

# THE NEGRO QUESTION

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

By J. R. JOHNSON

## Destiny of the Negro

(Outline of the course at the Marxist School)

The subject for this week's discussion is "Emancipation from Slavery and the Destruction of Feudalism." The New Internationalist for December, devoted entirely to the Negro question, includes an article, "Revolution and the Negro," by J. R. Johnson, which describes in some detail the revolutionary contributions of the Negro to the destruction of feudalism in England, France, and America. All who are interested in this subject should secure a copy of the December number and study it closely. Here we shall make some political analysis of the role of the Negro in this phase of the development of Western civilization.

First of all, what is feudalism? That is not easy to answer in a sentence. It is a form of society based on landed property and simple methods of cultivation. You have a landowning class which rules; at the other end of the social scale you have the serfs, who get a part of their produce to feed themselves and contribute their surplus to the landowning aristocracy. Side by side with the landowning aristocracy is the clergy. The main characteristic of social life in feudal society is the fact that the aristocracy and clergy have great privileges, and the serfs and others have very few or none. This is not a matter of custom, but a question of law. (In capitalist society, in theory, all men are equal before the law.)

Feudal economy in Europe did not in any way have contact with Africa. It was essentially a subsistence economy; that is to say, it produced what it needed to feed and clothe itself. About the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, however, there grew up in Europe a new class, the merchants. These were the first real capitalists.

## Europe's First Dealings With Africa

Soon their business began to be of great importance in the state. With increasing wealth, they gradually changed the economies of certain countries from producing chiefly food and the simple things that the community needed, to the manufacture of goods on a large scale. This particular class was concerned as much with production for trade in other parts of the country and abroad as for use at home. It was this drive for trade, for raw materials, for markets, and for profit, that created the necessity of expansion, and in the fifteenth century finally sent expeditions to America and to Africa. Thus it was the development of capitalism in Europe that brought the millions of Africans into contact with Western civilization.

Capitalism demands above all else landless laborers. In Europe the capitalist class created a class of landless laborers by driving them off the land whenever possible, for if the serf or the peasant had land on which to work or earn his keep for himself, naturally he would not hire himself out to any capitalist for long hours and small pay.

When the capitalists discovered America they tried to use the Indians as landless laborers. But the Indians died. There was so much land that it was impossible to get landless laborers from among the early colonists. Because of this, the capitalists in Europe and their agents in the colonies brought millions of Negroes as slaves to America and thereby provided the colonies with the necessary labor. By this means capitalism enormously expanded its capacity for making profit.

By means of these vast profits that they made at home and abroad, the capitalists in Britain and France, for example, not only built up tremendous trade and business, but, with the profits accumulated, they began to organize factories, and extended the application of science to industry. The standard of civilization rose, and the power and profits of the capitalists increased also. But the governments of France and Britain still continued to be under the domination of the old feudal nobility. When came much trouble.

## Capitalists Make Their Revolution

Trade and factories were more important than land. Yet the rulers of the country were princes, dukes, lords, bishops, and archbishops. That was all very well when they had the economic power, but now it had passed from them. Not only were they proud and arrogant, but they tried to keep the laws and the government suitable to land ownership when, owing to the shift in the economic basis of the country, the laws and the government should have been organized to help trade and industry. It was no use pointing out to them that they should give way. It took revolutions to do it.

In Britain there were two revolutions. One took place in the seventeenth century and lasted off and on for nearly sixty years. In France, revolution began in 1789, and by the time it was over the power of the aristocracy and the clergy was wiped away completely.

What part did the Negroes play in all this? The capitalists who first profited by slavery were commercial capitalists and the planters in the colonies. These planters were partly capitalist in that they traded their produce far and wide, and partly feudal in that they kept their slaves in a state of subjection comparable to the old serfdom and built up a type of feudal society. But as capitalism developed, these commercial traders and the plantation owners collaborated closely with the aristocracy, and many of them became aristocrats themselves. By the time the industrial capitalists were busy developing their factories, the aristocrats, the planters, and the commercial capitalists formed, roughly speaking, one reactionary group.

## An End to Slavery

Now one of the things that the industrial capitalists wanted to do was to finish with slavery. It was too expensive. Slave production was backward compared with modern methods and more highly developed capitalist production in agriculture. So that you had on one side the industrial capitalists determined to destroy the slave power of the aristocrats, the commercial capitalists and the planters. It was in this political struggle that Negroes got their chance to fight for their freedom. They played a small part in the English political struggle, a larger part in the French struggle, and a decisive part in the American struggle. This was not accidental. A few figures will show us why.

