

The Negro Question
by Robert L. Birchman

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

Typical of a great deal of the editorial comment in the Negro press last week was that in the May 18 Pittsburgh Courier, biggest Negro newspaper:

The total war has started. We are now seeing an immense worldwide struggle of rival imperialists and oppressors to decide which will rule and exploit the rich tropic lands and the half billion black and brown folk who inhabit them.

It is not a war between dictatorship and democracy.

So far as darker peoples are concerned, one side is no more democratic than the other.

England's colored subjects have no more voice in Parliament than Germany's Jews have in the Reichstag.

France's African subjects have no more voice in their government than the average Negro in the Southern States.

Belgium's vast Congo region, big as all of our South, has 13,000,000 black folk who dare not mention the word democracy.

Italy still stamps on the liberties of 15,000,000 black folk in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Libya and Somaliland.

In the Netherlands' East Indies, where ten cents a day is a "good" wage, all the many native leaders are in exile or in their graves, and the 60,000,000 serfs are crushed under a dictatorship which makes Hitler's rule of Poland seem benevolent by comparison.

Portugal, the worst of all colonizers because the least intelligent and competent, is a stooge of England, whose colonial policies she religiously follows, to the great detriment of her black subjects.

The United States, which preens itself as the champion of democracy, denies it to its dark millions, and refuses to even protect them from lynching, discrimination and segregation.

Yes, it is a total war, and dark folk are the stakes.

If this total war destroys white civilization, there are hundreds of millions of people in Africa and Asia who will not mourn.

But some of the Negro papers have already begun to talk like their white masters. The May 18 Afro-American of Baltimore was saying: "We have the choice of jumping in while the Nazis are hard-pressed, or waiting until Adolf sits on top of the world, and then fight him by ourselves. . . . Peace at any price is as unthinkable today as in 1914 . . . we must fight to preserve what President Roosevelt calls our culture and our civilization."

Who is that "we" and "our" that the Afro-American is talking about? Is the only choice for the Negro masses the choice between two slave-masters? If those are the only two alternatives, the Negroes might as well commit suicide. But they are NOT the only alternatives because they are not alternatives at all, they are the same thing. The other choice is for the Negroes to join with militant white workers and the colonial peoples against all their oppressors. If millions of us are to die, then let us die fighting for freedom and not for the bosses, fascist or "democratic."

GM Bolder Under War Drive Impetus

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intense this week that the union was forced to issue a special letter to the membership warning against the company's conspiracy to provoke unorganized demonstrations and actions which could only weaken the union at this time.

Membership Not Informed

The waves of unrest created by the company's campaign of intimidation have been increased by the secrecy with which Hillman and Murray and the others have been conducting the GM negotiations, but the GM workers have not even received assurance that any agreement extracted from the company will be submitted to the membership for their ratification.

This uncertainty and unrest in the ranks of the auto workers have been turned into positive dismay and fierce anger this week by the statement of President R. J. Thomas that he is defying the instructions of the rank and file and is not demanding the 30-hour week at 40-hours pay from GM.

Militant Back 30-Hour Week

The South Fisher program for the 30-hour week at 40-hours pay, initiated by a local union representing about 7,000 workers, was supported immediately in membership meetings by Flint Chevrolet Local No. 659 and Flint Buick Local No. 599, both locals together representing approximately 23,000 workers.

Other locals in Pontiac and throughout the auto area have also given assurance of support to the South Fisher resolution. Pontiac Yellow Coach Local No. 594 was the first in the City of Pontiac to go on record for the fighting program of the 30-hour week.

Already, therefore, a solid bloc of local unions, representing at least 40,000 GM workers have made it clear that they support the South Fisher resolution and that they want the 30-hour week not in the vague and distant future, but in the next agreement.

The faint-hearted International leadership of Thomas & Co., trying desperately to find an excuse for "disregarding" the expressed mandate of the membership, is now trying to drag out the red herring of the Ford Drive.

