



Frederick Douglass



Harriet Tubman



Karl Marx



John Brown



Sojourner Truth



Frantz Fanon

American Civilization On Trial

BLACK MASSES AS VANGUARD

Expanded edition includes:

A 1980s View of the Two-Way Road Between the U.S. and Africa — by Raya Dunayevskaya

Appendix: Black Caucuses in the Unions — by Charles Denby



Statement of the National Editorial Board of News & Letters

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American Civilization On Trial

BLACK MASSES AS VANGUARD

Statement of the National Editorial Board of News & Letters

Raya Dunayevskaya

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A 1980s View of the Two-Way Road Between the U.S. and Africa

On this double 20th anniversary of the famous 1963 March on Washington and the first publication of **American Civilization on Trial**, the struggle continues. The planned August 27, 1983 March on Washington is taking place when the deep economic recession spells out Depression for the Black world, not only in terms of unemployment - especially that of the youth which is an incredible 50 percent - but in the whole field of civil rights, where that supreme artificer, President Reagan, is trying to roll back what civil rights struggles had achieved over the past two decades.

Reagan's retrogressionism makes it more imperative than ever not to leave these stark facts at the factual stage alone. Otherwise, all we could report is that the Magnolia Jungle we described in our first edition is as steaming as it was when Bull Connor unleashed the fire-hoses, vicious dogs and cattle prods against teenagers in Birmingham, Alabama and four young Black children were blown to bits in a church there - after which Schwemer, Chaney and Goodman were tortured and murdered in Mississippi, and Viola Liuzzo was gunned down and Rev. Reeb clubbed to death following the Selma to Montgomery March. Indeed, that jungle is still at such white heat that Black youth in Florida have erupted in revolt for three years in a row.

The truth is, however, first, that what was won through the last two decades was inseparable from the intense new forms of revolt. The turbulent 1960s witnessed the birth of a whole Third World, central to which was the Black Revolution both in the U.S. and in Africa. Secondly, inseparable from and simultaneous with that, was the Marxist-Humanist banner that **American Civilization on Trial** raised in the context of the whole 200-year history of the U.S., whose civilization had been put on trial and found guilty.

In a word, to separate a philosophy of liberation from the struggle for freedom is to doom us to yet one more unfinished revolution such as has characterized the U.S. from its birth, when the Declaration of Independence

was meant for white, only and left the Black enslaved. It was because this history, not only as past but as present, remained racist on the 100th anniversary of the "Emancipation Proclamation" that the Introduction to **American Civilization on Trial** was entitled:, "Of Patriots, Scoundrels and Slave Masters."

Historic Turning Points: Slave Revolts, Women's Dimension, Anti-Imperialism

What **American Civilization on Trial** disclosed was that, at each historic turning point of development in the U.S., it was the Black masses in motion who proved to be the vanguard. Take the question of the slave revolts leading to the birth of Abolitionism, which had created a new dimension of American character. It is not only, as we pointed out, that: "They were inter-racial and in a slave society preached and practiced Negro equality. They were distinguished as well for inspiring, aligning with and fighting for equality of women in an age when the women had neither the right to the ballot nor to property nor to divorce. They were internationalist, covering Europe with their message, and bringing back to this country the message of the Irish Freedom Fighters." It is that the vanguard nature of the Black dimension in the Abolitionist movement has much to say to us today - even when it comes to Women's Liberation.

Take so simple a matter as a name, specifically Sojourner Truth's name. Keep in mind what the question of choosing a name means in today's Women's Liberation Movement, which has discussed widely the question of not bearing one's husband's name. But did anyone other than Sojourner Truth include a whole philosophy of freedom in a chosen name? Listen to her story. She said she "talked with God," told him she refused to bear a slave name, and asked what should she do? "He" answered her as follows: Sojourn the world over and tell everyone the truth about American democracy, that it doesn't exist for Blacks. That was how she decided to call herself "Sojourner Truth."

Woman as Reason as well as Force has always been hidden from history, not to mention philosophy. Yet, as early as 1831, the very year Nat Turner led the

greatest slave revolt, Maria Stewart spoke up in public - the first American-born woman, white or Black, to speak publicly. Her appeal was to:

"O ye daughters of Africa, awake! awake! arise! no longer sleep nor slumber but distinguish yourselves. Show forth to the world that ye are endowed with noble and exalted faculties . . . How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles? . . . How long shall a mean set of men flatter us with their smiles, and enrich themselves with our hard earnings: their wives' fingers sparkling with rings and they themselves laughing at our folly?"

