

The Negro Question

By J. R. JOHNSON

(This week's column is written by Robert L. Birchman, in the absence of J. R. Johnson.)

The Philadelphia Independent, Negro newspaper of Philadelphia asks some questions of President Roosevelt in a recent editorial.

Why should Negroes be secretly excluded from wide scale industrial recovery? Why does not President Roosevelt call attention of the nation, and the industrialists in particular, to the fact that the recovery of America must include the emancipation of Negro workers?

"Bread, Not Bullets"

An editorial, "BREAD NOT BULLETS" in the Feb. 4 Chicago Defender states: "President Roosevelt's recommended relief cut of one billion dollars means mass starvation for the majority of the Negro people.

Negroes have been the largest group on relief proportionally in the country. The Unemployment Census of 1937, the latest complete figures available, show that 28.2 per cent of the Negro workers were unemployed compared to 19.1 per cent of the white workers.

The Negroes, the most poverty stricken section of the American population, will be the chief victims of further relief cuts.

Measure relief cuts against such phenomena of our national life as 9,000,000 already unemployed, and seeking anything to do, consider the discrimination against Negro job seekers by powerful corporations. The answer is starvation.

"Negroes, by the millions, supported the New Deal program although it was palpably a stop gap. Whatever its inadequacies, it was the beginning of a new conception of government—that the welfare of the American people, white and colored, meant more to the future of America than the opportunity for industrial magnates to gouge fortunes out of these people.

"Nor does a president always get what he wants from Congress if the people want something else. Congress can be told emphatically by the American people that the situation demands an increase in relief expenditures rather than a decrease; that:

"Bread is wanted, and not bullets!"

Which Way Now?

The New Deal was not the "beginning of a new conception of government" and certainly the New Deal did nothing and will not do anything to prevent the industrial magnates from gouging profits out of the masses of the people.

The problem which these editorials do not answer is how are the Negro people to solve the problems of job discriminations, unemployment, war, educational inequality, jim-crowism, etc., that face them—and which face the masses of the white workers as well.

The direction in which the masses of the Negro workers must turn their efforts was indicated by Wilfred Dickerson, a young Negro trade unionist, and delegate from West Virginia to the recent convention of the United Mine Workers when he stated:

"The results of this convention will be the laying of the ground work for a great political labor party. Through such a labor party the laboring man—Negro and white—will get the best type of representation."

The Negroes must unite with their white brothers in the trade unions to fight for the building of a militant labor party since experience has proved that labor and especially the Negroes have received little of value from the boss parties and that they cannot make use of the boss parties and must have a party of their own. It is only along this line that the Negroes can fight effectively for jobs, adequate relief, educational equality, against lynching, against war and for "full economic, political and economic equality for the Negro people."

To the Readers of the Negro Column:

We would like to deal more concretely with the problems that face the Negro people in their daily life in the shops, in the trade unions, in their organizations, etc.

We would like to have your comments on the column, your experiences in the trade unions, the problems you face in promoting better relations between the Negro and white workers in your unions and shops, the problems and living conditions of the Negro WPA and unemployed workers. We shall print and comment on the reports sent in by our readers.

NATIONAL NEGRO DEPARTMENT

ON THE WAR IN FINLAND

Why We Should Defend the Soviet Union

By ALBERT GOLDMAN

Many and serious have been the crimes of Stalin from the very beginning of his regime. In fact, his internal and his foreign policies constitute one colossal crime against the interests of the workers of the whole world.

Bitterly as we condemn and fight against his crimes and betrayals, nevertheless we do not yield an inch on our fundamental position of defending the Soviet Union against the capitalist world. We distinguish between the Soviet Union based on nationalized property and the Stalinist bureaucracy capable of the worst crimes against the working class.

When Stalin expelled the Bolshevik-Leninists, led by Trotsky, from the Communist party of the Soviet Union, when he hounded and jailed them, he committed a crime against the revolutionary proletariat, but these Bolsheviks, hounded by Stalin, pledged loyalty to the state which they were instrumental in creating.

