

THE NEGRO QUESTION

By J. R. JOHNSON

J. R. Johnson is giving a course on the Destiny of the Negro at the Marxist School, 125 West 33 Street, New York City, each Tuesday evening for the next six weeks, beginning on Tuesday, November 21. To facilitate the study of Negro history, his column will outline each Saturday the subject of the following Tuesday's lecture. The series begins below.

To know where the Negro is going one must know where the Negro comes from. Capitalist history and capitalist science, taken as a whole, are designed to serve the needs of capitalist profit. Their studies of the Negro and his history have aimed at justifying his exploitation and degradation. They have excused the slave trade and slavery and the present position of Negroes as outcasts in capitalist society, on the ground that the Negro in Africa had shown himself incapable of developing civilization, that he lived a savage and barbarous life, and that such elements of culture as Africa showed in the past and shows today were directly due to the influence of Arabs and Europeans. All of this, from beginning to end, is lies.

Negroes in African Civilization

First of all, the capitalist scientist's attempts to isolate the "pure" Negro from other African peoples is admitted today to be pure rubbish. Through there are broad differentiations, the Negroes in Africa are inextricably mixed. There are people of Hamitic stock who derive either from the Near East or the easternmost peninsula of Africa, (today British and Italian Somaliland). There are the sport-statured Bushmen in the South, and the supposedly "pure" Negro is found on the West Coast alone. It is as if a scientist said that the "pure" European was found only on the coast of Portugal. The truth is that even the Egyptians had a strong Negroid strain. There were Negro dynasties in Egypt. Queen Nefertari, one of the great conquerors and rulers of Egyptian history, was reputedly a Negress. Among the modern Ethiopian ruling class can be seen types ranging from the purely Semitic through the Mulatto to types indistinguishable from the Negro.

The chief object of these scientists is of course to deprive the Negro of any share in the famous civilizations of Egypt and Ethiopia. Today, ingenious Negroes call the Egyptians "black men" and by this means place all Egyptian civilization to the credit of the Negro. Racial theories of this type, whether from white capitalist centers of learning or fanatical Negro nationalists, are neither history nor science, but political propaganda. This much is clear and for the time being sufficient: the Egyptian civilization began where it did and flourished because of favorable climatic and geographical conditions, and the Negroes had a great deal to do with it.

The attempt to deduce from history that Negroes are subhuman continually breaks down. The Bushmen are among the most primitive of peoples. Yet their drawings have been universally hailed as some of the most marvelous examples of artistic skill. And since when have monkeys been given to producing great artists? In South Africa the ruins of Zimbabwe are evidence of a great ancient civilization. Whose? Nobody knows, but numerous professors are racking their brains to prove that, whoever created it, it wasn't Negroes. Much good may it do them. They will not stop the world revolution that way.

But the greatest stumbling block in the way of the anti-Negro historians are the empires of Ghana, of Songhay, Mali, and others, which flourished in the basin of the Niger. People who sneer at the Marxist phrase "bourgeois ideology" simply have no conception of the dishonesty, corruption and scope of capitalist lies and propaganda.

The Ghana Empire

For nearly a thousand years (300-1300) between the River Senegal and the Niger flourished the Ghana Empire. We do not know how it was founded. Some people say that a Hamitic people from East Africa migrated there. Others say that they came from Syria. What we do know is that this empire at its zenith embraced many millions of people. It produced wool, cotton, silk, velvet; it traded in copper and gold. Many houses in the chief towns were built of stone. At one time its army consisted of 200,000 soldiers. Its schools, its lawyers, its scholars were famous all over the Mediterranean area. And this empire for nearly a thousand years was an empire of black men, of Negroes.

Another famous empire was that of Songhay (600-1500) with its dynasty of Askia. Askia Mohammed I (1493-1528), was not only a great ruler. He surrounded himself with scholars. Timbuktu and Gao were the centers of trade and learning.

