

THE NEGRO QUESTION

By J. R. JOHNSON

(Outline of Course at the Marxist School)

Destiny of the Negro

Let us for a moment review our analysis of the Negro in his contact with Western civilization.

European contact with Africa began with the rise of European imperialism. A new continent, America, was discovered and Africa, which had always lain within easy reach of European ships, was penetrated.

The Bourgeois Revolutions

This was a progressive struggle. It took place in great revolutions in France and in America, and in Britain it took not only the threat but the actual beginning of a revolution to break the power of the feudal aristocrats.

To see what happened after the industrialist bourgeoisie took power, it would be best to follow the course of one country, say Great Britain. The industrialists seized power in 1832. They struck a terrific blow at the landed aristocracy in 1847 by abolishing the "corn laws."

But in this year began a great era of prosperity. So prosperous was the industrial bourgeoisie, thanks to the home market its victory had given it, that it treated the idea of colonies in Africa with scorn.

A New Need For Africa

But capitalist production leads inevitably to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few and the corresponding increasing poverty of the masses.

In 1885 Jules Ferry, the French statesman, used the famous words:

"Colonies for rich countries are one of the most lucrative methods of utilizing capital. . . I say that France, which is glutted with capital, has a reason for looking on this side of the colonial question."

Cecil Rhodes once told a friend, "If you want to free civilization, become an imperialist." With the glut in the home market, colonies were no longer "deadweight."

But this process of "saturation" that forced the imperialists to expand to the colonies has now itself spread to the colonies. The increasing accumulation of great wealth in the hands of the few and the increasing poverty of the masses is now not only a European but a world phenomenon.

And in the same way as the Negroes played an important role in the revolution of the industrialists in unseating the feudal aristocracy, so tomorrow the Negroes will play a decisive role in the struggle between finance-capital and the working class.

Marxist School For the Coming Week

The following lectures will be given at the Marxist School, 125 West 33rd Street, Room 201, New York City, during the week beginning December 11:

- 1. War and Inflation - Frank Demby - Monday at 7:15.
2. The Tradition and Teachings of Marx and Engels - German and Italian National Unity - The Irish and Polish Questions - Pan Slavism - Max Shachtman - Monday at 8:50.
3. Africa Today - The Position of the Native African - J. R. Johnson - Tuesday, at 7:15.
4. Class Society and the State - George Novack - Tuesday at 8:50.
5. Stalinism in the C.I.O. - Wednesday at 7:15.
6. Civil Liberties - What Can We Expect After M-Day - James Burnham - Wednesday at 8:50.

YORKVILLE FORUM

Felix Morrow, editor of the Socialist Appeal, will be the speaker at the Yorkville Branch forum of the Socialist Workers Party, at the National Bohemian Hall, 321 East 73 Street, New York City, Friday, Dec. 8, at 8 p.m.

"Will Roosevelt Keep Us Out of War?" is the topic of the lecture.

WILLIAMSBURG FORUM

"War and the Negro People" will be discussed by James Burnham, E. R. McKinney, and other prominent speakers, at a free educational meeting Friday, December 8, 8:00 p.m. at St. Augustine's Church, Lafayette and Marcy Avenues, Brooklyn. The meeting is sponsored by the Socialist Workers Party, Williamsburg Branch.

A Page from Finnish History Mannerheim and Kuusinen Destroyed the Socialist Revolution Once Before, in 1918

By VICTOR SERGE

"This war is nothing except the continuation and the last act of our war for liberation," declared General Baron Mannerheim, commander of Finland's army, on December 2. The "war for liberation" of 1918 to which he refers was, however, nothing of the kind. Finland's right to national independence was guaranteed by one of the first acts of the Soviet government of Lenin and Trotsky: the "Decree on the Rights of the Russian Peoples", promulgated on November 2, 1917.

This decree established the equality and sovereignty of the different nations in the former Czarist territories and their right to determine their own destiny, even to the point of separating and forming independent states.