When, in order to save himself from the danger of an attack by Hitler, he made an alliance with France and, as compensation to the French imperialists, actually ordered the Communist party of France to cease its anti-militarist activities, we condemned the alliance as a betrayal of the workers. But the revolutionary Marxists did not give up the slogan of unconditional defense of the Soviet Union.

By frameups, by torture, by outright murder, Stalin exterminated the generation of Bolsheviks who organized and led the revolution. That crime did not cause us to eliminate from our program the slogan of defense of the Soviet Union.

STALIN'S GREATEST CRIME WAS IN SPAIN

The greatest crime that Stalin has committed thus far was the crushing of the Spanish revolution. When Franco began his revolt, the Spanish workers took the factories away from the capitalists and the peasants took the land away from the landlords. Stalin bought his way into the leadership of the Spanish Loyalists, sent a large contingent of his GPU to Spain, took control of the Spanish government, murdered hundreds of revolutionary workers and crushed the Spanish revolution.

The program of our party was written after that crime and in that program was included a section dealing with the necessity of defending the Soviet Union against imperialism.

Why did we cling to that slogan? Because the crimes of Stalin, taken separately or together, did not change the nature of the Soviet Union. They undermined the basic structure; they weakened the Soviet Union but they did not destroy nationalized property and we therefore continued to insist on the unconditional defense of the Soviet Union against imperialism.

Came the Hitler-Stalin pact. The liberals were dreadfully shocked. They had depended on Stalin to save their democracy and now the great savior changed playmates and left them holding the bag.

Sad to say, some of our own sympathizers were shaken out of their equilibrium by Stalin's "betrayal" of the "democratic" nations.

Did Stalin betray anyone when he signed the pact with his erstwhile arch enemy? Undoubtedly, he betrayed the working masses, but essentially no more and no less than when he made a pact with imperialist France. If we are going to measure betrayals by degree, his crushing of the Spanish revolution was by far worse than the signing of the pact with Hitler.

WHY HIS ALLIANCES ARE CRIMES AGAINST THE WORKERS

It must be clearly understood that, in and of itself, there is nothing criminal in the leaders of the Soviet Union making a temporary alliance with one imperialist nation against another. Existing in an imperialist world, a workers' state must of necessity take advantage of the conflicts between the imperialist nations in order to strengthen itself to a certain extent.

What constitutes Stalin's crime in making these alliances is that he ties the working masses to that section of the imperialists with which he enters into an alliance. When he was courting the democratic imperialists, his agency, the Communist International, was backing France and England against Hitler. Now that he has entered into an alliance with Hitler, the Communists are in fact supporting Hitler. Not so openly, it is true. But openly enough so that an intelligent worker can see what their real game is.

In his alliance with Hitler, Stalin proved his contempt for the

workers—he did not hesitate a moment to violate their democratic sentiments. He proved that he never was interested in fighting fascism because it is the mortal enemy of the workers but simply because it represented a danger to his regime. As soon as conditions made Hitler willing to make peace with him, Stalin dropped the fight against fascism.

WE PREDICTED THE STALIN-HITLER PACT

Our party was not shocked, not even surprised, by the pact. We foresaw the possibility of such an alliance; we warned the workers against that possibility. The Stalinists raged at us; the Stalinist liberals sneered at us; the "fantastic" idea that Stalin could make an alliance with Hitler.

We turned out to be correct. And events have demonstrated that the pact was a betrayal of the workers. Recognizing it as such, we ask all our critics: what change in the economic structure of the Soviet Union did the Hitler-Stalin pact usher in? We have thus far heard no answer. In fact the economic structure remains the same, and our policy of unconditional defense of the Soviet Union against the imperialist world must still be followed.

Following upon the heels of the pact came the invasion of Poland by the Red Army. More liberals left the Stalinist movement. The whole capitalist press began to howl about Stalin's "imperialism." Norman Thomas and his followers took up the cry; the Lovestonites joined in, and, alas, some of our close sympathizers permitted themselves to be led astray by the crime of Stalin and by the pressure of capitalist public opinion.