But they have had opportunities to organize Ford's for over a year and a half, and they have done nothing about it. Only now,

at this belated date, in the face of the rank and file demands for immediate negotiations for the 30-hour week at 40-hours pay in GM, the UAW leaders, aided and abetted by so-called progressives like Emil Mazey, President of Briggs Local No. 212, are trying to use the Ford campaign as a cover for their inaction and cowardly policy in GM.

Along the line of this miserable attempt a meeting of all local union presidents of Detroit was called last Tuesday night for the purpose of preparing the "Ford campaign." Three fourths of the speakers at this meeting spent their time lambasting Homer Martin, much in the same manner as the old pre-war Republican politicians, who, to cover their own treachery, used to wave the bloody shirt and kept on fighting the Civil War far into the 20th Century.

Split Among Leaders

This top leadership is split into two basic groups, with a bitter, deep-going division between them that threatens to flare up into a bitter conflict at the coming convention.

Thomas is president of the union today, but at least three other International Board members are trying to get his job. Reuther, Frankenstein and Addes. Do these other men differ with Thomas on program or union principles?

The unscrupulous Stalinist stooge, Frankenstein, is in a big fight with the so-called Lewis men—Thomas and Reuther. What differences divide these two groups of men on union principles? None!

The auto workers, the most militant union men in the American labor movement, are reaching out for a basic solution to their economic insecurity. They are demanding militant action to win the 30-hour week at 40-hours pay! They know that the corporations will in the next couple of months attempt to insure immense war profits, by attempts to smash the union, drag down wage levels, and increase the hours of work. The ranks feel that unless they inaugurate aggressive action while there is time and while the union is strong, they will not be in a position to withstand the terrific corporation offensive that will inevitably come with high-gear war production.

They also know that you cannot organize Ford by a lot of baloney and empty gestures. They

CHI. MILKMEN ON PICKET LINE ONCE AGAIN

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The 89 companies which have already signed with the union can, it is estimated, produce sufficient milk for the city by working overtime.

The milk drivers were out on strike during May 1-2, when the bosses attempted to introduce a 25% wage cut of the \$48 wage. Two days of militant strike action forced the bosses to retreat, and the men went back to work with a guarantee of the \$48 wage scale until a new agreement was concluded. The truce under which they went back to work provided, however, that after 30 days negotiations, the differences be submitted to arbitration.

The union membership at a meeting May 9 rejected the provision for arbitration. In the negotiations the bosses demanded the immediate installation of a

15% wage cut, but got nowhere. Whereupon on Saturday, May 18, the bosses posted a notice on all barns that beginning with May 20, the basic wage would be lowered to \$40 per week—an \$8 cut.

This constituted a lockout, which the workers answered with militant strike action.

The milk drivers are fighting a battle whose outcome is important for other unions too. The Pop and Bakery drivers of Chicago are still being stalled on their new contract, while their bosses await the results of the milk strike. Philip S. Hanna, editor of the Chicago Journal of Commerce, addressing three hundred bosses at the Sioux City Traffic Club on May 8, singled out the Chicago milk drivers for a vicious attack.

Attending the meeting were trucking bosses from Omaha, Chicago, Kansas City, St. Paul, Minneapolis, and other cities. They are watching the milk strike, planning an intensive campaign to reduce the present drivers' scale in all mid-Western cities if the strike is lost. That is why the fight of the Chicago milk drivers is a national issue, and must be supported by the entire labor movement.

LEWIS WANTS SHARE IN FDR WAR DRIVE

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On Feb. 10, praising resolutions against loans to Finland, and defending them against Roosevelt, who had characterized the resolutions as "twaddle," Lewis said: "Those resolutions are symbolic of what is in the hearts not only of the young men and women of America, but of practically every citizen. They represent the constant and the conscious and unconscious fears that, in some way, the politicians and statesmen of this country and the warring world will in some fashion drag our country into the war, and it's a protest."