The latest edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Volume 23, page 522) says of these kingdoms, "Long before the rise of Islam the peoples of this Northern part of West Africa, consisting largely, as has been seen, of open plains watered by large and navigable rivers, had developed well organized states, of which the oldest known, Ghana (or Ghanata), is thought to have been founded in the 3rd century A.D. Later arose the empire of Melle and the more famous and more powerful Songhai (Songhay) empire. . . . Marking the importance, commercial and political, of these states, large cities were founded." The idea that Islamic influence founded these states is now exploded, and this is admitted by the *Britannica* writer. He follows, however, the theory of "pure" and "impure" Negroes. The Negroes on the coast were "pure." But even these, he notes, founded civilizations: ". . . the Yoruba, the Ashanti, the Dahomi, and the Beni created powerful and well organized kingdoms."

The Beni, better known as the Benin, are famous today for their bronze sculpture, of artistic merit and technical skill, unsurpassed by any people of ancient or modern times. When after many centuries they were "discovered" in 1891, the impudent imperialists at once attributed these bronzes to "Portuguese" influence. That theory has now joined the others in the waste-paper basket.

The High Water Mark

West Africa was the high-water mark. But all over Africa organized civilizations flourished. The first Portuguese to visit East Africa some five hundred years ago did not remark any noticeable differences between the Africans and themselves; while less than fifty years ago Emil Torday, the Belgian explorer discovered in Central Africa the Bushongo people. A wise king, as far back as the seventeenth century, had prohibited all contact with Europeans, and, away in the interior, the tribe had survived. Torday found a free and happy people, living in villages well laid out, the huts beautifully decorated, their sculpture, textiles and household objects of a rare beauty. Political organization was a perfect democracy. The king had of all the honors, the council all the power. Representatives, two of them always women, were both regional and vocational. Today they are degraded savages. Torday states that before the coming of the Europeans such civilizations, perfectly adapted to their environment, were widespread over Africa. The picture of warring tribes and savage cannibals is all lies. As late as 1906, Frobenius, traveling in the Belgian Congo, could still see the following.

"And on all this flourishing material, civilization then was a bloom, here the bloom on ripe fruit, both tender and lustrous; the gestures, manners and customs of a whole people, from the youngest to the oldest, alike in the families of the princes and the well-to-do and of the slaves, so naturally dignified and refined in the smallest detail. I know no northern race who can bear comparison with such a uniform level of education as is found among the natives."

Slave Trade Destroys Africa

It was the slave trade that destroyed Africa, the depredations of Arabs and European imperialists. They ravaged the continent for three centuries. What the travelers of the nineteenth century discovered was the wreck and ruin of what had existed four centuries before, and even then enough remained to disprove the idea of the subhuman Negro. Africa is a vast continent and many millions of people in varying degrees of civilization have lived there over the centuries. There was much ignorance, barbarism and superstition, but the history and achievements of Negroes in art, literature, politics, empire-building, until Arab and European imperialism fell upon them in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, is an incontrovertible refutation of the mountains of lies and slander built up by

News from World's War-Torn Capitals

PARIS

French Workers Seek Leadership As Bureaucrats Trap Them in War-Machine

PARIS, Oct. 31 (by courier)—Not even after two months of the war is there any serious sign of patriotism among the French workers. The worst one finds is sheer, exhausted, disillusioned apathy; the best, a militancy looking for leadership.

The advanced workers are encountering extreme difficulties in re-establishing communication with their comrades in other countries, even with nearby England. The severity of English customs control (searching not only the baggage, but also the persons, of all people entering or leaving the country, confiscating every scrap of paper, to be returned later by mail) is but one example of the handicaps we work under.

Under the pretext of rounding up Paris' gangsters, and keeping them in a concentration camp at the Stade Roland-Garros, the police have also been rounding up the most militant of known rank-and-file radicals, and sending them to the same place temporarily, for later transfer to larger camps in the Ariège and the Loire-et-Cher.

Those municipalities, hundreds in number, which had Stalinist mayors or councils, were dissolved, and are ruled by prefectural decree. All Stalinist headquarters have been seized, as well as their funds, including the private property of any arrested leaders. This government repression has had a martyring effect, which has stayed the defection of many workers who were on the point of leaving the Stalinist party. Practically all the Stalinist intellectuals, on the other hand, have become tricolor patriots of the most disgusting description.

Stalinists Expelled from Unions
The top committee of the CGT (General Federation of Workers) expelled its Stalinist minority and called upon all affiliated federations and locals to expel their Stalinist leaderships. In those cases where the Stalinists controlled the unions and refused to yield, the CGT tops, with the aid of the police, seized the headquarters and funds.