We too condemned the invasion, but from a totally different viewpoint. All others condemned it as an "imperialist venture." We condemned it because it confused the masses, undermined their faith in the Soviet Union and thus weakened it in the struggle which some or all of the imperialist nations will inevitably wage against it. We condemned the invasion in the same way

that revolutionary workers condemn reactionary activities of the leaders of their trade union, activities which would not in the least prevent them from defending the union against the bosses.

Revolutionary socialists do not look upon boundaries as sacred. When the Soviet Union invaded Poland in 1920 and Georgia in 1921 no class conscious worker hesitated for a moment in supporting it. "Socialists" condemned the invasions of those years as "red imperialism" but that was to be expected from lackeys of the capitalists. If and when it is necessary for the Soviet Union, in order to defend itself, to invade the territory of some capitalist nation, it would be perfectly justified in doing so. But it should be done under circumstances where the workers of the world can clearly see the necessity for the invasion. The sentiments of the workers must be taken into consideration because in the last analysis the defense of the Soviet Union depends upon them.

GAINS FROM INVASIONS OUTWEIGHED BY DAMAGE

"Now it is true that to some extent the Soviet Union has gained certain advantages by occupying a section of Poland. One advantage is that all of the Ukrainians are now out of reach of Hitler so that he cannot establish a phoney Ukrainian state to be utilized in an attack against the Soviet Union. There may also be some military-strategic advantages. But all of the advantages put together cannot compensate for the damage the invasion has done because of the terrible effect it has had on the workers of the world.

Had Stalin invaded Poland in order to struggle against Hitler, no class-conscious worker would have objected; it was criminal for him not only to invade Poland but to permit Hitler to seize the best section of Poland. The invasion, in and of itself, is not the crime. The circumstances under which it took place and the effect on the workers make it a crime. The same thing is true of the invasion of Finland. It is only

a simpleton who can condemn Stalin for wanting to fortify important bases on the Gulf of Finland, in order to protect Leningrad against an attack either by England and France or by Germany or by all three. Only middle-class liberals or middle-class "socialists" will take the attitude that the Soviet Union has no right to ask a smaller state to cede important bases for its defense. Class-conscious workers make a distinction between capitalist states and the Soviet Union. It does not at all follow that what we oppose as far as capitalist states are concerned we should oppose in a workers' state, even though degenerated.

We condemn the invasion of Finland not because the Soviet Union has become "imperialist," but because under the circumstances it had a terrible effect upon the workers of the world. It was not proved to the workers that the invasion was absolutely necessary to defend the Soviet Union. No attempt was made to appeal to the Finnish workers before the invasion took place. Ridiculous lies were spread about Finland threatening to attack the Soviet Union. The same tactics were used by Stalin in invading Poland as by Hitler in invading Poland. The invasion was criminal because, even if Stalin gets what he wants, it will not be sufficient compensation for the loss of faith in the Soviet Union amongst the workers.

WE DEFEND UNIONS DESPITE FALSE LEADERS

But the invasion is one thing and the defense of the Soviet Union is another. If we condemn Stalin's invasion, that does not mean that we change our attitude to the Soviet Union.

There are those who argue that even if we consider the Soviet Union as a workers' state we cannot defend it in every struggle that the Stalinists see fit to throw it into. Suppose a trade union, they argue, calls a strike to compel a boss to exclude Negroes. Revolutionary workers would not support that kind of a strike. Very true. But if that strike, called for a bad purpose, devel-

ops into a struggle between the union and the boss and the defeat of the union by the boss must inevitably result in the weakening of the union, then class-conscious workers defend the union against the boss regardless of the cause of the strike. The workers themselves must punish the treacherous leaders and not permit the boss to defeat the union.

Even if we should consider that Stalin's invasion had an objective which we would condemn, it would not alter our attitude, because the struggle in Finland is essentially, as I explained in a previous article, a struggle between the Soviet Union and capitalist Finland representing the capitalist world. In such a struggle we defend the Soviet Union.

