

The Negro Question

"LABOR WITH A WHITE SKIN CANNOT EMANCIPATE ITSELF WHERE LABOR WITH A BLACK SKIN IS BRANDED" — KARL MARX.

The Natchez Fire

Screaming and clawing for escape from suffocating smoke and crackling flames that swept through the hall in which they were dancing on the night of April 23 at Natchez, Mississippi, 198 Negroes died in heaps that mounted shoulder high and fell in horrible agony.

The dance hall had been converted from a blacksmith shop into an amusement center that featured well-known Negro orchestras. It was frequented by colored people barred from dance halls open to Southern whites. The windows were boarded; it had but one door which served for both entrance and exit; long festoons of tinder-dry Spanish moss hung from the rafters as decorations.

The fire began near the entrance, swept through the moss with terrifying swiftness and drove the packed dancers against the bandstand. The victims milled, screaming, crushing against the walls, beating futilely at the boarded windows as the flames curled down from the rafters and seared their bodies. They dropped in piles that resembled heaped up logs of smoking wood.

Within fifteen minutes the fire had burned itself out. Firemen chopped their way in. Moans came from the mounds of scorched bodies, and the few who were still writhing were dragged out. Twenty more of these crushed and burned victims died on the way to the hospital; eleven more succumbed during the day. Dozens more were near death.

All the facts indicate criminal negligence on the part of the Natchez authorities. Those whose duty it was to make sure that the ordinary fire precautions were carried out didn't care and didn't act. After all, the burning of Negroes is not something out of the ordinary in the South.

Southern Justice

The wave of horror which swept the country over this mass burning of Negroes, however, moved the authorities of Natchez to take action. An investigation was in order. It was necessary to fix the blame for the monstrous neglect of the city officials who were responsible.

Mayor William J. Byrne started a "thorough inquiry."

Although Sheriff Hyde Jenkins upon first coming upon the scene declared that the fire was clearly of accidental origin, Police Chief Joe Serio on the following day intimated that the fire had been set "deliberately."

Police Chief Joe Serio arrested five suspects and threw them in jail.

All five of the suspects, of course, are Negroes—in the language of the Southern Bourbons, "drunken Negroes."

Police Chief Joe Serio said that these arrests were based on "statements" made to him by unnamed people that "several drunken Negroes were overheard threatening to set the building on fire."

All that is lacking to complete this picture of Southern justice in action is a report from Police Chief Joe Serio that he was unable to save the five suspects from the anger of a lynch mob of whites.

The Bourbons of the South may pass over this incident as light-mindedly as they have passed over all the other gruesome and ghastly cruelties they have inflicted upon the Negroes. But this incident like all the others brings the revolutionary wrath of the oppressed a degree nearer its culmination. When that wrath bursts it will sweep the land with the fierce cleansing flames of the socialist revolution. It will wipe out the savage rule of the Southern Bourbons along with that of their Wall Street brothers with a thoroughness that will leave not the slightest trace behind.

May the flames in which the 198 died on the altar of Southern justice serve as a spark to light the cleansing fire!

A Letter from a Negro Reader

Editor: I am a college-trained Negro, favored with numerous labor, educational and political experiences that have given me a keen appreciation of the many economic problems facing the Negro people.

A solution to the Negro's problem will never be effected until there is a concerted effort together with the white masses of Labor. Economic maladjustment affects the Negro more adversely than any other racial group.

The American Negro has less to be patriotic for than any group in the world. Since the Socialist Appeal expresses the intention to right some of the many wrongs besetting the Negro people, I take great interest in this regard.

The following opinions on this question have been formed in my mind:

1. American capitalism has used the Negro to retain its dominant status.
2. Divide and Rule has been more advantageously applied on the Negro people than on any other racial group.
3. Perpetuation of race prejudice preserves those in the upper economic stratum and divides the masses of the two races in the lower economic stratum.
4. The unequal distribution of wealth is the cause of our economic chaos.
5. Negro reactionaries have greatly retarded the progress of the Negro people.
6. The hypocrisy of the American white man has caused Negro youth largely to distrust him, even in the labor movement.

Yours very truly,
Chicago, Illinois POPE THOMPSON

P.S.—I subscribe to the Socialist Appeal and deeply appreciate its facts and frankness.

British Arrest Indian Strike Leaders In Opening Drive to Crush Anti-War Movement of Workers

By ROBERT BIRCHMAN

British imperialism is clamping down on the forces of the All India Congress and the leaders of the militant strikes of the Indian workers and peasants. Wholesale arrests are taking place under the Defense of India Act.

