of the Bulletin (Vol. 1, No. 1, Sept. 14, 1964) pointed out that "despite economic prosperity a huge section of American working class youth has no prospect of getting a job. If these young workers cannot find employment now during prosperity what will their future be when the economy begins to sag?" It was noted that "fully one quarter of all Negro male teenagers are out of work. These figures only include those actively seeking employment, ignoring the many who no longer feel it is worthwhile to even try. The figure for white teenagers was also high -- 14.2%"

All of the vaunted government programs designed to "attack" youth unemployment mean next to nothing and the unemployed Negro youth have no illusions on this score. A New York Times article, (Dec. 14, 1964) discussing the "Job Search" quoted a "young man" who "lounged in a dry-cleaning shop in Harlem not long ago and explained why he was not at work: 'I enrolled at one of the job training courses', he said, 'I forget who was running it -- it was the City or the State or maybe the Federal Government.

'Anyway, they taught me how to be a printer. I got good grades. and they said I had turned into a good worker. Then I finished the course and now I can't get a job'. He was asked what he did now. 'Nothing!', he said."

The answer of the black nationalists to the problem of unemployment can only be to hold forth the ideas of "separation" and the building of black business. These "solutions"

All the (government job placement) programs are fake, said one outspoken observer in the city government... 'because they take these kids and build up their hopes and then they find them jobs as bus boys and stock clerks and the kids are ripe to be replaced by automation'. The first JOIN (a federal-city job agency) office was opened last Jan. 2 in East Harlem. Eight Negroes and Puerto Ricans who had gone to the center for help were asked to step outside into a fierce snowstorm while Mayor Wagner and other dignitaries cut the ribbon inside and coffee and donuts were served to the press... From Jan. 2 until early this fall..., the agencies' 300 employees dealt with 9,780 clients. Of the total, 6,629 received counseling, remedial education and testing services; 2,419 job placements were made...

--from the N.Y. Times, Dec. 14, 1964

do not offer the unemployed Negroes any means of struggle to link them up with the white and Puerto Rican unemployed against the system. Nor do they explain that unemployment is an essential feature of capitalism; that capitalism makes increasing numbers of workers, black and white, permanently "obsolete". Equally disorienting as a "solution" is the demand for "preferential hiring" of Negroes. Such a policy cannot basically alter Negro unemployment as long as there are relatively less and less jobs to go around for all workers. More important, the demand tends to separate workers and buttress the chauvinism of white workers by enhancing the fear of many white workers that the Negroes want to take their jobs away from them.

Unemployment Must Be Fought With a Class Program

Rather than making demands which separate and divide and therefore strengthen the system which depends on the exploitation of the entire working class, demands must be made which tend to unite all the unemployed with each other and with the employed who are demanding "job security": for the 30 hour week at 40 hours pay; for a massive Federal public works program to be subsidized with funds now being used for military purposes; for a Federal unemployment insurance program to maintain all workers and their families above the "poverty level" for the duration of the period they are unable to find work. The Negro unemployed of New York City could be organized behind the demand, for instance, that the unemployed of the city be put to work to tear down the city's 600,00 substandard housing units and replace them with 100,000 new low cost units per year, with construction starting in 1965. The same sort of linking can be made between the need for jobs and the need for new schools. The Negro trade unionists as well as the unemployed are in a position to build movements in support of these measures to fight unemployment which could be immensely popular among white and Puerto Rican workers and unemployed youth. Concrete programs like this can be a great weapon in breaking down the chauvinism of white workers and making a real impact within the trade union movement.

Public Education is a Class Issue

The recent agitation against segregation in New York public schools is not simply a racial matter. While the form of the struggle is for integrated schools, underlying this is the demand and necessity for new and better schools in working class neighborhoods, decreased class sizes, etc. Recently there was a mass demonstration by the students of New York's Commerce High School against its proposed demolition. The city plans to throw the 3400 students into other already overcrowded schools to make way for the building of the private Juilliard School of Music. The Commerce student body is predominantly working class, -- 45% Negro, 25% Puerto Rican and 30% white. The aims of this school protest tend to merge with the aims of the Negro schools boycotters demanding in-

tegrated quality education. In an interview in Challenge of March 9, 1965, one of the Commerce student's parents said, "All I know is I want my kids to have as good an education as any in this city -- my kid is as good as anyone even if his father isn't rich...when the city gives something away, it takes from the poor and gives to the rich. For years they've promised us new schools, now they tell us 'tough'! Well they're asking for a fight and we're in a mood for one." Just as on the question of jobs, there is no room in the black nationalist program for struggle of the masses over this question of their daily existence.