In 1789 British colonial trade was five million pounds out of an export trade of 27 million. Britain had lost America in 1783 and had few slaves in the West Indies. We can therefore see that slavery was playing a very minor part in British economy. The British Negroes on the whole played little part in the destruction of British feudalism.

## Negro In The French Revolution

In France in 1789 the export trade was 17 million pounds. The colonial trade was 11 million pounds—two thirds of this. The question of abolition was therefore of tremendous importance. It took a prominent part in the revolution. The Negroes fought magnificently and being thousands of miles away, gained their independence. This is how Haiti came into being.

In America in 1861 this combination of the commercial bourgeoisie and the plantation owners was not a minor part of American economy. It was a major part. The combination was not a colony thousands of miles away. It occupied hundreds of thousands of square miles inside the country. To defeat this combination took the greatest Civil War in history, and the Negro's share was far greater than it had been in France.

This is the way we must look at history. People who only see black men in general, being oppressed by white men in general, and are unable to trace the historical dialectic do not understand anything and therefore cannot lead. That is the great value of being a genuine Marxist, an adherent of the Fourth International. You can study history and understand where we are to today and why and where we are going tomorrow.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Black Jacobins by C.L.R. James.  
History of Negro Revolt by C.L.R. James.  
The series of articles by George Novack which are now running in the New Internationalist. They are the only Marxist study of the pre-Civil War period and they are invaluable.  
The relevant chapters in Beard's Rise of American Civilization.

# British Empire Faces Rising Tide of Revolt In African Colonies

By BRITANNICUS

From the beginning of the war it has been the policy of the British government to play up the idea of a united people and a united empire. Already in these columns we have shown that there is at present a firm core of revolutionary resistance in Great Britain, small though it is. We can be certain also that it would already have been much larger, had it not been for the fact that at the very beginning of the war the British government arrested some 6000 persons as "spies." (In much the same way President Roosevelt, through his stooge, Attorney-General Murphy, is whipping up the lynch spirit against "spies" in this country, in other words, against persons who are determined to oppose the war.)

In its principal colonies, however, the British bourgeoisie is confronted by a rising tide of revolt. The Socialist Appeal has analyzed the rattle scamper of Gandhi from pro-Ally conversations with Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy, to frantic shouts about the necessity of Britain granting independence to India as the price of India's support in the war. Gandhi, the representative of the Indian millowners and the landlords, has not changed his pro-British subservience between September and his present fire-breathing policy. It is the Indian masses who are determined not to give any support to their 300-year-long jailers. And Gandhi must protest or perish. The Indian masses are for war but for war against Britain.

Now Africa takes the field against British imperialism.

British West Africa has a climate not at all suitable for Europeans. The political situation there, therefore, is not nearly so acute as it is in British South Africa, Rhodesia and Kenya, where the climate allows Europeans to live. Among twenty million people in West Africa, there are only 5,000 Europeans and in Lagos, a town of 150,000 inhabitants, there are only 1000 whites. Inasmuch as in the early years of British domination no British settlers wanted land, British imperialism was graciously pleased to guarantee to the Africans the possession of their land. Recently, however, Lord Leverhulme, of the famous firm of Leverhulme Brothers, soap manufacturers, has realized the importance of taking away the Africans' land, and is intriguing against them. However, the Africans have had their land for a hundred years under British rule and will lose it only at the cost of a desperate civil war.

## BACKGROUND OF PRESENT, NATIVE STRUGGLES

They are on the alert and increasingly hostile to Britain. In 1929 the women of Nigeria, thirty thousand strong, led a revolt against taxes which resulted in nearly two hundred being either killed or wounded. In 1937 there was a general strike of the Gold Coast farmers, which was joined by the truckdrivers and dockers. The British government sent out a commission, which, with much verbiage, finally decided essentially that the Gold Coast farmers had as much right to form combinations and to protect their prices as the employers had to form their combines.

The West African youth is also militant and organized. They have had better opportunities of education than Negroes elsewhere in Africa, and, social discrimination, for the historical reasons described, is not as strong as elsewhere in Africa. Within recent years there has developed a West African youth movement, sixty thousand strong, which is in opposition not only to British imperialism but also to the caste of native lawyers, doctors, magistrates, and other government officials, who can be found in British West Africa and in no other British African colony.