The issue in Finland in 1918 therefore, was not the question of independence but whether Finland would be a workers' republic or a bourgeois state. That issue was decided by a civil war precipitated by this same Mannerheim, in which the White Guards were victorious thanks to two things:

1. The aid of German imperialism, purchased by the Finnish bourgeoisie at the price of be-

coming a vassal of the Kaiser. The Kaiser's generals inserted into the Brest-Litovsk treaty a provision forcing the evacuation of Soviet troops from Finland, and provided Mannerheim with German regiments against the Finnish Red Guards. When Germany lost the war, Finland became a British sphere of influence.

2. The same Kuusinen whom Stalin has set up as a puppet government was in 1918 leader of the Finnish social democracy and led the Finnish workers to disaster. An opponent of the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, he opposed the expropriation of the capitalists; he did not summon the workers to take up arms against the White Guards until it was too late. In Stalin's service Kuusinen remains, as before, an opponent of proletarian revolution, cynically serving the Kremlin bureaucracy in its annexation of Finland.

The story of the civil war of 1918 is a damning indictment of both Mannerheim and Kuusinen—then and now. The story is told in a chapter of Victor Serge's "The Year I of the Russian Revolution", which we pub-

lish here for the first time in English—Editors.

FINLAND WAS READY FOR SOCIALISM

If Russia was, as Lenin often remarked, one of the most backward countries of Europe, Finland was one of the most advanced in the world. Her customs, her advanced political education, the victories of her social movement, even her industrial structure, seemed to ensure the easy victory of socialism.

A part of Sweden since the Twelfth Century, a country of small proprietors whom feudalism had never overcome, Finland passed to Russia in 1809, through the alliance between Napoleon and Alexander I. Constituted as a Grand Duchy, she enjoyed a large degree of autonomy, all the larger as the Finns were able to defend their autonomy against the attacks of her Grand Dukes, the Czars of Russia. Finland kept her Diet, her own money, her postal system, her schools, her own army, and her own internal administration. She grew up, like the other Scandinavian countries, as a part of Western Europe.

Nicholas II made brutal attempts at Russification of Finland; he only succeeded in estranging the entire Finnish people. Two years after the Revolution of 1905, which forced the Czar to grant her a constitution, Finland instituted universal suffrage. In the first election, in 1907, the social democrats obtained eighty seats out of two hundred in the Sejm (parliament). The 1916 elections gave them an absolute majority, one hundred three out of two hundred. This majority voted the eight-hour day and an intelligent program of public legislation. Then parliamentary socialism found itself at the point of death. Was it possible to continue peacefully marching toward socialism with ballot in hand?

The Finnish bourgeoisie allied itself with Kerensky against the Red social democratic Diet; the Provisional Government in Petrograd, following the line of the autocracy, declared the Diet dissolved. Russian soldiers guarded its closed doors. In the following elections, the social democrats gained—from 375,000 votes the year before, to 440,000 votes—but lost some of their seats—from 103 to 92. This result was

obtained by cynical fraud on the part of the bourgeois parties.

But no more than the Finnish proletariat could resign itself to this electoral defeat, could the bourgeoisie content itself with so precarious a victory. An extra-parliamentary settlement was on the order of the day. The bourgeoisie had foreseen it for long, and prepared seriously for civil war. But the social democracy, twenty years in the school of the "powerful" German social democracy, and dominated by reformist illusions, hoped to avoid the conflict.

Three thousand young Finns of the wealthier classes were in the 27th Jaegers battalion of the German army, fighting against their hereditary enemy, Russia. Clandestine military schools existed in various places throughout the country. After the fall of the Czar, a volunteer rifle corps was formed in the North to maintain law and order. This was General Herrich's Schutzkorps, the first White Guard unit formed in the open. Its headquarters were at Vasa on the Gulf of Bothnia; it received arms from Sweden and Germany.