Once this stage had been concluded, the social-patriots passed on to the next, which consisted of expelling from the unions any rank and file Stalinists who did not publicly knuckle under. When necessary, the cops helped.

Agreement Gives Bosses "Everything"
When the CGT tops last week signed a general agreement with the bosses at the Hotel Majestic, Leon Jouhaux, CGT head, proclaimed that an end had been put to class struggle, causing the bosses in the Comité des Forges (steel trust) bulletin to crow: "If these words from his mouth are truly meant, everything—everything—is possible." Leon Blum's reaction, predictable enough, was to say that the Hotel Majestic agreement wasn't quite as good as the Hotel Matignon agreement but we must do the best we can.

(The Hotel Matignon agreement ended the revolutionary strikes of June, 1936, giving the forty-hour week, paid vacations, etc., all of which has now been officially abrogated.)

On Sept. 16, the new wages-and-hours decrees were put into effect two weeks early by the bosses; the details are hair-raising. A seventy-two hour work week, etc. The workers called on their delegates to raise hell; the delegates wouldn't. Foreign workers, particularly Belgians, simply refused to accept the new conditions; they went home to Belgium.

Some French workers tried to throw up their jobs. But under the decrees requisitioning factories, workers can't throw up their jobs; they're tied to them exactly like serfs. Those who did, got two months in jail. The workers are ragingly angry, but so far feel baffled and helpless. A marvelous opportunity for a revolutionary party to come forward, and provide the workers with a new perspective, the PSOP, held down by its rightist leadership, has so far missed the opportunity.

Revolutionists As "Fortifications"
The one party that possibly could serve, the PSOP (Socialist Party of Workers and Peasants), held down by its rightist leadership, has

Labor Movement in Strait-Jacket of Dictatorship and Repression

so far missed the opportunity. Many of its revolutionary elements are at the front.

The revolutionists at the front are in grave danger, in spite of the little fighting that is going on. For they are being systematically placed in the most exposed positions—advanced machine-gun posts in No-Man's land, etc. That this is being done consciously is quite certain. For example, in one case, when a well-known revolutionist was transferred from a combat unit to a liaison post out of danger, he was sent back to the front by direct order from a ministry in Paris.

PRAGUE

Czech Students Rally In Teeth of Most Savage Hitlerite Repression

According to an Associated Press dispatch from Prague, Adolf Hitler is getting his first case of indigestion over the Czech territories he swallowed a year ago with the aid of Chamberlain and Daladier.

The report states that 2,000 university students demonstrated in Prague on November 5 against the German protectorate government. Another reason for the demonstration was the death of a Czech student killed by rifle fire during clashes with police on "Independence day", October 28.

The students reformed their ranks, demonstrating in various parts of the city, more than five times after being dispersed by mounted police and Elite Guards threatening rifle fire. Ten arrests occurred during the demonstrations but no reports are available of how many occurred subsequent to the demonstration.

The protest actions of the students is only a precursor to the real revolts bound to follow in due time when the solid contingents of Czech workers raise the banner of struggle against Hitlerism in the factories and on the streets.

To paraphrase a Russian proverb: the student protests are only the nationalistic blossoms; the revolutionary berries are yet to come.

TORONTO

How They Dragged the Canadian Workers Into A War They Don't Want

TORONTO—Canada's belligerency was settled, not in Ottawa or even in London, but in Washington, and herein lies the first of many important lessons which the American worker can draw from a study of Canada's war. If Rooseveltian capitalism had any serious intention of preserving American neutrality, it would have brought such economic and political pressure to bear upon Ottawa that the belligerency and MacKenzie King and his trained parliamentary seals would have disappeared overnight. A country of eleven millions, in America's sphere of influence, could not have moved without the benediction of Washington.

The American workers may learn from the Canadian experience not only how the masses in a capitalist state are plunged into war against their will but also how they are exploited after they are put into it. Canada is in many ways a pocket edition of the U.S. Its peoples represent another melting pot, their economic problems closely similar; their habits of thought, traditions, reading, even their speech, are virtually like America's. The largest trade unions are tied with the American unions. The farmers have the same marketing and climatic problems.