The leader of the youth league is Wallace Johnson, a West African Negro, who has been active in politics in West Africa for

many years. He organized a labor union in West Africa and led several successful strikes. He ran a paper, was arrested for sedition, and was driven out of the country. He went to England and for a time was secretary of the International Service Bureau, which has always taken a militant revolutionary position against the war and whose manifesto has been published in the Socialist Appeal. Early in 1938 Johnson returned to West Africa and organized a political campaign of progressive Africans against the old-line municipal councillors, who were as subservient to the British government as Gandhi and his mill-owners are in India. In a fierce political campaign last year five candidates, supported by the West African Youth League, won a smashing victory over the old fakers who formerly misrepresented the people in the Lagos municipality.

## BITLERITE CONCENTRATION CAMPS OF THE BRITISH

Now comes the news that Wallace Johnson has been arrested by Sir Douglas Jardine, the English governor, and thrown into a concentration camp with Germans and others as a "man likely to disturb peace and order during the war."

We can get no further news about his arrest. In the House of Commons Campbell Stevens of the Independent Labor Party asked Malcolm MacDonald, Secretary of State for the Colonies, to state the crime for which Johnson was arrested. MacDonald refused. The hypocritical British government knew quite well the sensation that would be created if it were stated in the House of Commons that Johnson was openly carrying on agitation against the imperialist war. It would lay bare to the British public the lie about the unity of the empire and, coming so quickly after the revelation of the real state of affairs in India, would help expose British imperialism, not as the friend of "democracy" and civilization but as the greatest enemy of the democratic rights of people, hated by the millions it oppresses, who wish nothing better than to see Britain's downfall in the present crisis.

## JOHNSON'S VIEWS IN AFRICAN MANIFESTO

We have no direct news of what Johnson has been doing, but it is enough to quote from the war manifesto of the International African Bureau to which he subscribed:

"We denounce the whole gang of European robbers and enslavers of the colonial peoples—German Nazis, Italian Fascists, French, British, Belgian and Dutch democrats—all are the same IMPERIALIST BANDITS whose common aim is the enslavement of humanity throughout the world."

"To the workers of Britain we appeal also. You must unite in the struggle of the colonial peoples against the common enemy, who is in your own country. To white and black the solution is the same: Organize and be ready to seize the opportunity to overthrow the enemy."

"FOR COMPLETE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LIBERATION OF THE COLONIAL PEOPLES!"

"DOWN WITH THE IMPERIALIST BANDITS!"

"WORKERS OF ALL LANDS, UNITE!"

We can state with confidence that that is the sentiment of hundreds of millions of colonials, in India and in Africa. What they need is political clarification, organization, and a perspective. More than ever we can see the crying necessity of a powerful revolutionary organization, world-wide in scope. Wallace Johnson was once a follower of Stalin, but broke with the Comintern when it preached that "democratic" Britain should be supported against fascism. There are hundreds, nay thousands, of such leaders in the colonies. We have to get to them somehow!

## British "Peace" Bid

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What it boils down to is this: the capitalist powers caught in the mesh of the crisis of their own system lunged forward into a war among themselves. They all know the probable consequences. They know war will bring in its train the revolution that will destroy them all.

That is why they hope desperately even now to postpone the decision—and they hope to do it by transforming the war into an eastward push against the Soviet

Union by destroying the basis of the workers state and winning a partial respite for themselves by opening up Russia for capitalist exploitation.

This remains the nub of the war strategy of the great powers.

## FIGHT AGAINST THE WAR

# MUTINY! 1917: The Mutinies of the Russian Brigades in France

by "Spartacus"

THE FIRST FLAMES of mutiny on the Western Front were lit by sparks from the Russian revolution. Some twenty thousand Russian troops fighting in France were the fuel for the fire.

These Russian soldiers had been sent to France in the freighters which landed munitions for the Czar's armies at Archangel, Murmansk, Vladivostok. It was a fine business transaction. The French had plenty of munitions but needed cannon fodder; the Czar had plenty of cannon fodder but needed guns. Furthermore, the French boats avoided an unprofitable return trip in ballast.

There was no trouble getting volunteers for the trip. Incredible rumors were circulating in the Russian ranks about conditions in the French army. It was said there was no flogging, that rifles were so plentiful that every man got one all to himself, and that even privates wore leather shoes.