Harlem Erupts

During and following the Harlem rebellion sparked by unemployed youth last summer, the ruling class showed that it was not interested in attacking any of the nationalist groups as such. Rather, it was more fearful that the Progressive Labor Movement might gain a following among the masses. In the course of the struggle, Bill Epton and the PLM were the only leadership that refused to go along with the so-called Harlem Unity Committee, a committee consisting of all the "leaders" of the community including representatives of the Muslims, Malcolm X's OAAU and other nationalist groups. The aim of this committee was to hold back the masses while unsuccessfully begging for some crumbs like the creation of a "civilian review board" to investigate cases of alleged police brutality.

While most of the other leaders were telling the masses to cool it and "go home", Epton, along with Conrad Lynn, Paul Boutelle of the Freedom Now Party and Jesse Gray defied the Police Department ban on Harlem demonstrations. The city showed where it stood when, despite the ban, the police granted James Lawson's African Nationalists a permit for a rally, but arrested Boutelle when he tried to hold a rally for his election campaign. Nationalist groups like Muhammad's Muslims and Malcolm's Organization of Afro-American Unity said not a word in support of Epton and Boutelle while groups like Lawson's were openly hostile to them. When Epton was indicted on phony charges of "criminal anarchy" as a prelude to an ever mounting campaign to isolate and destroy the PLM, all the nationalist groups kept their mouths shut.

The outbreaks in Harlem and the other urban ghettos against the system of "law and order" were not "race riots" as some reactionary wishful thinkers would have us believe. While there was undoubtedly a great deal of anti-white sentiment, it was the brutal cops, both black and white, who were the objects of the pent-up rage of the people. It was reported that in the Elizabeth, N. J. skirmish, both black and white working class youth joined together against the cops.

The Black Revolt Needs Political Independence

All the issues that lie behind the "riots" --

police brutality, housing, education, unemployment -- inevitably confront the state power of the capitalist system. Every social protest and economic demand becomes a political demand against the government. The burning need is for the Negro workers to involve themselves in political action independent of the two capitalist parties in order to raise the type of working class demands we have discussed. We understand that Jesse Gray, Negro leader of the Community Council on Housing, is considering running for Mayor in New York against Wagner on an independent ticket next November. Such a campaign could provide a vehicle for struggle by black workers on these class issues. It has the potential to shake up the labor movement where the bureaucrats will be in the Wagner camp. To do this it will have to reach the black trade unionists and through them involve sections of the white trade unionists. Skeptics may scoff, but in New York City alone, in the last year there have been significant rank and file rebel movement among longshoremen and railroad workers which have jointly involved black and white workers.

The Future of the Struggle

It is often forgotten that Negro workers represent a far greater proportion of the industrial working class than their 10% proportion of the total U. S. population. While the unemployed Negro youth and students are currently taking the lead in the struggle, the Negro trade unionist will come more and more to the forefront of the struggle as the class struggle heats up in industries such as auto and steel over the next few years. Anyone who has followed the Bulletin for the last 6 months should have some understanding that this heating up is definitely in the cards as the economic crisis of U. S. and world capitalism deepens. The class elements of the Negro struggle will increasingly dominate over the racial elements.

Not to understand this is to be a prisoner of the "false consciousness" of the moment -- to be unable to see the future because of an impressionistic reaction to the superficial appearance of the moment. Impressionists are constantly surprised when their "common sense" impressions of reality reveal themselves to be mistaken. Any movement which has the subjective desire to be revolutionary has to break with this empirical impressionism which is the dominant mode of thought produced by capitalist society. Only by absorbing the method of dialectical thought can a revolutionary movement understand the underlying class character of all social struggle in the modern world. Only by seeing phenomena in all their contradiction, interconnection, and development, will revolutionists be able, in the words of the Communist Manifesto, "to represent the movement of the future in the movement of the present."