What is happening now in Canada is what will happen in the U.S. unless the American working class awakens to prevent it.

WAR UNPOPULAR

This has been, from the start, an unpopular war. Not only are there now more class-conscious workers in Canada than in 1914, as reflected in the growth of trades unions and a left social democratic movement, but there is also a bitter living memory of the last mass murder.

In 1914 Canada sent half a million men from

a country with a population of seven million. Sixty thousand died overseas and as many more succumbed from injuries after returning. It is rare to find in Canada a veteran of the last war who was not a casualty. The city of Welland was still engaged in unveiling its expensive memorial to the last war on the day the new war broke out.

Nor is it forgotten that the decimation of the younger generation was followed by the depression of 1919-20, civil riots, a general strike in Winnipeg, and widespread misery.

The number of English-born Anglo-Saxons in Canada is much less than in 1914, and the proportion of non-Anglo-Saxons much greater. This, plus the strengthening of the social and economic ties with the U.S. over the last 25 years, has led to a strong and widespread isolationism, in addition to the traditional isolationism of the French-Canadians (who resorted to armed resistance to prevent their conscription in 1917).

On top of this, the smaller capitalists hoped they might be left free by "neutrality" to enjoy the prosperity of a war boom without paying the penalty of war-taxes, regimentation and conscription. Finally, nearly all sections and classes were united in a deep distrust of the British government, which had not only muddled its way into war but had, in its relations to Canada, persistently interfered against the natural development of Canadian autonomy.

THE GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGY

Faced with such conditions, the King government took the line of intimidating the masses with an accomplished fact. King had promised that "parliament would decide" peace or war; but parliament was not assembled until Britain had begun fighting, and then it met to listen to a "speech from the throne," announcing that Canada was already "in a state of war" and that the War Measures Act—abolishing civil liberties—had been in force since Sept. 1. On this speech, setting forth official government policy, no vote was taken.

King had affirmed that no expeditionary force would be sent abroad. But then he introduced the War Appropriations Bill for a hundred million dollars for military operations in "and beyond" Canada. At this point the Canadian Commonwealth Federation (social democrat) members forced a division on an amendment to change "beyond" to "adjacent to." The amendment got the support of only six CCF and 10 French-Canadian members.

The government still hesitates to impose conscription. It even pretended, for a while, to be staging recruiting only for home defense. Now, however, the newspapers announce plans to dispatch two complete divisions to Europe before Christmas. In Vancouver, three hundred recruits were asked by an inspecting colonel how many wished to serve overseas. Eight stepped forward. The colonel merely remarked: "That's all right. You're all going anyway."

(Continued in next issue)

BRUSSELS

Belgian Fourth International Appeal For Workers Action Against the War

After a delay of several weeks, in the course of which comrades Walter Dauge, Leon Lesoil, Lemmens, and other leaders were subjected to repeated arrests, La Lutte Ouvrière, organ of the Revolutionary Socialist Party (PSR) has once again resumed publication as a weekly.

In its first issue after the persecutions, La Lutte carries a long appeal to the workers of Belgium entitled: "The Struggle Against War is the Struggle for Socialism."

"The present war," says the appeal, "is the fatal and logical consequence of the Treaty of Versailles with which the last imperialist war of 1914-18 was concluded. The Anglo-French imperialism, by rivaling the formidable imperialism of Germany, cut up central Europe into strips of states which went contrary to the most legitimate national aspirations. Thus a situation was created which engendered new conflicts. They are responsible for this state of

affairs who today pose as defenders of justice in international relations. The fraud of just wars is beginning all over again. . . .

"The workers of Belgium need not have too many illusions about the neutrality of Belgium. Everyone knows how precarious it is. . . . The great Belgian press is now preparing public opinion for entry into the war on the side of France and England. . . . The social-patriots are shouting Long live France. . . . They are undoubtedly speaking of the France of Daladier, whose politics they endorse so aggressively. What we love in France is the magnificent revolutionary tradition of its proletariat, the Paris Commune, the great days of the strikes of June 1936. . . . The Belgian workers have nothing to gain from choosing between Hitler, the butcher of the German workers, and Daladier, the man who broke the general strike of 1938. Doesn't every one know how anxious Daladier is to defend "democracy" in company with Mussolini, the assassin of Matteotti? . . .