Total deafness to women shaping history extended into the 20th century, even when it wasn't a question of the rights of any single person, but when whole masses in motion fought - and won!

In Africa, in 1929, tens of thousands of Igbo women had self-organized against both British imperialism and their own African chiefs whom they accused of carrying out the new British edict to tax women. It took our age and a new Women's liberation Movement to bring forth just such pages of history.¹

The vanguard nature of the Black dimension is seen also in the struggle against imperialism at its earliest appearance. Take the question of the Spanish-American War, Blacks sensed its imperialist nature and became the very first force in the world outside of Latin America itself to organize an Anti-Imperialist League in 1899. In a word, whether the focus is on the Civil War in the U.S. or the world anti-imperialist struggles, the Black masses in motion showed their multi-dimensionality.

In the very same year that the Anti-Imperialist League was formed, in a different part of the world the revolutionary Marxist, Rosa Luxemburg, wrote:

"At present, Persia and Afghanistan too have been attacked by Russia and England. From that, the European antagonisms in Africa too have received new impulses; there, too, the struggle is breaking out with new force (Fashoda, Delegoa, Madagascar). It's clear that the dismemberment of Asia and Africa is the final limit beyond which European politics no longer has

room to unfold. There follows then another such squeeze as has just occurred in the Eastern question, and the European powers will have no choice other than throwing themselves on one another, until the **period of the final crisis sets in within politics . . . etc., 'etc.'**"

The birth of a whole new Third World in our age cast a new illumination both on Luxemburg's flash of genius on imperialism's rise and on the little-known page of Black history concerning its early anti-imperialist struggles. The struggles today have reached a new intensity, and they are multi-dimensional. As we witnessed in the anti-Vietnam War struggles, it was the Black youth who first articulated the defiance as "Hell, no! We won't go!". Yet it has become clear since the 1960s that even the greatest actions need the direction that comes from a total philosophy of freedom. What is needed now is to concretize such a philosophy of freedom as the reality for our age.



Black Union cavalrymen bring in Confederate prisoners during Civil War.

Emergence of the Third World as Marx Foresaw It

What **American Civilization on Trial** reveals is both Marx's deep American roots and his Promethean vision. Take the succinct way in which Marx pinpointed the situation in the Civil War at its darkest moment, as the war

dragged on and the Southern generals were winning so decisively as to produce a defeatist attitude in the North. Where others looked at the military forces, Marx looked at the forces of revolution: "A single Negro regiment would have a remarkable effect on Southern nerves . . . a war of this kind must be conducted along revolutionary lines . . ." (Letter from Marx to Engels, August 7, 1862).

From his very first break with capitalism, as he discovered a whole new continent of thought and of revolution which he called "a new Humanism," capitalism is what Marx critiqued and fought against throughout his life. Here is how he described the origins of European capitalism:

"The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black skins, signaled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production." (**Capital**, Vol. 1, p. 823, Kerr edition)

The unmasking of Western civilization's racism by its Black dimension in revolutionary moments of mass upsurge makes imperative a most serious return, on this centenary of Marx's death, to his critical, revolutionary unmasking of Western civilization's capitalist foundations. Just as in the U.S., so in Britain, Western civilization has been put on trial by the Black dimension. This became especially sharp with the April 1981 Brixton rebellion. Like the famous Kerner Commission Report following the 1967 rebellions in the U.S. and the current investigations into the Miami rebellions, the British government has produced its own Scarman Report on the Black British rebellions. While the tone of the British report is more outraged than its American counterpart at the stripping away of Britain's fetishism about its vaunted "civilization," Lord Scarman nevertheless found that "the disorders, like so many riots in British history, were a protest against society by people, deeply frustrated and deprived, who saw in a violent attack upon the forces of law and order their one opportunity of compelling public attention to their grievances." Being in the business of empire longer than the Americans, however, the British authorities are more expert in recognizing historic continuities in the new forms of revolt against their rule. Thus, in its very first paragraph, the Scarman Report observed that "the petrol bomb was now used

for the first time on the streets of Britain (the idea, no doubt, copied from the disturbances in Northern Ireland)."2

Frantz Fanon was absolutely right when, in our age, he wrote: "Two centuries ago, a former European colony decided to catch up with Europe. It succeeded so well that the United States of America became a "monster . . ." The extreme urgency of dealing with that global monster today demands that the struggles be tightly woven together with a total philosophy. As we work it out for our age, what is needed is a concentration, at one and the same time, on 1) the trail to the 1980s from Marx's last decade, and 2) revolutionary Black thought.