3. BLACK NATIONALISM AND AMERICAN RADICALS

The SWP as a Case History of Failure

To Intervene in the Negro Struggle

The upsurge of the Negro struggle poses a great challenge to Marxists. They have the duty to intervene in this mass struggle, to connect up with it and lead it towards the path of revolutionary struggle against the capitalist system. In the last several years the development of black nationalist trends has posed a particularly important test for all radicals.

How have the radicals met this test? This article will make an assessment of the role of the Socialist Workers Party in relation to the developments in the Negro movement over the past few years. The SWP, built as a Trotskyist party in this country with some roots in the working class, and built in opposition to the reformism of Stalinism and the Social-Democracy over a long period, might be expected to prove capable of meeting this challenge of the Negro struggle, at least in part. Instead, the SWP has become typical of the failure of American radicalism to intervene in the revolutionary process.

The development of the Black Muslim movement and the SWP's growing interest in it are reflected in the pages of the Militant through late 1962 and early 1963. In its convention of July 1963, the SWP passed by majority vote a resolution entitled, "Freedom NOW: The New Stage in the Struggle for Negro Emancipation and the Tasks of the SWP." The SWP leadership sought in this resolution to assess black nationalist trends and relate the SWP to them. The resolution states:

Our attitude toward separatists, including the Muslims, is a friendly one. We recognize that the mere existence of the Muslims has had healthy effects, pushing rival Negro tendencies to the left and thereby imparting an impetus to even purely integrationist battles. We note with interest that, far from being a hardened sect, the Muslims have shown a capacity during the last year to change in a direction that better serves the interests of all Negroes. However, they have still to develop a program of action for the struggles now taking place.

The resolution goes no further in attempting to analyse the Black Muslim movement. The Militant during this period simply printed what amounted to press releases, various statements made by the Muslims, or news on defense cases they were involved in because of the harassment they were then being subjected to by the government.

To this day, the SWP and the Militant have given no accounting as to how the Muslims, "far from a hardened sect"

two years ago, have developed to the point where the supporters of Malcolm X themselves accuse the Muslims of his murder. We have yet to be informed by the Militant as to when and if the Muslims stopped playing a progressive role, and how this came about. We may suppose that the Militant relates all of these changes in some way or another to Malcolm X's split with the Muslims, but this was never explained in any serious way even by Malcolm.

Typical SWP Meeting

In the last half of 1963, the SWP continued its adaptation to the Black Muslims. There was never, in the Militant or inside the party itself, any analysis of the Muslims, any basic criticisms made of them on any level, or any attempt to see where they were going or how sections of them could be influenced towards Marxism. At any one of the many meetings organized for spokesmen like Malcolm X when he was a part of the Black Muslims, the SWP or YSA speaker or chairman of the meeting would introduce the speaker by saying how close the Muslims are to the socialists; how they attack and expose "the system"; how they are attacked by the government and are lied about, like the socialists; how their approach to the system is different, but only slightly different, from the socialist approach. Several times this kind of patronizing adaptation got so thick that the Muslim speaker himself would correct the erroneous impression that no differences existed between the Socialist Workers Party and the Nation of Islam. Behind this sickening opportunist approach lay an assumption which was at times even openly expressed: Marxists have no role to play in leading the Negro movement now -- they can only cheer on from the sidelines.

The Kennedy assassination and Malcolm X's famous statement about the chickens coming home to roost gave Elijah Muhammad the opportunity to discipline Malcolm that he had no doubt been looking for. The Militant reported very briefly on the suspension of Malcolm, and then very discreetly withheld all comment whatsoever on the nationalist movement for almost four months -- until Malcolm announced his actual break with the Nation of Islam. No doubt this was in line with the newly developed "Marxist" tactic of the SWP: when a petty bourgeois current to which they are adapting (Castro, Ben Bella, the Muslims, Malcolm X) moves to the left (usually this is merely a matter of words and not deeds, of course) there is enthusiastic applause; at other, more "difficult" moments, silence is called for. In this case, the reason for the silence of the Militant for four months is that Malcolm's suspension and the crisis within the Muslims were incomprehensible on the basis of the line of the Militant. The Militant was caught by surprise by these developments, just as they are by all developments in the mass movement.