And he repeated these anti-war, anti-Roosevelt sentiments on succeeding occasions — until Roosevelt's war drive got under full steam last week.

know that the Ford workers must have their confidence restored in the UAW-CIO, by showing them that the union is forging ahead. And the way to forge ahead is to fight and get the 30-hour week at 40-hours pay.

Then, dropping all criticism of the war preparations, Lewis told the Amalgamated convention: "It is publicly known that labor is fully in accord with the necessity of national defense." Lewis raised only one question:

"Will labor be given a voice in the determination of national defense policies and in the discussion of national defense production? If not, why not? Who is more entitled to a voice? If the country wants the cooperation of labor to do the work of preparing for war, and in the event of war to do the necessary dying in the war, what is wrong with a little cooperation on policies?"

"Even imperial England had to come to it, and surely democratic America can give labor adequate representation."

In other words, Lewis wants no more than the British Labor Party bureaucrats got—a few seats in the cabinet, in exchange for which they redoubt their efforts—for they were already supporting the war—to drag every last worker in to his death.

Lewis has come to heel, as Green did before him. The bureaucrats of the AFL and the CIO, just as the Gompers leadership in 1917, will be recruiting sergeants.

That means that the fight against the war and for labor's rights will have to be waged in spite of and against the labor bureaucrats.

IBEW PICKETS CON-EDISON POWER PLANT

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securities, amount to \$1,083,203.468. It is one of the wealthiest corporations in the United States. The income from the sale of electricity for the twelve month period, ending March 31, 1940, was \$199,041,450—almost ten million dollars more than in the previous twelve months. The company reported that the profits for that period of operation was \$37,045,006.

The increased profits came from the low wages paid to the workers. The increased profits also came from the Edison Company's monopoly control of the sale of gas and electricity. Consumers are charged far more than is warranted by the cost of production, but the workers get none of the gravy.

The Edison Company has gotten the aid of Thurman Arnold, who has been smashing down on Local 3 in the guise of 'trust-busting.' If there is any trust-busting to be done, it is the Edison Company that under the rules of the Sherman Anti-trust law itself, should be busted wide open!

Here is more: The Board of Directors of the Edison Company have voted themselves some pretty fancy salaries. Too fancy, in fact. For on March 21, 1940, the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court convicted the Directors of the Company of "misappropriation" of company assets.

A minority group of stockholders brought out in the suit that the Directors had "given" a little present of \$155,900 to Matthew S. Sloan when he retired in 1932. It was revealed that, "in recent years, the investment banking house of Morgan, Stanley, and Co., has handled as principal underwriter, all Consolidated Edison financing." Since 1935, this underwriting amounted to \$401,747,000; tens-of-millions of dollars of which went into the pockets of the House of Morgan.

It is the same old story come to light again. The bosses get the gravy; the workers, a bare bone to chew on. And when the workers do get a little meat on the bone, down comes the hammer of the capitalist system—and Local 3 is indicted for operating in "restraint of trade!"

Consolidated Edison workers! Help your brothers on the picket line! Support their strike for better hours, better wages!

Roosevelt Ready To Spike Walsh-Healey Act

by FARRELL DOBBS

Roosevelt addressed a joint session of the United States Congress on May 16, beating the drums for a bigger and better armament program. The last echoes of his speech had hardly faded before the hounds of big business, hot on the scent of greater war profits, were baying loudly in the halls of Congress.

Full of patriotic zeal, the bosses are more than anxious to build planes, guns, tanks and all the other engines of death and sell them to the government. But they want no interference with their profits.

Roosevelt has been quick to oblige. Administration officials and Congressional committees are preparing legislation which will repeal the limitations on profits and, at the same time, void the main provisions of the Walsh-Healey Act and the Wage-Hour Act.

The Walsh-Healey Act forbids the issuance of government contracts to employers unless they pay the prevailing wage. The unions have been able to make use of it in protecting union wage rates in some industries and in establishing the 40-hour week. The Wage-Hour Act calls for a minimum wage rate of 30c per hour and a maximum work week of 42 hours.