STALIN'S OVERTHROW IS TASK OF THE WORKERS

Stalin's objective, however, as I mentioned above, is not something that we can condemn. The invasion is what we condemn. Frequently it happens that reactionary trade union leaders want to organize a section of workers who are opposed to unionism and the reactionary leaders, instead of educating these backward workers, send up gangsters to beat and intimidate them, thus antagonizing not only these but other workers. Nevertheless, if a strike should develop under circumstances where the union is placed in a bad position in the eyes of public opinion, including the public opinion of workers, there would be nothing else for us to do except to support the union to the utmost.

Because we condemn the reactionary leaders of the Soviet Union for invading Finland does not mean that we should permit the Finnish bourgeois army representing world capitalism to defeat the Red Army representing the workers' state.

Because of its criminal acts against the working masses the Stalinist bureaucracy must be overthrown—but only by the workers. As against the capitalist world the Soviet Union must be defended at all costs.

HOW STALIN SERVES HITLER A LETTER TO A COMMUNIST WORKER, DISCUSSING THE EFFECT OF STALINIST PROPAGANDA IN NAZI GERMANY

Dear Will:

Thank you for sending me the article from the Feb. 25 Sunday Worker. I have noted all the passages you have marked: the headline—"German Communists lead fight on Nazi hunger"—the picture of Thaelmann and the demand for his freedom, the assertion that "The Communists are just as merciless and penetrating in their exposure of the lies of the German imperialists as with the war propaganda of the Anglo-French bloc."

You so desperately want to believe that the Comintern is undermining Hitler in Germany, and to disprove my arguments that the Comintern now serves Hitler in return for the Stalin-Hitler pact, that you painstakingly searched out every conceivable word in that article which might prove your point. But you didn't underline very much! The few things you underlined are so much embroidery; the main content of the article, and in this it undoubtedly accurately reflects, as it claims, the type of propaganda being carried on by the Comintern in Germany is—a justification of the Hitler-Stalin pact.

If, the day before the Hitler-Stalin pact, I had asked you: "Is it possible for Hitler to conduct a foreign policy beneficial to the German workers?"—what would you have answered? No! How can bestial fascism do anything which serves the interests of the workers! You understood then, quite firmly, that there was no difference between Hitler's treaties and Hitler's breaking of treaties: no difference, for instance, between Munich and his march into Austria. Everything that he did, at home or abroad, was reactionary. Everything without exception.

Now, however, you and your party try to tell me, Hitler has done something very good. "Very good" is, indeed, a miserable understatement. Few rulers, indeed, have ever achieved anything remotely comparable on behalf of their people. Just see what, according to that Sunday Worker article, Hitler has done for the German people by concluding his pact with Stalin:

"The German-Soviet pact shows that the vital interests of the German people can definitely be protected by peaceful treaties, provided that the German working people decide for-

sign policy and have the power to guarantee such treaties."

Yes, I note the "provided that." But the Stalin-Hitler pact was concluded without those provisions; the German workers had no voice in it and no power to guarantee it. Apparently, therefore, "the German people can definitely be protected by peaceful treaties even though they are bound and gagged and tortured by Hitler!"

Here is another tremendous compliment paid to Hitler by the same Sunday Worker article:

"... The Soviet Union's pacts with Germany rescued the German people from the worst of counter-revolutionary wars and dethroned the predatory plans of the Allied warmakers against both the Soviet and the German peoples."

Hitler has seldom had such compliments paid to him, even by his own lickspittles. Just think! With a wave of his pen, Hitler saved the German people "from the worst of counter-revolutionary wars" and "ditched the predatory plans of the Allied warmakers."

EFFECT OF STALINIST PROPAGANDA IN GERMANY

What, logically, would be the effect of such propaganda on German workers who want a free, united Germany, who want to be rid of Hitler, but fear also the occupation of Germany by the Allies?

If he accepted the propaganda of your party, the German worker could only conclude: "After all, Hitler at the helm is not the worst thing. He has saved us from the worst of counter-revolutionary wars, has ditched the predatory plans of the Allied warmakers, has protected our vital interests by peaceful treaties with the Soviet Union. Better than another Versailles. We must wait until after the war before overturning a regime which can do these things."

they are responsible for this war. The way to stop the war is for us, the workers, to stop fighting, to stop working for this war machine.