From Silence to Applause

Malcolm's final break ended the "silence" phase and

The characteristic thing about the American workers' parties, trade unions and organizations, and so on, was their aristocratic character. It is the basis of opportunism. The skilled workers who feel set in the capitalist society help the bourgeois class to hold the Negroes and the unskilled workers down to very low scale. Our party is not safe from degeneration if it remains a place for intellectuals, semi-intellectuals, skilled workers and Jewish workers who build a very close milieu which is almost isolated from the genuine mass. Under these conditions our party cannot develop--it will degenerate.

excerpt from Trotsky's discussions with J. R. Johnson, 1939

began a new ascending "applause" phase in the Militant's brilliant Marxist analysis of black nationalism! A flurry of articles appeared in the Militant, week after week, simply reporting on what Malcolm X said at such and such a place or in such and such a news release. For instance, the March 23, 1964 issue of the Militant contained the full text of Malcolm's statement in launching a new organization, the Muslim Mosque, Inc. The text, including both correct and confused statement, was printed without comment. The statement included the following:

-- I am and will always be a Muslim. My religion is Islam. I still believe that Mr. Muhammad's analysis of the problem is the most realistic, and that his solution is the best one. This means that I too believe the best solution is complete separation, with our people going back home, to our own African homeland.

...I'm not out to fight other Negro leaders or organizations. We must find a common approach, a common solution, to a common problem. As of this minute, I've forgotten everything bad that the other leaders have said about me, and I pray that they can also forget the many bad things I've said about them.

...Our political philosophy will be Black Nationalism. Our economic and social philosophy will be Black Nationalism. Our cultural emphasis will be Black Nationalism.

The March 30 Militant reported, "3,000 Cheer Malcolm X at Opening Rally in Harlem." On April 6, the page one headline said, "Malcolm X to Organize Mass Voter Registration" (There was not and never has been since any assessment of the failure of Malcolm X to implement this or any other concrete action). Subsequent issues reported on other Malcolm X speeches, and in the July 13 issue the founding statement of the Organization of Afro-American Unity was reprinted without comment. After wading through this reportage the question which literally hits one in the face, is "What could a Negro nationalist militant learn about the struggle that he doesn't already know from reading the Militant?"

The several articles by George Breitman in the Militant during this period fall very much within this framework of simple reportage and adaptation. The "analytical" article in the March 30 issue is entitled, "New Force Can Bring Major Rights Gains". The following week the banner headline reads, "His Stand Can Unite and Build Movement". In these articles Breitman tries to make some delicate criticisms of the Muslims. His major point is that they faced serious problems because of their sectarian stance in relation to the rest of the movement, where there was a lot of action going on. In trying to make this point, he even goes so far as to welcome the increasingly friendly treatment in Muhammad Speaks to such leaders as Roy Wilkins! Needless to say Malcolm's break is welcomed (discreetly, to be sure) as a step away from this sectarianism and towards linking up with the struggle, etc. Hope is even held out that Malcolm will continue to influence the Muslims in the direction he was going, a prediction that looks like a bad joke at this time. Nowhere in these articles is there anything approaching a serious criticism of Malcolm or even of the Muslims, beyond the point of their lack of involvement in the struggle. It is apparent that the writer of this "analysis" is not even thinking in terms of posing an alternative line, of really analyzing, in the scientific sense of that term. The author uses a very clever device. Wherever something is implied which would ordinarily make it necessary for the SWP to clearly and sharply differentiate itself politically from Malcolm or the Muslims, the writer very smoothly adopts the lofty tone of the commentator, the spectator from whom sharp criticism or differentiation is not required or expected. This approach is the trademark of the centrist line of the SWP.

Malcolm Speaks Out

Thus we see how the SWP dropped its great attention to Muhammad's Muslims and began an even greater adaptation to Malcolm. The Breitman articles are supposedly the explanation of this turn, and a very feeble explanation they are. During the last half of 1964, the Militant has nothing at all to say about the Black Muslims. In several reports on speeches and public statements of Malcolm in January and February of this year, his vague references to differences with the Muslims are simply repeated.