GENERAL STRIKE OF NOVEMBER, 1918

The October Revolution provoked an echo in Finland; a great general strike, in mid-November, brought on by a serious famine, which affected only the poorer classes, and by the reactionary policies of the Finnish Senate, which seemed inclined to place the reactionary Svinhufvud, at the head of a dictatorial Directorate.

The workers quit work everywhere. The railways stopped. Workers' Red Guards, supported by Soviet Russian troops in places, occupied all public buildings. Bloody encounters occurred between the Whites and the Reds. The deputies argued. The frightened bourgeoisie consented to the application of the eight-hour law and to the enactment of a new program of social legislation, as well as to the democratization of power, which passed from the Senate to the Diet.

And the victorious general strike of the workers ended in the constitution of a bourgeois cabinet, headed by the same reactionary Svinhufvud! It was the abortion of a revolution. Finnish revolutionists are of the opinion that the seizure of power was possible at that time; it would even have been easy; the support of the Bolsheviks would have been decisive. Otto Kuusinen, then one of the leaders of the Center wing of the Finnish social democracy, later wrote: "Not wishing to risk our democratic conquests, and hoping to skip that great historical turning-point by clever parliamentary maneuvers, we decided to elude the revolution. . . We did not believe in the revolution; we had no hope in the revolution, we did not want it at all." (Kuusinen, The Finnish Revolution, an Essay in Self-Criticism, 1919). With leaders of such mind, the cause of the Finnish proletariat was certain to lose.

BOURGEOISIE PREPARES FOR CIVIL WAR

But the general strike revealed their own strength to the workers, and to the bourgeoisie their peril. The Finnish bourgeoisie understood that it was lost without reinforcements. Svinhufvud asked the Swedes to intervene. The Whites armed feverishly in the North, where they collected large stocks of food. The government cleverly extended the famine in working class centers by holding back reserve food supplies. The proclamation of Finnish independence changed nothing. The possibility of Swedish or German intervention alarmed the workers more and more.

To cap matters, the Diet voted, by 97-87, a motion containing unmistakable allusions to the necessity for a bourgeois dictatorship. The problem of power was posed once more, even more seriously than on the eve of the November general strike. This time the social democrats realized that all chances of a parliamentary solution were exhausted. It was necessary to fight.

The red flag was hoisted over the Workers' House in Helsingfors during the night of January 27. The rest of the city was rapidly captured, and the Senate and the government took refuge at Vasa. In a few days, the workers mastered the larger cities of Abo, Vyborg and Tammerfors, and the whole southern section of the country, without meeting any serious resistance.

The social democratic leaders, Kuusinen, Tanner, Sirola, formed the Council of People's Delegates, under the control of a supreme Workers' Council of 35 delegates—ten from the social democratic party, ten from the Red Guard, five from the Helsingfors workers' organizations. What were they to do? "To march day by day toward the socialist revolution," declared the People's Delegates. They instituted workers' control of production, made easy by the high degree of concentration of the main industries, lumber, paper and textiles; they put a stop to the sabotage of the banks. Public life and industrial production soon returned to an almost normal state.

KUUSINEN THROWS AWAY THE REVOLUTION

Was the dictatorship of the proletariat possible? Was it necessary? The social democratic leaders did not think so, although five hundred thousand, of a total population of three million, were engaged in industry. The workers and agricultural laborers together numbered half a million men. The small and middle farmers, the rural majority, could be won over or neutralized by the revolution. Unfortunately, "Until they were defeated, the majority of the leaders were not at all clear as to the goals of the revolution" (Kuusinen). Without either establishing the dictatorship of the laboring masses or expropriating the wealthy classes, the social democrats tried to establish a parliamentary democracy in which the proletariat was the leading class.