The "impartial" government is preparing to revise legislation affecting the war industries so that both capital and labor will have a free hand—capital to make unlimited profits and labor to work longer hours at lower pay.

The top officialdom of both the AFL and the CIO have steered a deliberate course away from independent working class action. Instead, they relied upon the "friends of labor" in the government apparatus. They hailed the passage of the Walsh-Healey Act and the Wage-Hour Act, among others, as proof of the wisdom of this policy. This leadership sought to curb militant class struggle action by the trade unions in strike struggles against the employers and denounced all efforts of the workers to establish their own independent political party.

Now the mass production workers in the war industries find that their "friend" Roosevelt and their "friends" in Congress are stepping away from all responsibility to which they previously committed themselves.

The trade union workers, following the false advice of their national leadership, depended upon Roosevelt. He has double-crossed them again. They must now overcome their delusions and prepare for an independent struggle against the bosses.

Roosevelt has already anticipated that this struggle will be made. The demand of Congressman Martin Dies, public stool pigeon number one, that special funds be appropriated to investigate "Fifth Column" activities in the war industries, is the first step in a strike-breaking program. The "Fifth Column" which Roosevelt-Dies really has in mind is none other than the militant workers who will stand up and fight for their rights.

The struggle of the workers will become increasingly difficult. Roosevelt will intervene more and more openly on the side of the bosses. Victory for the workers lies only in militant trade union action, and independent political action of the workers through their own party.

The Struggle for a Proletarian Party
By JAMES P. CANNON
National Secretary, S.W.P.

(This is the last 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.)

The Case of Burnham

Shachtman and I worked hand in hand in this period, jointly defending the program of the Fourth International on the Russian question and jointly defending the "regime." At that time, with the knowledge and participation of Shachtman, I wrote a letter about the question of Burnham to Comrade Crux. I consider it necessary now to publish this letter. I think it will convince any objective comrade of at least two points: 1) That the conflict with Burnham, which has reached the present state of irreconcilability, was clearly foreshadowed more than two years ago; 2) That I personally wanted to do everything possible to maintain good relations with him and to preserve him for the revolutionary movement. Here I quote my letter to Comrade Crux in full:

December 16, 1937

"Dear Comrade Crux,

"The trip to Minneapolis took two weeks out of my schedule at a very awkward time—the eve of the convention. Nevertheless, I think it was worthwhile. From all indications we succeeded, not only in frustrating the frame-up game of the Stalinists, but in dealing them a very heavy blow in the trade union movement, especially. In this case they counter-posed themselves, not merely to the "Trotskyites" as a group, but to the organized labor movement of Minneapolis. The results were devastating for them. And I must admit we helped the natural process along.

"Our comrades in Minneapolis were on the offensive all along the line. And it appears to me their position in the trade union movement is stronger than ever. Nationally, also, I think we came out of this skirmish victorious. The fact that Professor Dewey, in his radio speech, referred to the Minneapolis frame-up, is somewhat of an indication that our campaign recorded itself in the minds of a fairly wide circle of people who follow the developments in the labor movement.

"I now hope to be able to concentrate all my time and attention on the preparations for the convention. I am completely optimistic about it. I know that the active membership throughout the country, especially those engaged in mass work, and they are by no means few in number, are looking to the convention with great expectations and enthusiasm.

"We plan to orient the convention along the lines of our general perspectives and tasks, and our concrete work in the trade unions, putting the dispute over the Russian question in its proper proportions. The comrades in the field are up in arms at the perspective, indicated by the internal discussion bulletins, that the convention might resolve itself merely into a discussion of the Russian question.

"It has been decided that I should make the trade union report with the objective of raising this question to first place in

the convention deliberations. Our comrades engaged in trade union work are securing modest successes in an unexpected number of places. And it is in precisely these places where the party is going forward, drawing in new members, and where the spirit of revolutionary optimism prevails.

"The general pessimism and spirit of defeatism, so strong now in the circles of intellectualistic and de-classed radicals, affects our organization primarily in New York. Here, it must be admitted, the social composition is not of the best, and that explains many things. As for the real workers, the harsh exigencies of the daily struggle do not permit them to speculate too much on the sad state of the world, and they have no place whither to retire.