## The Language of the Whip

When the first of the Russian regiments landed at Marseilles, they were greeted with cheers and flowers—even more enthusiastically, according to eyewitnesses, than the Americans were later on. But the soldiers soon found their existence as wretched under the Third Republic as it had been under the Czar. They were kept together in two brigades—about twenty thousand of them altogether—under Russian officers, and floggings and brutality flourished on the democratic soil of France just as much as on the autocratic soil of Holy Russia. "That's the only kind of language the Russian soldier understands," explained their officers. Furthermore, these Russian regiments had terrible losses, being "spent" by the French General Staff in the reckless way they had with colonial troops of "inferior" races. Even Winston Churchill, in his history of the war, admits that the Russian brigades "were used by the French in a ruthless manner."

"Unrest began," writes T. H. Wintringham in *Mutiny*. "A paper called *Nashe Slovo* ('Our Word') was printed in Russian in Paris and copies of it reached the brigades; it protested against the abuses of which the men complained. The Russian command decided to employ Tsarism's usual methods: to send into the ranks agents provocateurs, who would lead the men into some sort of riot; then severe punishment could be inflicted, an example made. A man called Vining, from the Russian Embassy in Paris, seems to have done his work too well: a Colonel Krause was set on and stoned to death. Eight men were shot for this, *Nashe Slovo* suppressed. An almost unknown journalist called Leon Trotsky, who had helped to run the paper, was expelled from France." Thus, for a moment of history, the fates of these twenty thousand Russian soldiers and of the future leader of the Red Army were joined in symbolic union.

## "We Want to Go Home!"

In March of 1917, the Czarist regime was overthrown, cast aside in a few days of almost bloodless struggle by the awakening Russian masses. Despite the strenuous efforts of the French authorities, news of the revolution quickly reached the Russian brigades. At once, delegates were elected, secret meetings called, and finally open assemblies—Soviets. Out of all the talking and voting, one basic, simple demand emerged: "We want to go back to Russia!" All through the long drawn-out affair, this was the only demand made: "Send us back to Russia. We want to go home!"

# Indian Workers in Mass Strikes Against British Imperialist War Rule

News concerning the anti-war activities of India's 375,000,000 people is finally beginning to pierce through the heavy British censorship.

In previous issues of the Socialist Appeal we have reported on the rising wave of anti-war sentiment and activity for India's freedom that is now sweeping the country. The negotiations between the conservative Gandhi leaders of the Indian National Congress and the British authorities broke down completely because of the unwillingness of the British to make even the slightest promise or concession. At that time we predicted that a period of direct mass action on the part of India's workers and peasants would begin.

While the Gandhian leaders of the Nationalist Congress have continued their futile playing around with the British Viceroy, the masses of people have not been inactive.

## Workers Take the Lead

Of utmost significance is the emergence of the industrial workers—the Indian proletariat organized in their militant trade unions—as the leaders of the oppressed nation. In the city of Cawnpore there is now a general strike of all textile workers which is threatening to spread to Bombay, Ahmedabad and other textile centers. This localized general strike can easily become a nation-wide strike.

In Calcutta, one of the world centers of the jute industry where millions of sand bags are now supposed to be produced for British war needs, 31,000 Hindu and Moslem jute workers walk-

ed out on strike at the beginning of last week. This too will spread rapidly and shortly involve the more than 100,000 jute workers who toil in the British factories around and in Calcutta.

## Massacre Nationalists

In Karachi, a major seaport of the country and a center for nationalist propaganda, the British applied some of their "democratic" practices last week. In cold blood, British troops and police shot down and killed 20 Indian nationalists who were conducting an anti-war parade and demonstration. The number of wounded is unknown, but this action of the police who were confronted with absolutely unarmed people can only be labelled as another example of typical British criminal massacre. British rule in the colonies is based precisely upon such actions as the Karachi slaughter.

Meanwhile, the British are making every effort to relieve the constantly growing pressure by stirring up Hindu-Moslem communal discord. There are reports of numerous Hindu-Moslem riots, mostly in the Northern sections of India—that is, where the hatred of British rule is deepest and most militantly organized. It is undeniable that these efforts to pit Hindu against Moslem has had some success. This is primarily due to the actions of the pro-British Moslem League who work for the imperialists, and the failure of the Gandhian leadership to prove in action the possibility and need for Hindu-Moslem unity.