Jaiprakash Narain, general secretary of the Congress Socialist Party was arrested at Patna on March 7. He is charged under the Defense of India Act. The Executive Committee of the Congress Socialist Party, meeting at Lucknow, March 11-13, passed the following resolution on the arrest of Narain:

"The Executive Committee of the All India Congress Socialist Party offers its felicitations to Jaiprakash Narain, its general secretary, on his arrest under the Defense of India Act.

"The Committee considers this arrest as symbolic of the determination of British Imperialism to suppress the struggle for independence in this country. This arrest constitutes a challenge to the forces of freedom represented by the Congress.

"The Committee feels that the present political stalemate cannot continue for very long and calls upon the members of the Congress Socialist Party and other fellow-fighters to be ready for the utmost sacrifice for the freedom of India."

Narain has been sentenced to nine months imprisonment.

S. S. Zaher, a member of the Executive Committee of the Congress Socialist Party was arrested at Lucknow on March 11, also under the Defense of India Ordinance. Numerous arrests have occurred of local and provincial leaders of the Congress, especially in Bengal.

WORKERS' AND PEASANTS' LEADERS ARRESTED WHOLESALE

Rahul Sankratyan, president-elect of the All India Kisan Sabha—peasants union—was arrested at Allahabad on March 15.

On March 11, three leaders of the Bombay Textile Workers Union—S. A. Dange, B. T. Ranadive and S. S. Mirykar—were arrested under the charge of carrying on anti-war propaganda.

S. V. Dhepande, joint secretary of the Textile Workers Union and a member of the Bombay Provincial Trade Union Congress, which declared the general strike of textile workers in Bombay was arrested on March 16. He was arrested after having delivered two speeches alleged to be prejudicial to public order.

Latest reports are that R. S. Nimbkar, general secretary of the Textile Workers Union, has been arrested. He is charged with a breach of the order prohibiting meetings. Nimbkar visited England last August where he spoke to the Lancashire textile workers and appealed for closer cooperation between the Indian Trade Union Congress and the British Trade Union Congress.

"We shall have to struggle in the near future to stop the employers' offensive against us," he said, "and we hope the Lancashire workers will give us their support—for any rise in the standards of Indian workers is bound to benefit the Lancashire workers in the long run."

POLITICAL GENERAL STRIKE CALLED IN BOMBAY

The Council of Action of the Bombay Provincial Trade Union Congress, at its meeting on March 12, decided to call a one-day general strike in Bombay on March 15 as a protest against the "attack on democratic liberties" and to demand the release of their leaders.

Latest papers from India give us a few highlights on the strike of the 160,000 Bombay textile workers, which is still going on. The strike was called for Monday but the workers spontaneously struck on Sunday. Picketing prevented the night shift from entering the plants. At least 25 processions paraded the streets and joined a mass meeting in the evening at which a resolution was adopted protesting the police ban on meetings and processions in the labor areas effective on Monday.

Nearly 90 percent of all mill workers were out on the first day of the strike. Workers in six silk mills, about 10,000 workers, struck in sympathy with the textile workers. A new feature of this strike has been mass picket lines. Women have been especially active on the picket lines and by 3 p.m. of the first day of the strike 36 women pickets had been arrested on charges of disorderly behavior or for breach of the police order prohibiting assemblies.

Five hundred textile workers organized a one-day hunger strike in Bombay against the

Over 100 workers in one of the generating stations of the Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation struck on March 13 against the dismissal of two of their fellow-workers.

The managing committee of the Bombay Transport Coolies Union has, on behalf of the workers employed on harbor construction projects, demanded a war allowance of 20 percent. D. V. Pradhar, secretary of the union notified the contractors that if the allowance is not granted the workers will go out on strike.

These great strike struggles of the Indian masses are the driving force pushing the left wing of the All India Congress into direct collision with the British overlords. They are the explanation for the strong language of the resolution adopted by the Congress' Working Committee, and which was presented to the plenary session of the Congress at Ramgarh, March 19. The resolution read in part:

"The Congress considers the declaration by the British Government of India as a belligerent country, without reference to the Indian people, and the exploitation of India's resources for war, as an affront which no self-respecting and freedom-loving people can tolerate.

"The recent pronouncement made on behalf of the British Government regarding India, demonstrates that Britain is fighting for fundamentally imperialist ends and the preservation of the Empire, which is based upon the exploitation of the Indian people and other Asiatic and African peoples.