"I feel reasonably sure that the convention will be a success from the point of view of organizing and stimulating our mass work, and pointing the whole activity of the party in this direction. At the same time, of course, we will not slur over the principled disputes. I have had several talks with Comrade Shachtman on this matter. We are fully agreed, and firmly resolved, to fight for a clear and unambiguous Bolshevik answer to every question. We hope at the same time to conduct this uncompromising fight in such a manner, and in such a tone, as to avoid any serious disruption of personal comradely relations. We can restrain ourselves in this respect to the utmost because we are assured of the firm support of the overwhelming majority of the party, and in particular of the worker Bolsheviks.

"Regarding the suggestion that Comrade B. should be invited to visit you, both Max and I are of the opinion that this is totally excluded before the convention. In truth, I am very doubtful whether it will be feasible after the convention. We must wait and see the outcome of the convention.

"I feel it my duty to write you in complete frankness about this matter, and I do so with full confidence that my remarks will remain with you and your immediate co-workers.

"We do not want to do or say anything that would tend to sharpen personal relations. Both Max and I are going as far as possible to conciliate and smooth over everything, as long as it is not a matter of blurring principled lines. But that is just the nub of the matter. It appears to us that Comrade B. is undertaking to revolt from fundamental principles in general, and not only on the Russian question.

"As the convention approaches, we come more and more into conflict over the conception of the party. The questions of democracy, centralism, irreconcilability, stubborn resistance against the infiltration of alien moods and theories, the necessity of a brutal offensive against the intellectualistic calamity howlers, defeatists, and belly-achers in general—on all these questions, which, in the present situation spell the meaning of Bolshevism, we come more and more into profound, if politely conducted dispute. In such a time as this, when we must take arms against the world of enemies and disintegrating factors, Comrade B. is greatly handicapped by his background, his environment, and his training. He has a strong character, and of his ability, I need not speak, but it seems to me, that the disputes arising from the Russian question, and now from other questions, are not primarily—or, better, not fundamentally—intellectual or theoretical.

"Now, I must tell you, dear friend, that I think he is suffering from the intellectual soul sickness. Who can cure that? If he were completely identified with a group of worker Bolsheviks, and could be brought under the influence of their spirit in day to day struggle, one could have more hope. But there's the rub. He does not really feel himself to be one of us. Party work, for him, is not a vocation but an avocation. He is not in a position to travel the world, to take part in the action of our comrades in the field, to live with them, and learn from them, and come under their influence in his personal life. His social environment is entirely different. You know very well that the academic world of the real, as well as the pseudo, intellectuals, is weighted down now with the heavy pessimism in general, and with a new skepticism about everything. Without his really comprehending it, Comrade B. himself is affected by this pressure of his daily environment. Combining this with a great tendency on his part to deprecate his party co-workers, and to resist the idea of being influenced or taught anything, even by our international comrades, and you can see the problem doesn't promise any easy solution.

"I must say that I sensed for a long time the coming of this personal crisis—that is what it really is—of Comrade B. I know, as we all do, that the Revolutionary Party devalues men. Demands everything and repels flirtations. By all rights, now, Comrade B., having established himself as one of the most prominent leaders of the party, and bearing in mind the party's indispensable need of a more active professional staff, should be preparing himself, at least, to become a functionary, with all that it implies. When I returned from California last spring, I had the hope that he would be ready for such a drastic decision. Indirectly, I suggested to him that with our break from the S.P., he should take over the office of national secretary. His failure to react to this suggestion at that time, although there was then no trace of serious differences, filled me with misgivings for the future.

"I have written you this extremely frank opinion because I think it is necessary for you to know the nature of the problem, as I see it. Perhaps on that basis you can make suggestions or proposals which will help both us and Comrade B. in finding a common language and a common path.