Leave Door Open  
At its latest session the Con-

"Very soon after the February revolution," writes Trotsky in his *History of the Russian Revolution*, "the first brigade broke discipline. It did not want to fight for Alsace or for Lorraine; it did not want to die for beautiful France. It wanted to try living in the New Russia." A simple, reasonable desire, certainly! So little, and yet—from the viewpoint of French G.H.Q.—so much! Colonel Netchvolodov, a battalion commander, indicated most dramatically just how the high command felt about this simple little request. When a delegation presented it to him, he fainted on the spot. The delegates had to pick up the Colonel out of the mud and carry him into doors to be revived.

## Casualties: Sixty-six per cent

The men made no immediate attempt at mutiny. They pressed their simple request, but continued to obey orders. In April, General Nivelle, the new French commander-in-chief, launched his grand offensive that was to smash the German lines once and for all—and that almost smashed the French military machine once and for all. The Russians were ordered up into the line. They discussed the matter in their "Soviets" and decided to obey.

One of their brigades, nine thousand strong, was given the task of capturing one of the main buttresses of the German line: Fort Brimont, a fortress with deep concrete redoubts, almost impregnable to infantry attack. Nivelle had planned to outflank it after the break-through and take it from the rear. But the break-through never came, and so the Russians were ordered to take it by frontal attack. They had to go up hill, in full view of the German defenders for two and a half miles, crossing a deep canal and getting through twenty-six lines of barbed wire defenses. Day after day they struggled on, dying in whole companies under the German machine guns. When they finally reached the earth-covered slopes of the fort itself, they had lost two thirds of their original strength—six thousand killed and wounded. The exhausted survivors were unable to take the fortress.

Even after the Nivelle offensive, the Russians did not mutiny. But now began those widespread mutinies in the French army which will be described in the next instalment of this series. As we shall see, these French mutinies never became politicalized, thanks largely to the efficient work of the French authorities in isolating the troops from all contact with workers and revolutionaries. The Russian troops were a dangerous source of political infection, with their increasingly militant demands, their close ties with the Russian revolution, and their "Soviets"—the word sent shivers into the polished boots of the General Staff!

Wintringham quotes the frank words of Paul Painlevé, French Minister of War at the time: "The example that these Russian soldiers gave in their Soviets, their deliberations, their attitude towards their officers, demoralized the French troops alongside them and repercussions of this were felt on the whole front. The only remedy was to transfer them to the interior of the country."

(NEXT WEEK: French G.H.Q., fearing the spread of the Soviet idea to its own troops, isolates the Russian soldiers in a camp at La Courtenne. Left to themselves, without officers the men organize a model democratic community. G.H.Q. finally suppresses the Soviet when it orders the camp surrounded by artillery and at bayonet-point forces one of the brigades to fire upon the other.)

But the initiative is no longer in their hands! It rests firmly in the hands of the workers and peasants who have passed beyond the conservative boundaries of their "leaders" and who are already reaching out for freedom and power. Rebel India is indeed on the march again and its pace will increase rapidly within the next weeks and months!

# The Unofficial War

Great Britain scored a big point this week in its struggle against the United States over control of South America's markets.

The government of Argentina Tuesday repudiated its Aug. 23 declaration for multilateral trade—which opened the way for the US to take over Britain's Argentinian markets—and, through Alfredo Louro, Director of the Exchange Control Bureau, declared: "All requests for exchange for importations of other countries of merchandise that can in some form be acquired in Great Britain will be refused."

## Wants No 1914 Repetition

During the last war, the United States interests took advantage of British preoccupation in Europe to forge ahead at a tremendous rate in Latin America. Wall Street, which prior to 1914 played second fiddle to British capital, was enabled by the war to advance by leaps and bounds, while its British rival was in no position to throw capital across the sea. In the period of the war and the reconstruction that followed

it, the investment of British capital was practically at a standstill in comparison to the inroads made by US capital.

From 1913 to 1928, British capitalism, even with its postwar partial recovery, had only increased its investments by approximately fifteen percent. In the same period Yankee capitalism advanced well over a thousand percent. During that period Wall Street stretched into Brazil and other countries. Britain has no desire to see the same thing happen again.

Argentina is one of the few countries where Britain still retains a large measure of control, and the British are fighting hard to maintain that control. The Argentine bourgeoisie, although largely linked to the British, is exerting itself to take advantage of the war crisis to bargain with both sides of this fight within the "democratic bloc." The sweat and blood of the Argentine workers and peasants are just mere items of trade to be pushed over the counter to the highest buyer.