The principal measures taken by the Council of People's Delegates were: the institution of the eight-hour day, the payment of wages for time out during the revolutionary strike, the emancipation of servants and bondsmen from the farms (they were hired by the year by the farmers and subject to very severe laws), the abolition of the old method of allocating land, which was based on a system of corvee and tribute, the abolition of rents for small tenants, the institution of judicial reform, abolition of the death penalty, tax exemption for the poor, a special tax on incomes of more than twenty thousand marks, a tax on apartments of more than one room, liberation of the press from ancient regulations, workers' control of the factories.

The Council drew up a constitution, to be adopted by referendum, which expressed the Ideal Democracy which motivated the social democrats. An assembly of people's representatives, elected every three years by universal, direct secret suffrage (women voting, the age limit twenty years), according to proportional representation, was to be the supreme authority of the "People's Republic of Finland." Any amendments to the constitution were to be submitted to a referendum. A minority in the assembly which mustered one-third of the votes had the right to veto all but tax legislation. The import of prime commodities was exempted from all taxation. Officials and magistrates were to be elected every five years and subject to recall by one-fifth of the electors at any time. The government was to be checked by a "control commission for the administration and application of laws"; two members of which could veto any new legislation, etc., etc.

A Finnish revolutionist has remarked of this constitution: "In theory, it attained the widest development of bourgeois democracy, a development actually impossible under a capitalist system. This bourgeois democracy could only go forward to the dictatorship of the proletariat if the workers were victorious, or backward to a bourgeois dictatorship if they were defeated." It was a beautiful and completely utopian project. "The weakness of the bourgeoisie," Kuusinen said, "let us into democratic illusions, and we decided to march toward socialism by parliamentary debate and the democratization of the government." Such was the terrible effect of reformism on the Finnish socialists. Such was their fatal misunderstanding of the laws of the class struggle.

(How, in return for these democratic illusions, one hundred thousand Finnish workers—altogether about one quarter of the working class—were struck down by the White Terror, will be told next week, in the concluding installment of Victor Serge's story.)

I. "We Want to Go Home!" MUTINY! 1917: The Mutinies of the Russian Brigades in France by "Spartacus"

(Concluded from last week)

Both Russian brigades were marched into the interior, to a camp of huts near the village of La Courtine, some two hundred miles south of Paris. Their numbers are variously put at from 10,000 to 15,000. No attempt was made to disarm the men. The French were too busy dealing with the widespread mutinies in their own army to pay any attention to the Russians once they had been safely "interned", so to speak. The Russian officers, not relishing the new democratic manners of their men, and perhaps a little alarmed for the safety of their own skins, went off to Limoges to live.

For four months the camp at La Courtine presented an extraordinary spectacle of democratic communal living. The thousands of soldiers in the huge camp, left strictly to themselves, showed the talent for social organization which is usually shown by the masses under such conditions—and which never fails to astonish bourgeois observers, who cannot conceive of an army existing without officers bawling "orders" and keeping "discipline", any more than they can imagine a factory producing goods without high-salaried executives sitting behind mahogany desks.

According to the later official reports, the Russians raped and looted the whole countryside for miles around. But the local villagers seem to have been completely unaware of any of these outrages. They said afterwards that the Russians were "doux et correctes" ("gentle and well-mannered")—fine men who liked nothing better than to play with the children. The villagers distinctly preferred them to the Americans who came to La Courtine later on.

The Social Patriots Try Oratory

Frequent political meetings were held in the camp. Various eminent Russian exiles of a respectable social-patriot complexion, of course—were sent in by the French authorities to show these ignorant and stubborn soldiers why they should die for la gloire, la victoire, liberte, egalite, fraternite, etc., etc.

For all their eloquence, these patriotic democrats were never able to make clear to the soldiers what the revolution was all about. Always their fine words about freedom and democracy rang false when thrown on the hard counter of the soldiers' single, unalterable demand: We want to go home.

But Miliukov and his successor, Kerensky, had enough rebellious troops on their hands at home. They wanted these to stay and help France win the war.