It was in his last decade that Marx discovered still newer paths to revolution. Present-day existing state capitalisms calling themselves Communist, like Russia and China, have totally abandoned both the philosophy and the actuality of Marx's "revolution in permanence." Marx, on the other hand, began introducing fundamental changes in his greatest theoretical work, **Capital**, which disclosed his new perceptions of the possibility of a revolution in technologically underdeveloped lands before the technologically advanced West. Take the simple word "so-called" placed by Marx in the title of the final part of **Capital**: "The So-Called Primitive Accumulation of Capital." Though that word has been disregarded by post-Marx Marxists, it touches the burning question of our day - the relationship of technologically advanced countries to the technologically underdeveloped Third World. What Marx was saying with that word, "so-called", was that it simply wasn't true that capitalism's carving up of the Asian and African world characterized only the primitive stage of capitalism.

To further stress that technologically advanced capitalism has not at all left behind the so-called primitive stage of turning Africa into "a warren for hunting black skins" and forcing them into slavery in "civilized" countries, Marx subordinated the whole section of Part 8 and made it integral to Part 7, "Accumulation of Capital." There it reached its highest point - the concentration and centralization of capital. Thereupon, Marx added a whole new paragraph to the 1875 French edition of Capital, which showed that this continued outreach into imperialism "successively annexed extensive areas of the New World, Asia and Australia."3

As Marx then turned to study pre-capitalist societies - be it of the Native Americans, the Indians in Morgan's Ancient Society, or the Australian aborigine designated by Marx as "the intelligent Black", he hit out against anyone trying to transform his chapter, "The Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation" into a "Universal." Marx insisted that he had been describing the particular, historic stage of Western capitalism; that other societies need not follow that path. If they did, they would "lose the finest chance ever offered by history to a people and undergo all the fatal vicissitudes of the capitalist regime."⁴

Revolutions in Philosophy and in Fact

Marx's projection of the possibility of a revolution coming first in technologically underdeveloped lands achieved a new meaning for our age with the emergence of a whole new Third World, as well as new mass struggles and the birth of new revolutionary forces as reason. The Black dimension in the U.S. as well as in Africa showed that we had, indeed, reached a totally new movement from practice to theory that was itself a new form of theory. It was this new movement from practice - those new voices from below - which we heard, recorded, and dialectically developed. Those voices demanded that a new movement from theory be rooted in that movement from practice and become developed to the point of philosophy - a philosophy of world revolution.

Our very first major theoretical work, **Marxism and Freedom**, cast in the context of that movement from practice, was followed by a series of pamphlets in which the voices of all the revolutionary forces - workers, Blacks, women and youth - could be heard: from **Workers Battle Automation** to **Freedom Riders Speak for Themselves**, and from **The Free Speech Movement and the Negro Revolution** to **Working Women for Freedom**.⁵

Indeed, it was not only the voices of the Freedom Riders we heard in 1961, but the story of the magnificent Black women in Mississippi who called themselves "Woman Power Unlimited" and came to the .. aid of the jailed Freedom Riders. **American Civilization on Trial** cast a new illumination on

the two-way road between Africa and the U.S. via the West Indies by showing that what, to the capitalists, was the triangular trade of rum, molasses and slaves, was, to the Blacks, the ever-live triangular development of internationalism, masses in motion **and ideas**. This triangular development remains the dominant force to this day.

In our epoch, the dynamism of ideas in Africa comes out in sharp focus as we contrast it to the weary American bourgeois ideologues who declared the 1950s to be "the end of ideology" just when a whole new Third World emerged. As against what the capitalist ideologues wrote then, consider the 1959 speech by Leopold Sedar Senghor to the Constitutive Congress which united Mali and Senegal:

"A nation that refuses to keep its rendezvous with history, that does not believe itself to be the bearer of a unique message - that nation is finished, ready to be placed in a museum. The Negro African is not finished even before he gets started. Let him speak; above all, let him act. Let him bring like a leaven, his message to the world in order to help build a universal civilization . . . Let us recapitulate Marx's positive contributions. They are: the philosophy of humanism, economic theory, dialectical method."