"Hence it is clear that the Congress cannot in any way, directly or indirectly, participate in such a war, which means the perpetuation of exploitation... Congressmen and those under Congress influence cannot help in the prosecution of the war with men, money or material. Congress declares again

that nothing short of complete independence is acceptable. Indian freedom cannot exist within the orbit of imperialism, and Dominion or other status, is wholly inapplicable to India and is not in keeping with the dignity of a great nation. It would bind India in many ways to British policies and economic structure. The people of India alone can properly shape a constitution through a Constituent Assembly on the basis of adult suffrage, or determine relations with other countries of the world."

These strong words have, unfortunately, not been implemented as yet by the proposed civil disobedience campaign. Gandhi and the right wing were able to stave off action at the Ramgarh Congress.

In the following weeks, however, the great strike wave has continued to grow, and provides an ever more imperative pressure for a general collision with the British rulers.

The Struggle for a Proletarian Party

By JAMES P. CANNON
National Secretary, S.W.P.

(This is the third of a series of articles by Comrade Cannon, to acquaint our readers with the party's estimate of the dispute which arose in the party, was debated in a seven-months' discussion, and was settled by a decisive majority at the Third National Convention, April 5-9. In previous issues of the APPEAL we published all the Majority and Minority resolutions. Comrade Cannon's first two articles dealt with the way in which, under the impact of the war, the petty-bourgeois minority had abandoned our programmatic stand for the defense of the Soviet Union and how the ensuing dispute "unfolded as a fundamental conflict with the Fourth International over all the questions of our program, our method and our tradition." Comrade Cannon's articles are taken from his pamphlet, published in the Internal Bulletin before the convention—Editors.)

The Organization Question

As long as the real scope of the political and theoretical disputes remained undetermined the talk about the organization question contributed, and could contribute, nothing but confusion. But, now that the fundamental political issues are fully clarified, now that the two camps have taken their position along fundamental lines, it is possible and perhaps feasible to take up the organization question for discussion in its proper setting and in its proper place—as an important but subordinate issue; as an expression in organizational terms of the political differences, but not as a substitute for them.

The fundamental conflict between the proletarian and the petty-bourgeois tendencies expresses itself at every turn in questions of the party organization. But involved in this secondary conflict are not little incidents, grievances, personal friction and similar small change which are a common feature in the life of every organization. The dispute goes deeper. We are at war with Burnham and the Burnhamites over the fundamental question of the character of the party. Burnham, who is completely alien to the program and traditions of Bolshevism, is no less hostile to its "organizational methods." He is much nearer in spirit to Souvarine and all the decadents, skeptics and renegades of Bolshevism than to the spirit of Lenin and his terrible "regime."

Burnham is concerned first of all with "democratic guarantees" against degeneration of the party after the revolution. We are concerned first of all with building a party that will be capable of leading the revolution. Burnham's conception of party democracy is that of a perpetual talking shop in which discussions go on forever and nothing is ever firmly decided. (See the resolution of the Cleveland Conference!) Consider his "new" invention—a party with two different public organs defending two different and antagonistic programs! Like all the rest of Burnham's independent ideas that is simply a plagiarism from alien sources. It is not difficult to recognize in this brilliant scheme of party organization a rehabilitation of Norman Thomas' ill-fated "all inclusive party."

Our conception of the party is radically different. For us the party must be a combat organization which leads a determined struggle for power. The Bolshevik party which leads the struggle for power needs not only internal democracy. It also requires an imperious centralism and an iron discipline in action. It requires a proletarian composition conforming to its proletarian program. The Bolshevik party cannot be led by dilettantes whose real interests and real lives are in another and alien world. It requires an active professional leadership, composed of individuals democratically selected and democratically controlled, who devote their entire lives to the party, and who find in the party, and in its multifarious activities in a proletarian environment, complete personal satisfaction.

For the proletarian revolutionist the party is the concentrated expression of his life purpose, and he is bound to it for life and death. He preaches and practices party patriotism, because he knows that his socialist ideal cannot be realized without the party. In his eyes the crime of crimes is disloyalty or irresponsibility towards the party. The proletarian revolutionist is proud of his party. He defends it before the world on all occasions. The proletarian revolutionist is a disciplined man, since the party cannot exist as a combat organization without discipline. When he finds himself in the minority, he loyally submits to the decision of the party and carries out its decisions, while he awaits new events to verify the disputes or new opportunities to discuss them again.

The petty-bourgeois attitude toward the party, which Burnham represents, is the opposite of all this. The petty-bourgeois character of the opposition is shown in their attitude towards the party, their conception of the party, even in their method of complaining and whining about their "grievances," as unfurling as in their light-minded attitude towards our program, our doctrine and our tradition.