"Whatever their nationality, be they Belgian or English, French or German, Italian or Spanish or American, the workers are all exploited by capitalism alike. The real cause of the war is not Hitler, but capitalism with its imperialist rivalries, its greed for profits and its chase for markets. . . .

"Hitler is himself only a product of decadent capitalism. The only way of defeating Fascism and of ending war is the abolition of the capitalist regime which heads humanity towards the worst kind of savagery, and its replacement by socialism."

"The Fourth International continues the proud tradition of the Third International of Lenin. It shows the working class of the world the only road to safety. That road alone leads to the abolition of the capitalist system of the exploitation of man by man, to the foundation of a Union of Socialist Republics of Europe, to the establishment of socialism which alone can give to the people bread, peace and freedom."

DUBLIN

Irish Nationalist Patriots In Forty-Day Hunger Strike Against De Valera

Where are the Irish persecuted most? In England where the English judges are sending to gaol every militant Irishman who dares to speak up against British oppression of Ireland? Or in Ireland itself, where an "Irish" government is mercilessly persecuting the Irish Republicans?

In the English courts, at least, the condemned can stand up and speak out, as did young Christopher Kenneally, just sentenced in the dock at Liverpool Assizes to three years of servitude. The 19-year lad said:

"Today England and France say that they are saving the human race from aggression. No country under God's sun has suffered more from aggression than my country. The cause for which I am going to be sentenced is a cause which will never die."

But even that much the Irish arrested in Ireland cannot do, for under the laws of the De Valera government it is enabled to arrest men and hold them indefinitely without trial.

Only one means is left to these arrested men to register their protest against such treatment, the dreaded means employed by Irish martyrs against the British when they openly ruled in Ireland—the hunger strike. And so, for a month now, four prisoners, Patrick McGrath, Richard McCarthy, John Lynch, and Jeremiah Daly, have been on a hunger strike. A month! Think of the heroic fortitude it means to undergo such suffering! But they do it for Irish freedom.

De Valera has stood up in the Dail Eirann and told Ireland that these men might die, but he would not free them. The latest report is that three of them are in hospitals, in critical condition, and that the fourth, Jeremiah Daly, "had abandoned his hunger strike and been released."

What is clear beyond all doubt is that prison in Ireland is the place for Irish patriots as it is in England. Irishmen are not ruled by themselves but by agents of the British Empire.

LONDON Only the Fourth International Fights In Revolutionary Opposition To The War in Britain

Under the acid test of war, all the working class parties in England except the Fourth International have crumpled and are subsiding in one form or another to the program of the capitalist war-mongers. Only the Fourth International remains firm in its revolutionary opposition to the Second World War. This is the gist of a report from the British Section which has just been received.

capitalist apologists in defence of capitalist barbarism. Africans worked in iron countless generations ago and many historians claim that it was they who introduced metal work to Europe and Asia.

Capitalism developing in Europe precipitated the discovery of America and sent its navigators and explorers to Africa. In the fifth century began the use of Negro slaves on the plantations of America. British capitalism drew one of its most powerful sources of wealth from the slave trade. The greatness of Liverpool, the second city of Great Britain, was founded on the trade. The wealth of the French bourgeoisie was based on the slave trade. The rise of modern Europe is inexplicable without a knowledge of the economic ramifications of the slave trade.

Bibliography

For a useful sketch of the early history of Africa see the opening chapters of Carter Woodson, *The Negro in Our History*. For more detailed study the reader will have to consult the writings of Emil Torday, Frobenius and Maurice Delafosse. Admirable material can be found in Nancy Cunard's *Negro*. For easily obtainable material on slavery and European capitalism see *Africa and the Rise of Capitalism*, by Wilson E. Williams (The Harvard University Studies in the Social Sciences, Harvard University, Washington, D. C.) and *The Black Jacobins* by C. L. R. James, Chapters 1-8, particularly pages 35-41.

London local where Fourth Internationalists exercise influence. The "Militant" has been increased from a monthly to a twice-monthly.