STALIN WHITEWASHES HITLER'S WAR GUILT

But the worker under the influence of your party will never get to that point of revolt. For your party is not telling him that Hitler is responsible for this war. Your party is not telling the German worker that the main enemy is at home. Your party is telling him that the Allies are responsible for the war. I quote another of the many key paragraphs you did not underline:

"Brushing aside the legalistic 'origins' of the present war, the Communists point to THE REAL PROVOCATION OF THE WAR IN THE SYSTEMATIC EFFORTS OF THE ANGLO-FRENCH IMPERIALISTS to bring the Soviet Union and Germany into a head-on collision. With this goal in view, the British imperialists supported an entire series of German fascist aggressions. . . The Soviet Union effectively scotched these plots by its pacts with Germany."

If your party could convince the German workers that "the systematic efforts of the Anglo-French imperialists" is the "real provocation of the war", then why should they cease fighting and working for the German army? What would be the use, if the Anglo-French are alone responsible for the war? To stop war, one must deal blows at those responsible. They, according to your party, are outside Germany. The main enemy is not at home.

LENINIST SLOGANS ABSENT FROM COMINTERN LINE

The article points out correctly that the Anglo-French are not fighting for the freedom of Poland, the Czech and Austrian peoples. But search that article, and all the others of your party since the Hitler-Stalin pact, and nowhere will you find the elementary slogans on this question dictated to every real Leninist: For the freedom of the Polish, Czech, Slovak peoples from the yoke of Hitler! Is it an accident that a lengthy article describing Communist propaganda in Germany does not say these things? No, it is by design: the Leninist slogans against war are completely alien to the Comintern

line in Germany.

In America, your party is raising the slogan: "Not a man, not a cent, not a gun, for the imperialist war!" Why don't your party raise the same slogan in Germany? Because, in return for the pact with Stalin, your party serves Hitler. To serve him well, it must do so not too crudely. Therefore, as the article puts it, "One of their central rallying cries is the demand for the release of Thaelmann." Thaelmann should be freed. But can that possibly be a CENTRAL rallying slogan?

Look through that article again, and what other "rallying cries" do you find? "They call the people to action against the fearfully low wages and the sky-high of war profits, the mistreatment and bad food"—and these "action" slogans are justified by this: "The Communists emphasize that the fight for the immediate interests of the people is identical with the struggle against the war policy of German big capital."

A PSEUDO-RADICAL COVER FOR SERVING HITLER

That sounds radical, until you analyze it. Is "the war policy of German big capital" identical with fearfully low wages, war profits, etc., or is it something more? We, the Trotskyists, would say that low wages, profiteering, etc., although to be fought against, are merely accompaniments to German imperialism's war policy. The war policy itself is: the aim of imperialist expansion, the attempt to redivide the world. In other words, German imperialism, Hitler, is responsible for the fact of war itself.

But your party cannot say this, for it has already blamed the war on the Allies. Nor can it even fight against low wages and hunger effectively.

In a word, do you want a picture of your party in Germany? Then look at the Socialist Party of France, or the British Labor Party. They, too, talk of fighting low wages and hunger; but their war policy makes it impossible. Thus they serve the British and French rulers—as your party serves Hitler.

More, more, more, can be said on this question. I shall return to it next week.

Fraternaly,  
FELIX MORROW

West Indies Feel British Wartime Rule

By ROBERT L. BIRCHMAN

A partial stoppage of work in seven of Trinidad's oil fields in January gave the governor, Major Sir Hubert Young, the pretext to crack down on "agitators" and to place in compulsory detention, Uriah Butler, militant Negro trade unionist, just released from two years in prison for his activities in connection with the Trinidad general strike of 1937. The authorities feared a recurrence of the 1937 strike, when they landed bluejackets and marines in order to suppress the strike. The governor put through an agreement with the oil companies under which the strikers were induced to return to work. Under its terms a wage increase of two cents an hour was granted all around, plus a war bonus of half a cent an hour for every five point's rise in the cost of living. These concessions are less than meagre, as they are to be nullified by soaring prices.