The petty-bourgeois intellectual, who wants to teach and guide the labor movement without participating in it, feels only loose ties to the party and is always full of "grievances" against it. The moment his toes are stepped on, or he is rebuffed, he forgets all about the interests of the movement and remembers only that his feelings have been hurt; the revolution may be important, but the wounded vanity of a petty-bourgeois intellectual is more important. He is all for discipline when he is laying down the law to others, but as soon as he finds himself in a minority, he begins to deliver ultimatums and threats of split to the party majority.

The leaders of the opposition are running true to type. Having recited the whole dolorous catalogue of their petty and inconsequential and mostly imaginary grievances; having been repulsed by the proletarian majority in their attempt to revise the program; having been called in sociological and political terms by their right

name—having "suffered" all these indignities—the leaders of the opposition are now attempting to revenge themselves upon the party majority by threats of split. That will not help them. It will not prevent us from characterizing their revisionist improvisations, and showing that their attitude on the organization question is not disconnected from their petty-bourgeois conceptions in general, but simply a secondary expression of them.

Organization questions and organization methods are not independent of political lines, but subordinate to them. As a rule, the organizational methods flow from the political line. Indeed, the whole significance of organization is to realize a political program. In the final analysis there are no exceptions to this rule. It is not the organization—the party or group—which creates the program; rather it is the program that creates the organization, or conquers and utilizes an existing one. Even those unprincipled groups and cliques which have no program or banner of their own, cannot fail to have a political program imposed upon them in the course of a struggle. We are now witnessing an illustration of the operation of this law in the case of those people in our party who entered into a combination to fight against the "regime" without having any clearly defined political program of differences with it.

In this they are only reproducing the invariable experience of their predecessors who put the cart before the horse, and formed factions to struggle for "power," before they had any clear idea of what they would do with the power after they got it.

In the terminology of the Marxist movement, unprincipled cliques or groups which begin a struggle without a definite program have been characterized as political bandits. A classic example of such a group, from its beginning to its miserable end in the backwaters of American radicalism, is the group known as "Lovestonites." This group, which took its name from the characterless adventurer who has been its leader, poisoned and corrupted the American Communist movement for many years by its unprincipled and unscrupulous factional struggles, which were carried on to serve personal aims and personal ambitions, or to satisfy personal grievances. The Lovestonites were able and talented people, but they had no definite principles. They knew only that they wanted to control the party "regime." As with Abern, this question always occupied first place in their calculations; the "political" program of the moment was always adapted to their primary aim of "solving the organization question satisfactorily"—that is, in their favor.

They were wild-eyed radicals and ultra-leftists when Zinoviev was at the head of the Comintern. With the downfall of Zinoviev and the violent right swing of the Comintern under Bukharin, they became ardent Bukharinites as quickly and calmly as one changes his shirt. Due to an error in calculation, or a delay in information, they were behindhand in making the switch from Bukharin to Stalin and the frenzied leftism of the Third Period. To be sure, they tried to make up for their oversight by proposing the expulsion of Bukharin at the party convention they controlled in 1929. But this last demonstration of political flexibility in the service of rigid organizational aims came too late. Their tardiness cost them their heads.

Their politics were always determined for them by external pressure. At the time of their membership in the Communist Party it was the pressure of Moscow. With their formal expulsion from the Comintern a still weightier pressure began to bear down upon them, and they gradually adapted themselves to it. Today this miserable and isolated clique, petty-bourgeois to the core, is tossed about by bourgeois democratic public opinion like a feather in the breeze. The Lovestonites never had any independent program of their own. They were never able to develop one in the years since their separation from the official Communist Party. Today their paper, the Workers Age, is hardly distinguishable from a journal of left liberalism. A horrible example of the end result of unprincipled "organizational" politics.

The most horrible case of all, with the most immeasurably tragic final consequences, is that of the "Anti-Trotskyist" faction in the Russian Communist Party. It is unquestionable that the Stalin-Zinoviev-Kamenev combination began its factional struggle against Trotsky without any clearly defined programmatic aim. And precisely because it had no program, it became the expression of alien class influences. The ultimate degeneration of the Stalinist faction, into a helpless tool of imperialism and a murderous opponent of the true representatives of the Russian revolution, is not, as our enemies say, the logical development of Bolshevism. It is rather the ultimate outcome of a departure from the Bolshevik-Marxist method of principled politics.