ILP Loses Ground

The Independent Labour Party, affiliated with the London Bureau, has lost ground rapidly because of its reversion to pacifism and its rejection of revolutionary defeatism. Although its journal, the "New Leader," editorializes on the possibility of revolution in Germany it has nothing whatsoever to say about the possibility of revolution in Great Britain. Alleged "secret reports" which they claim to have received from their sister party in Germany (the S.A.P.), regarding unrest in Germany, have been broadcast by the British government as an official part of the government war propaganda. The ILP is collaborating with a petty-bourgeois pacifist organization called the Christian Peace Pledge Union.

In the recent Clackmannan (Scotland) parliamentary by-elections, the pacifist anti-war candidate with the full support of the ILP, polled only 1,000 votes as against 16,000 for the Labour Party candidate. Previously in this same district the ILP secured 2,000 votes.

"The ILP is only a shadow of its former self," continues the report. "It is now a skeleton with most of the bones missing."

Stalinist Flip-Flop

The Communist Party has made a complete about-face since the beginning of the war.

At the outbreak of the conflict, their official organ published a statement of the Central Committee with the heading: "Why Britain Must Win This War."

Their leader and party secretary Harry Pollitt, the Earl Browder of England, issued a pamphlet outlining in detail the tactics and methods which the British ruling class must pursue in order to "win the war."

Now Pollitt has been dismissed from office by Moscow and the English Communist Party has come out for peace—on Hitler's terms.

The effect of this change in line dictated by the new exigencies of Stalin's foreign policy has been devastating upon the following of the Communist Party especially among the petty-bourgeois supporters and "fellow-travelers."

The leaders of the British Trade Unions in traditional style are attempting to throttle the discontent of the workers and by working hand in glove with the government stifle any incipient revolt engendered by the war.

Thus they urge local bodies to cooperate with the local war committee, set up by the government's Ministry of Information (Propaganda) and to operate as part of the war machine. The trade union chiefs are also seeking a legal ruling from the government to avoid holding their regularly scheduled national conferences while the war lasts. These labor lieutenants of the capitalist class so far have done more to repress working class opinion than the government itself.

Behind the Lines

(Continued from Page 1)

against Japan, the Stalinists never breathed a word publicly—until now, when their master in the Kremlin bids them prepare to cut loose from the anti-Japanese struggle in the interests of a deal between the Soviet bureaucracy and the Japanese imperialists!

Into what new muddy waters will the Kremlin now lead what is left of the Chinese Communist Party? As a workers' party, it long ago ceased to exist. Its strength has rested exclusively upon the military force it has controlled, the former peasant Red Army. Today that Red Army has nothing in common with the heroic force of peasant fighters who resisted six Kuomintang

The British section of the Fourth International expects a rapid leftward swing among the masses as an early result of the war, and a new powerful movement of the workers towards socialist revolution. In preparation for this swing, the Fourth Internationalists have been persistently entrenching themselves in the mass organizations of the workers.

"We can confidently assure you," the report ends, "that the British section will play its part in the struggle of the Fourth International against imperialist war."

offensives in Central China from 1930 to 1934. As long ago as 1937, Stalinist leaders admitted only a handful of the Kiangsi veterans remained.

Today the "Red" army is scarcely distinguishable from the mercenary forces of the Kuomintang generals. Nevertheless, it is a force recruited, trained, and tried in the struggle against Japanese imperialism. How it will react, if Stalin orders abandonment of the fight against the invaders and converts it instead, into an instrument for Soviet penetration in the west, remains to be seen.

In any case, the division takes place over the trampled and disregarded body of the Chinese national cause. In 1927 thousands of Communists paid with their lives in a needless sacrifice to the misleadership of the Kremlin. But they did fighting for Chinese liberation while Chiang Kai-shek became a spoke in the wheel of the imperialist chariot.

In his subsequent development, Chiang Kai-shek merely continued to reflect the pressure of Anglo-American imperialism. When they entered into a pact with him, the Stalinists were wooing the same master. But now the order is to switch camps. And that is all the Stalinist turn amounts to, in China, as elsewhere.

The struggle for Chinese liberation must and will go on, despite and against both camps of its betrayers and enemies. Its standard bearer is the small, heroic organization of the Fourth International which in many parts of China continues in the forefront of the struggle.