It is true that Africa, too, has since undergone many retreats, as the Union of Mali and Senegal has broken up and Senghor has retrogressed in thought, as well. It is not true that the mass freedom struggles have abated. Nor is it true that Senghor represents all of African thought. Frantz Fanon was "the opposite both in thought and in act, and it is his philosophy that is alive as far as South Africa is concerned and, indeed, can become a foundation for today's freedom struggles worldwide. It was this new stage in the two-way road that we presented in our 1978 pamphlet **Frantz Fanon, Soweto and American Black Thought**.

If we return to the year 1959, when Senghor made the Address to his Congress, we find that to be the same year that Frantz Fanon addressed the Second Congress of Black Artists and Writers meeting in Rome, where he said: "The consciousness of self is not the closing of a door to communication. Philosophic thought teaches us, on the contrary, that it is its guarantee. National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension."

Furthermore, this was not philosophy for its own sake or history as past, because Fanon was contrasting the Black worker to the Black intellectual in that battle against colonialism:

"History teaches us clearly that the battle against colonialism does not run straight away along the lines of nationalism . . . It so happens that the unpreparedness of the educated classes, the lack of practical links between them and the mass of the people, their laziness, and let it be said, their cowardice at the decisive moment of the struggle will give rise to tragic mishaps." (**Wretched of the Earth**, p. 121, Grove Press edition)

In this, too, Fanon's vision saw far. Which is why the final chapter of the 1973 work **Philosophy and Revolution** - "New Passions and New Forces: The Black Dimension, the Anti-Vietnam War Youth, Rank-and-File Labor, Women's Liberation" - quoted the American Black auto worker who gave the philosophy of Humanism its sharpest edge: "There is no middle road anymore. The days we accepted 'we have to take the lesser of two evils' are gone. You have to go to the extreme now. Racism is the issue here, and to rid ourselves of that, to be Humanist, we need a revolution."

The Black Consciousness Movement today recognizes Fanon as a great Third World theorist, at the same time that they recognize Steve Biko's unique creativity in the Soweto uprising in 1976 and in founding their great new movement. This is precisely why South Africa's barbaric apartheid system murdered Biko in September 1977.

It was no accident that Charles Denby, the Black production worker-editor of **News & Letters** since its birth, felt impelled in 1978 to add a new Part II to the story of his life which had been published in 1952 as **Indignant Heart**. Thus, Part II of **Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal** begins with the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the very year News and Letters Committees were born and ends with a chapter on "The Worldwide Struggle for Freedom" which discusses "the American Black identification with Soweto and Biko, with Fanon and Caribbean thought." It becomes clear why this story of Denby's Life, North and South, which sums up a half century of freedom struggles, from the struggles of rural Blacks in the South to the wildcat strikes of Black workers in the North, concludes with this Black worker's declaration "I consider my story as part of the worldwide struggles for

freedom."

It is in Azania (South Africa) that the most exciting events are now unfolding, revealing how the mine workers there are both organizing and thinking their own thoughts. A simple word - "Amandla!" (Power) - tells how new a stage they have reached. It is this word which Teboho Noka, an organizer for the National Union of Mine Workers, used in order to stress that not only are they fighting for different conditions of labor and higher wages, but for "Amandla" - adding: "It shall be ours." It is that feeling of fighting for nothing less than freedom which transforms the struggle from a mere trade union battle to one for a whole new society.

Like Marx in his day; Frantz Fanon, in our age, declared his philosophy to be a new humanism," as he developed it most originally in his **Wretched of the Earth**:

"Comrades, let us flee from this motionless movement where gradually dialectic is changing into the logic of equilibrium. Let us consider the question of mankind." (p. 254)

"For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man." (p. 255)

"This new humanity cannot do otherwise than define a new humanism both for itself and for others." (p. 197)

Mass Unrest Today and the Need for Truly Human Foundations

Just as it was the Black dimension which sounded the alarm against U.S. imperialism's first adventure in the Philippines and the Caribbean at the turn of the century, so today it is the Latino dimension which is opposing Reagan's imperialist actions in Central America and the Caribbean. The gunboat diplomacy which saw the United States invade again and again - from Cuba and Nicaragua to Panama and Honduras in the period from the

turn of the century into the 1930s - has returned in a vicious new form under Reagan. His policies of installing right-wing dictatorships and attacking the nascent Nicaraguan revolution seemed aimed at engulfing all of Central America in a "regional" war - that is, getting the Latin American countries to fight each other for the benefit of U.S. imperialism. The revolutionary opposition arising from within Central America - indeed, all of Latin America - extends to the Latino dimension right here within the U.S. At one and the same time, all are united in working to stay Reagan's counter-revolutionary hand, and by seeking out and expressing the dimensions of national minorities, sex and class are creating new pathways toward social revolution, in Latin America and in the U.S. itself.