From the few reports of conditions in the West Indies that seep through to the American Negro press, despite the rigid censorship, it is clear the West Indians are suffering from the burdens of the war. Increases in such prices of foodstuffs in Trinidad as much as 180 per cent (example: split peas, usually 5 cents per lb., now 14 cents), and 28 per cent in textiles (84 cent stockings are now \$1.08) but there has been no corresponding rise in wages. Sugar in large quantities is exported to England, while the population is restricted to purchases of 5 lbs.

Reports are that in Trinidad there has been near riot and discontent over the colony's gift of \$1,000,000 to England for the support of the war. In January city corporation laborers were battling to have their pay increased to 96 cents per day and were meeting with vicious opposition.

Food Profiteering Widespread

Profiteering in foodstuffs and textiles is widespread throughout the colonies. So terrific has been this upturn in prices that laws have been enacted in several of the colonies to curb the merchants. At St. Georges, the chamber of commerce petitioned Sir H. P. Popham, governor of the Windward Islands, "to set right the obvious hardships created upon merchants by the administering of the regulations consequent on the war." The governor has promised to investigate and effect changes to aid the merchants, which translated means that the poor people who have difficulties in peace time to buy the food necessary to exist upon will have their standard of living further reduced as a result of the war.

Royal Commission Report Suppressed

The report of the British Royal Commission on conditions in the West Indies, concluded before the outbreak of war and pigeon-holed, refused to stay buried and has emerged to plague and embarrass Malcolm McDonald, the Colonial Secretary. The report contains documentation of recent labor struggles in the West Indies and recommendations for correction of conditions. So revealing are the sections on Trinidad, Jamaica and Barbados that Mr. McDonald has refused to release them even to the members of Parliament that recommended the creation of the commission. One group is pressing for an immediate release and the institution of sweeping reforms in order "to earn the gratitude of the colonial peoples", but Mr. McDonald holds to the theory that the Empire is at war now and cannot gamble with the colonies now.

He fears that if the report is released, it would create a wave of resentment, and add fuel to the explosive conditions already existing in India, Africa, Ireland, and other sections of the Empire. Most embarrassing is the evidence contained in the report that in every instance the local commissions, made up of planter barons and high office holders, whitewashed the issue, released wrong figures on the casualties and voted enormous sums for modern arms and munitions to terrorize the peasants and workers.

Sentiment of the Negro Colonialists

In spite of the severe censorship existing in the colonies and the repressive measures against labor organizations we can be sure that the attitude expressed in The Barbados Observer in September is still the sentiment of the colonialists: "In the West Indies the elementary principles of democracy are denied the native masses. Therefore we are opposed to conscription. For example, when such savage sentences as ten years' imprisonment have been given to the negro worker, Ullric Grant, for championing the cause of his fellow workers, it is sheer impudence on the part of the British ruling class to appeal to colonial workers to help them defend their ill-gotten gains."

"We colonial workers have not forgotten the last World War, when all kinds of promises were made to us if only we would help get rid of Kaiser and Prussian militarism! Hundreds of thousands died in Europe, Palestine and Africa."

"But our masters have not fulfilled one of their promises. Instead, our reward has been more repressive laws, unemployment, and starvation."

"Just look at the condition of the African Peoples in South and East Africa, in Jamaica, in Trinidad, in Barbados and other parts of the West Indies. Even a hard-belled imperialist like Lloyd George described them as the slums of Empire."

"Furthermore, we shall never forget the shameful betrayal of Abyssinia by the so-called League of Nations dominated by the great democracies—Britain and France."

"We have no faith in Imperialist governments, regardless of whether they call themselves democratic or fascist. They are all Imperialists, and as such the exploiters and oppressors of colonial peoples. Therefore we are determined never again to allow ourselves to be used as cannon fodder by either camp in the coming war."