Comradely,
(signed) J. P. Cannon"

From this letter it is evident that my opinion of the petty-bourgeois attitude of Burnham was not suddenly formulated at the outbreak of the present factional struggle. The "intellectual soul-sickness"—that is the petty-bourgeois sickness.

But that is not yet the whole story. Shortly prior to the writing of the above letter I had occasion to be in Minneapolis (at the time of the Corcoran murder) as mentioned in the letter to Crux. There I had a discussion with a group of leading comrades about the disputes in the party and about the situation in the leading committee in New York. These comrades, whom the oppositionists now depict as ignorant intellectual-haters, emphasized very strongly to me in this discussion their desire that the dispute with Burnham be conducted in such a way as not to antagonize him unnecessarily, or to weaken unduly his position in the party. They made it clear that they valued his abilities very highly and wished assurances of comradely treatment for him that would facilitate his continued functioning as a party leader after the convention.

I assured them of my readiness to comply with their wishes in this respect. I expressed the opinion, however, that the real trouble with Burnham was not so much his mistaken political position as the more fundamental conflict between his bourgeois personal life and the increasingly exacting demands the party must make upon a leader. In such cases, I told them, I had fre-

quently observed that people unconsciously seek to rationalize their personal difficulties and contradictions in the form of hastily arrived at "political differences" with the party. I said that if we could feel sure that Burnham was really one of us, if he would show some sign of determination on his part to resolve his personal contradictions and come to work in the revolutionary movement in earnest—in that case we could have much more ground to hope that the political differences between us would eventually be overcome in the course of comradely discussion and common work.

Shortly after the convention Burnham requested that Shachtman and I meet him at lunch away from the office to discuss a very important matter. At this meeting he told us that a comrade, who had attended the Minneapolis discussion, had reported my remarks to him. He emphasized, however, that it had been done in good faith and with the best of intentions. I expressed my regret that the question had been put to him in such a point-blank fashion before he might be ready to give an answer. However, the fat was in the fire, and there was nothing to do but face the issue.

Burnham stated frankly that he wasn't sure but that I might be right in my assumption that in his political disputes with us he was simply rationalizing his personal contradictions. He said it was a real contradiction, that he recognized it, and that he was not yet ready to solve it definitively. Instead of plunging deeper into party work, he wanted more time to consider the matter, and wanted to be released for the next period from all party duties except his regular literary work. We discussed the matter in a friendly way; we didn't give him any bureaucratic orders; we acceded to his demands.

The minutes of the political committee meeting for January 20, 1938 record the official disposition of the matter as follows: "Cannon: Reports that Comrade Burnham, in the next period, wants to concentrate his work for the party on writing for the magazine and paper.

"Motion by Cannon: For the next period we consider Comrade Burnham's work to be specifically literary and editorial and that he be exempted from routine sub-committee work. Carried."

If some worker in the party, who is denied exemption from distasteful duties, reads this extract from the minutes of the Political Committee he may indeed draw certain conclusions about the existence of "second class citizens" in the party. But he will not find any evidence that our foremost party intellectual was placed in this category. (Incidentally, it can be learned from this account that the famous "New Year's meeting" on the auto campaign was not the only occasion when formal decisions of the P.C. were prepared beforehand in informal discussions. There were many such occasions and there will be many more in the future. It is the normal method of any serious "collective leadership.")

What changed since then? What happened to break off all personal and political collaboration and eventually bring us to the present situation? On my part, nothing changed; my course today is the same as it was then. Burnham moved steadily in an opposite direction. And Shachtman, soon after the conversation recorded above, began to shift over into the orbit of Burnham. We drifted apart and now stand in opposite camps. Burnham, as his article "Science and Style" testifies, has broken completely with Marxism and Bolshevism and the proletarian revolution. Shachtman, who yesterday defended Bolshevism against Burnham, today defends Burnham against Bolshevism. Let them try to explain these developments by references to the "bureaucratism" of Cannon and the machinations of a "clique." These are simply excuses invented after the fact. All my efforts, as I believe I have demonstrated, were exerted toward a different end.