The mass unrest today throughout the world, the deep recession we are in, and the many political crises we face compel intense new activities - whether on the production line or in the massive anti-nuke campaign or in the Black revolutionary movements - unseparated from a new passion for philosophy and revolutionary direction. That revolutionary direction can be seen as we sum up how Marx worked it out concretely for his philosophy of "revolution in permanence" in relation to the Black world.

Marx's reference in the **Ethnological Notebooks** to the Australian aborigine as "the intelligent Black" brought to a conclusion the dialectic he had unchained when he first broke from bourgeois society in the 1840s and objected to the use of the word, "Negro," as if it were synonymous with the word, "slave." By the 1850s, in the **Grundrisse**, he extended that sensitivity to the whole pre-capitalist world. By the 1860s, the Black dimension became, at one and the same time, not only pivotal to the abolition of slavery and victory of the North in the Civil War, but also to the restructuring of **Capital** itself. In a word, the often-quoted sentence: "Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the Black skin it is branded," far from being rhetoric, was the actual reality and the perspective for overcoming that reality. Marx reached, at every historic turning point, for a concluding point, not as an end but as a new jumping-off point, a new beginning, a new vision.

In the specific case of the Civil War in the U.S., it was not only a question of theory or of national action, but one of international organization as Marx established the International Workingmen's Association to come to the aid

both of the North, especially the Abolitionists, in that Civil War, and of the European working class struggles, especially the Polish revolt against Russian Tsarism. As Poland shows us all over again today, freedom fighters do not give up their struggle even when compelled to work under the whip of the counter-revolution.

There is no doubt that we are on the threshold of new revolutionary beginnings in the Black world in this Marx centenary year. The 20-year history of **American Civilization on Trial** and world development has seen not only capitalism's drive to war threaten the very existence of civilization as we have known it, but also its absolute opposite; revolutionary masses in motion. The Reagan retrogression - and the ceaseless struggles against the attempts to push back all the gains of the past two decades - gives urgency to this new fourth, expanded edition (and fifth printing) of **American Civilization on Trial**.

The absolute challenge to our age is the concretization of Marx's concept of "revolution in permanence." The Black dimension is crucial to the total uprooting of existing, exploitative, racist, sexist society and the creation of new, truly human foundations.

- Raya Dunayevskaya for the National Editorial Board of **News & Letters**

August, 1983

Notes

¹ See Judith Van Allen's "Aba Riots or Igbo Women's War" in **Ufahemu 6**: no. 1 (1975). An elaborated version also appeared in **Woman In Africa**, Nancy Halkin and Edna Bay, eds. (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1976). See especially a global view of revolutionary women in **Rosa Luxemburg, Woman's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution**, pp. 79-112.

² Marx often singled out the deep relationship between Irish revolutionaries and all other minorities. A new projected 11-volume documentary study,

covering the impact of Garveyism on the U.S., Africa and the West Indies, reveals the revolutionary relationship between Garveyism and the Irish struggles in the early part of the 20th century. Vol. I (1826-1919) and Vol. II (1919-1920) are due off the press In November, 1983, edited by Robert A. Hill (Berkeley, Cal.: Univ. of California Press). See also "British Civilization on Trial," in the May-June, 1981 issue of **Marxist-Humanism, journal of British Marxist-Humanists**, available from **News & Letters** .

³ This paragraph was left out of Engels' English and German editions. It is discussed in Chapter 10 of **Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution**, "A Decade of Historic Transformation: from the Grundrisse to Capital."

⁴ Marx's letter to the journal which had published a critique of his work by the Russian Populist, Mihailovsky, was written in November, 1877 but not published in Russia until 1886 after Marx's death in 1883.