All proportions guarded, the degeneration of the Abern clique, from formal adherents to the program and doctrine of Marxism into factional supporters of revisionism, has followed the same pattern as the other examples cited. The present ideological and political hegemony of Burnham in the opposition bloc is the most striking proof of the political law that groups and cliques which have no program of their own become the instruments of the program of others. Burnham has a program of a sort. It is the program of struggle against the doctrine, the methods and the tradition of our movement. It was only natural, indeed it was inevitable, that those who combined with Burnham to fight against the "regime" should fall under the sway of his program. The speed with which Abern accomplished this transformation can be explained in part by the fact that he has had previous experience in ideological betrayal in the service of pickayune organizational ends, and in part by the fact that the social pressure upon our party is much heavier today than ever before. This pressure accelerates all developments.

Trotsky Presents The Case for Revolution

THE LIVING THOUGHTS OF KARL MARX, presented by Leon Trotsky. Longmans, Green and Co. 1939. 90c.

There will be no volume in the Living Thoughts Library more full of life than this condensed version of Marx's economic teachings as he expounded them in the first part of "Capital" and as they are applied to contemporary society by Trotsky.

In "Capital" Marx first explained the laws which govern the development of capitalist economy. These principles provide the scientific basis of the proletarian revolutionary movement for socialism.

Marx's method of historical materialism demonstrates its practical superiority over rival theories by its power of prediction. Have Marx's doctrines stood the test of time? In his introduction Trotsky essays to answer this question with particular reference to the development of American economy.

On the basis of the law of labor value, the prime regulator of capitalist economy, Marx predicted that free, progressive competitive capitalism would necessarily give way to reactionary monopolist forces in the latter stages of capitalist development. Today in every matured capitalist country we see monopoly capital ruling industry, finance, politics. In the United States where capitalism has ascended to skyscraping heights. A few hundred interlinked wealthy families, owning over three-fifths of the national wealth, control the economic and political lives of 140,000,000 people.

Predictions Ridiculed, But Come True

Alongside this unprecedented concentration of wealth a second prediction of Marx has been realized: "the theory of increasing misery." The growing impoverishment of the wage-earners, the expropriation of the agricultural workers, the army of permanent unemployed swollen each year by fresh legions of young recruits, the reduction of living standards demanded by war or the preparations for war—all these phenomena are living proofs of Marx's thesis that capitalism breeds misery for the masses in proportion as it enriches their plutocratic masters.

How many times have bourgeois economists and their echoers in the labor movement ridiculed Marx's statements concerning the decline of the middle classes! Here Trotsky points out how the concentration of capital has involved a steady diminution in the economic importance of the propertied middle strata and in their relative share of the national income. The "new middle class," which has arisen beside the old out of the growth of the technical professions, has even less claim to an independent economic and political position in present-day society. Where capitalism has been unable to eliminate middle-class elements, it has degraded them without limit. "The middle class is not proletarianized only because it is pauperized."

Crises, said Marx, were essential and inescapable phases of the cyclical movement of capitalist economy and could not be avoided under capitalist conditions. They would grow progressively worse, working greater havoc to the system. Not at all, retorted the apologists for capitalism, crises are simply symptoms of growth which would cease when capitalism reached maturity. The crises that have shaken capitalism since the first world war, and especially since 1929, have decided that argument also in Marx's favor. The capitalist system lurches from one economic, political, social crisis, to the next—and its most devoted defenders no longer dare predict an end to these crises.

War and Revolution

Marx not only foretold the catastrophic collapse of capitalism, now being enacted before our eyes. He also foresaw its end. The expropriators, we read on the last page of this book, would be expropriated by the popular masses who had everything to gain and nothing to lose. This prediction, positively realized by the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, has been negatively confirmed by the inability of the capitalist class to find any enduring solution for its own problems.

Fascism and the New Deal, says Trotsky, are but two methods employed by capitalist reaction to stave off the inevitable socialist revolution. The murderous method of Fascism is first adopted by the poorer capitalist powers. New Dealism is the privileged policy of the rich aristocratic imperialisms, above all, that of the United States.

These alternative policies for the preservation of decaying capitalism reveal their common bankruptcy and insane barbarism in the second combat between the imperialist states for possession of the world.

To stop this senseless slaughter, to substitute a planned economy for the existing economic chaos, and to give mankind a fresh start, the working masses must, and will, learn to abolish private ownership of the means of production, first on a national and finally on a world scale.

Get workers interested in our movement to read this book. Here is the case for the socialist revolution brilliantly and briefly presented by the greatest living interpreter of Marxism.

LIVING THOUGHTS OF MARX

By LEON TROTSKY

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