Despite the fact that the Black Muslim movement attracted the most militant young black people, it was "maneuvered into a vacuum", explained Malcolm X. For on the one hand, it claimed to be religious, but was not accepted by the world religion; while on the other hand, the government and press called it political, but it didn't take political action. It didn't take part in the civil rights struggle. It said God would provide land, but had no plan of action, said Malcolm X. Lack of action led to dissension and finally to a division.

of the movement. (Jan. 18 Militant)

Missing, of course, is any class analysis, and the Militant is not about to give any. The Feb. 22 issue reprints the most serious accusations against the Black Muslims ever contained in the newspaper which consistently referred to them as a positive development, as a dynamic organization with great potential, etc. Malcolm X detailed several attempts on his life, referred to the Muslims as a criminal organization, and disclosed that the Muslims had friendly relations and some negotiations with the Ku Klux Klan and Lincoln Rockwell's Nazis, when he was in the organization and when the SWP was praising it as a positive force and labeling any suggestions of collaboration between the Muslims and racists as outright slander.

Before his death Malcolm X had himself indicated that a major difference in his outlook since his break with the Black Muslims was that he now thought independently, not simply accepting the word of Muhammad as the word of God. He had on several occasions shown signs of going beyond a purely nationalist outlook. To a large extent he substituted adherence to Muhammad with an orientation to the radical petty bourgeois nationalist leaders of Africa and the Arab countries. The most important thing is that in the face of all these developments the Militant never gave any reason for him to develop!

Within a week after the above-mentioned article appeared, Malcolm had been silenced forever. The Militant, as expected, devoted almost half of its next issue to the assassination, though without mentioning the Black Muslims at all. The Militant has yet to comment on Malcolm's last thunderous accusations, which ironically expose the SWP as prettifying the Muslims at the very time that organization was engaged in reactionary and anti-working class activities of the crudest sort. The SWP is completely incapable of explaining the reactionary role of the Muslims. Their empirical approach led them to view black nationalism in any form as inherently progressive. Their empiricism blinded them, and they were incapable of distinguishing between a reactionary and progressive trend. To "Marxists" who have lost all understanding, however slight, they ever had of the Marxist method, the bare fact that the Muslims were saying some radical things and were being persecuted by the government was enough to make them progressive and potentially revolutionary. Instead of trying to influence militants attracted to the Muslims or to Malcolm, the SWP grasped at some rudimentary elements of race consciousness and militancy, exaggerated these developments beyond recognition, and, above all, refused to lead this consciousness anywhere, to see it as part of a process which is not necessarily an irreversibly forward one.

SWP and the Wandering Followers

Those who looked to or admired Malcolm X now face

a dilemma: there is no real movement left behind after Malcolm's murder. There never was anything said about building a genuine revolutionary movement that can provide a real leadership. Nor is it simply a matter of building an organization. It is the presentation of an alternative program toward which militants can develop which is important. To uncritically support the present is to play no role in developing beyond the present! Thus these people, including the SWP, can only wait for another "dynamic leader" to spring up. Of course the material conditions will give rise, within a certain space of time, to similar developments. But revolutionaries are not supposed to have to wait, can not afford to wait for some leader to spring up with a relatively advanced consciousness. They have to be building a movement which can provide the necessary conscious leadership. Needless to say, the SWP has never said this, even among its own Negro members, so that many of them are leaving the SWP in confusion.

The SWP simply has turned itself into part of the wandering followers of Malcolm X who have no place to turn. What is needed is a class approach, the building of an independent Negro movement rooted in the working class and oriented towards real struggle against the system, linking up with other sections of the working class, the white workers as well as the Puerto Ricans and other minority groups.

No longer is it simply a matter of the SWP knowing these things but withholding comment for opportunist reasons. A new middle class, predominantly student, section of the SWP is not aware of these "subtleties"; they are almost as eclectic and confused as Malcolm was. This is a reflection of the degeneration of the SWP.

Needless to say, the SWP has accomplished nothing in connection with the turn to the Negro struggle that was outlined in the 1963 Convention resolution. The adaptation to black nationalism led to the complete dropping of any serious and consistent work by white or Negroes in the SWP inside the actual movement, as the organization was turned into the 'friends of the Muslims' or, later, the 'friends of Malcolm'. Not only have they been unable to recruit significant numbers of Negroes with their approach that implies no role for revolutionary socialists in the Negro struggle, but the few who were recruited or were already in the organization are also inactive or leaving the SWP. This is only natural when a previously revolutionary organization castrates itself politically in the face of a mass radicalization.