The best efforts of all these dignitaries and "distinguished former exiles" were not enough to persuade these simple soldiers to keep on fighting and dying, any more than Kerensky's brilliant oratory was enough to hold together the Russian armies at home. It was necessary to brand these brigades as "rebels" and let the French deal with them—at bayonet point. For these troops at La Courtine were fellow countrymen of the soldiers who had overthrown the Czar. They too were infected with the bacilli of revolution. Trotsky writes:

The Russian soldiers had carried this dreadful infection with them across the sea in their canvas knapsacks, in the lining of their coats, in the secret places of their hearts. This dramatic episode at La Courtine is significant. It was a kind of consciously arranged ideal experiment, almost as though under a bell-glass, for testing out those inner processes in the Russian army, the foundation for which had been laid by the whole past history of the country.

When they had finally mastered the mutinies in their own army, the French authorities turned their attention again to the Russians at La Courtine. It was decided to get rid of

them by sending them to the deadly, fever-ridden Salonika front. The Russian commander, General Zankievitch, issued orders to break up camp and march to a nearby town. The social composition of the two brigades was quite different. The first had been recruited in Moscow from clerks and workers, the second was made up almost wholly of Siberian peasants. In this final crisis—heavy artillery had already been moved up within range of the camp—the peasant brigade obeyed Zankievitch's order and marched out of the camp. The first brigade refused to move. Now, with French bayonets at their backs, the second brigade was forced to attack their comrades. Trotsky describes the operation:

The second Russian brigade was brought into action against the first. The artillery occupied positions on the nearby mountain slopes, the infantry, employing all the rules of engineering science, dug trenches and approaches to La Courtine. The surroundings were strongly occupied by Alpine sharpshooters, to make sure that no single Frenchman should enter the theatre of war of the two Russian brigades. Thus the military authorities of France set the stage on their territory for a Russian civil war, prudently surrounding it with a hedge of bayonets. This was merely a rehearsal. Later on the French ruling classes organized a civil war on the territory of Russia herself, surrounding it with the barbed ring of the blockade.

A methodical bombardment of the camp began. Several hundred soldiers came out of the camp, agreeing to surrender. They were received, and the artillery fire immediately began again. This lasted for four days and four nights. The La Courtine men surrendered in detachments. On the sixth of September there remained about two hundred men who had decided not to give themselves up alive. At their head stood a Ukrainian, Globa, a Baptist, a fanatic: in Russia they would have called him a Bolshevik. Under cover of artillery, machine gun and rifle fire, combining in one general roar, the place was stormed.

According to Wintringham, two hundred of the rebels were executed on the spot, and another eight hundred were officially declared to be "missing".

The End of the Story

The first brigade was rewarded for its loyalty by being sent to Africa, together with the thousands in the second brigade who had surrendered before the final assault on the camp. More thousands were added from Russian regiments serving on the Salonika front, who had also been demanding to be allowed to go home. Instead they were all shipped off to Africa, where, in the words of Henri Barbusse, who years later talked to some of the survivors, "they melted down. They were dragged from camp to camp, from inferno to inferno."

Finally, the French sent the survivors home—to fight in the army of Denikin against the Bolsheviks! Once more they mutinied, once more they were decimated. But they stood fast and refused to fight against their brothers in the Red Army. Finally the adventurer Denikin was beaten and fled to Paris. Those remnants of the Russian brigades who had survived the bombardment of La Courtine, the sun and fever of Africa, and the brutal reprisals of Denikin—these veteran rebels at last were able to return home and take part in building up the new Russia.

"And now at last," writes Barbusse, "the little throng of Russian soldiers have triumphed over events. At last they have become true soldiers of the revolution. They have encompassed that definite thing which they saw in their dreams when they refused to serve the ends of those who massacre the peoples. . . Never, in all the history of mankind, was promise more splendidly kept by a band of men both greater and more human than their fellows."