The real line of the SWP was revealed during the Harlem uprising of last summer. While Progressive Labor members in Harlem struggled to provide an alternative leadership, to mobilize the masses of Harlem against the system at a time when there was real anger and militancy in the Negro ghetto, the SWP remained silent. No doubt it remained silent in part because its hero Malcolm remained silent (for much of this

period he was touring Africa and the Middle East), and thus the Militant literally could not say anything because to say anything would be admitting even in part that the SWP has an independent role to play in the Negro struggle -- and hadn't Malcolm himself said many times that the 'white radicals' should take care of the whites, and he would take care of the Negroes?

The Reason For the SWP's Failure

The SWP has wound up in this position because it is incapable of understanding and applying the method of dialectical materialism. It views the Negro struggle, as it views the colonial revolution, the labor movement, and all other developments, in a mechanistic, empirical fashion. It sees things just as they are today, and discards as unimportant what they were yesterday or can be tomorrow. It separates theory and practice, sees itself as a commentator and not an active participant in the movement, and ignores the overall process while bowing before the 'accomplished fact'. Concretely, it fails to relate the ideology of the Muslims or of Malcolm X to the working class, it no longer sees the Negro struggle itself in class terms and it accepts as at least semi-permanent (until the distant future) separation between Negro and white workers' struggles. It is incapable of seeing how the crisis of capitalism can and is at this very moment driving white and Negro workers along a common path. It views events in an objectivist manner, and minimizes to the point of near-exclusion the role of Marxists, of consciousness, in the anti-capitalist struggles.

The rejection of Marxist method is summed up in the comment and reportage which is all the Militant contains on the Negro struggle. It is summed up in the complete lack of analysis, the fear of analysis and criticism, and the consequent extreme confusion which any Negro militant depending on the Militant for advice would feel about recent developments.

The line of the SWP on sending troops to the South shows the real conciliation of the SWP to the ruling class itself. It seeks to hide this adaptation by balancing it off with an uncritical attitude toward black nationalism. The common method and approach underlying these two apparently contradictory attitudes is the rejection of any role for Marxism and the working class in the Negro struggle. Time and time again the SWP has called on the Federal Government to defend the Negro struggle by sending Federal troops to the South, when any Marxist should understand the use to which these troops will inevitably be put, and when the most revolutionary of the civil rights fighters are already drawing conclusions about the role of the Federal Government which the SWP is consistently evading. Once the SWP forgot about the role of the Negro masses and the entire working class in emancipating themselves, then they began to look to and rely upon other forces, not only the nationalists, but also even the Federal

government!

The minority tendency within the SWP which later became the American Committee for the Fourth International struggled against this rejection of Marxism within the party. In the discussion which culminated in the adoption of the Freedom Now resolution, we stated the following:

We must come to grips with the concept which seems to be gaining a great deal of currency in our movement, that the Negro struggle is being automatically and irreversibly radicalized, and that our intervention is therefore not crucial...The turn to the mass movement...could turn out in practice to be an adaptationist turn, if this tendency is not countered.

We differ with the concept advanced by the nationalists of a bourgeois leadership of the Negro movement...The Muslims are ideologically strong in their attack on white society. But they also advance, and in many instances concentrate upon, demands which do not serve the interests of the Negro masses. These demands...are a petty bourgeois rejection of the actual struggle in favor of isolation and a sort of peaceful coexistence with American capitalism...

The majority rejected the minority views. Yet it is clear that the minority foresaw the crisis of the Muslims in a way the SWP leadership was unable to.

* * *

SPECIAL PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

The increased pace of political events is forcing us to alter our regular publication schedule so that we can better fulfill our political responsibilities. The developing crisis in the Negro movement made it necessary to run this enlarged issue of the BULLETIN with an increased press run. The next issue of the BULLETIN must also be an enlarged issue with an even larger press run. It will be devoted to two important events occurring over the Easter Weekend--the March on Washington to End the War in Vietnam and the Progressive Labor Movement National Conference. To enable us to produce these two enlarged issues in a row and have time to properly distribute them, the next issue of the BULLETIN will be dated April 19th. Subscriptions will be extended accordingly.

We ask all readers to give careful consideration to the theoretical and political concepts contained in this issue. We urge all readers to contribute their own views on this topic. What is needed now is a serious and deep dialogue on the left which aims at a theoretical solution to the crisis in the Negro movement to pave the way for the necessary practical solution. We hope our own contribution helps stimulate this process.

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