⁵ The full development of Marxist-Humanist philosophy in the U.S., under the title "Marxist-Humanism, 1941 to Today, Its Origin and Development in the U.S." is on file and available on microfilm at the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI 48202.

Introduction to the Third Edition

August, 1970

American Civilization on Trial, when it was first published on the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, was the only statement of the thousands then rolling off the presses that loudly proclaimed black masses as vanguard which had "also put white labor in mass production to the test."

Where others praised the liberalism of the Kennedy Administration in supporting the struggle for civil rights, we likened JFK's support to the kind "a rope gives a hanging man." We insisted that it was not too far distant from that of George Wallace who had just become Governor of that "magnolia jungle which vies with South Africa as the staunchest outpost of racism on this side of the diamond apartheid."

As against the shilly-shallying and dilly-dallying which has always characterized white rulers, even of the type of Thomas Jefferson, we pointed to the genius of the black rag-picker in Boston, David Walker, who challenged the author of the Declaration of Independence for his statement that the color, black, was "unfortunate," by declaring "My color will yet root some of you out of the very face of the earth !!"

Moreover, the Negro, as touchstone of American history, had also carved a two-way road to the African Revolutions as against the triangular trade of rum, molasses and slaves that characterized capitalism in the past.

The Nixon-Agnew Administration, in heightening the wars at home and abroad, by the extension of Johnson's war in South Vietnam to Cambodia, and the massacres of anti-Vietnam war protesters and black rebels in Kent, Ohio, Jackson, Miss., Augusta, Ga. has brought our nation to the edge of civil war by counter-revolution. It is time the initiative returned from the hands of the counter-revolutionaries to the Freedom Fighters.

The deepening struggles during the seven years that have intervened between

the first edition of **American Civilization on Trial**, and this, its third edition, have placed a new urgency on our 1963 conclusion:

"Above all, we hold fast to the one-worldedness and the new Humanist thinking of all oppressed from the East German workers to the West Virginia miner; from the Hungarian revolutionary to the Montgomery Bus Boycotter; as well as from the North Carolina Sit-inner to the African Freedom Fighter. The elements of the new society, submerged the world over by the might of capital, are emerging in all sorts of unexpected and unrelated places. What is missing is the **unity** of these movements from practice with the movement from theory into an overall philosophy that can form the foundation of a totally new social order."

The eruptions throughout the length and breadth of this country, in the year 1967, were totally spontaneous, and spoke in much clearer terms than any of the leaders: that the black masses would no longer tolerate their inhuman ghetto life; that they would speak to "whitey" in the only language he understood — by fire; that they would translate "black power" from a mere slogan to an unconquerable force. Whitey got the message, but once again tried to buy himself time with a few jobs in the "inner city" of each metropolis. The black masses refused to be silenced. They proceeded to search for a total philosophy on their own.

In 1969 we called together Black-Red Conferences in Detroit, Los Angeles, and in San Francisco, at a time when it seemed to be impossible to establish a dialogue between black and white. These conferences brought together worker and intellectual, youth and adult, housewife and professional, old and new revolutionaries, and all colors - black, white, brown, red and yellow. In opening the conferences we said:

"Trying to be against all whites is to fail to see your real roots, and to fail to work out a new coalescence of black and white, and theory and practice. It is the present period you will talk about. And, in becoming theoreticians, in creating a new philosophy by speaking for yourselves, you have to recognize that you speak, not as individuals (though the individual is very great) but as the new forces that are necessary — what Marx called the new passions for reconstructing society on totally new, truly human, beginnings."

Those who claim that Nixon-Agnew are like former Senator Joseph McCarthy are mistaken. Mc-Carthy never had the awesome power of the U.S. behind his personal drive to terrorize and destroy everyone who opposed him. Nixon-Agnew do. And they are mobilizing the full power of their administration to consciously and methodically destroy every gain made by the black mass and student revolts. **The "search and destroy" missions in South Vietnam have become the "stop and frisk" and "no-knock" laws in the US. They must be stopped.** It becomes imperative, therefore, that every freedom movement re-examine its past, and map out its future **in direct relationship to the continuous, the ceaseless, the ever new black revolts.** This includes all:

- the mass anti-war movement, which was born in opposition to the U.S. imperialist bombing of North Vietnam in 1965. (See **The Free Speech Movement and the Negro Revolution.**)
- the Women's Liberation Movement. (See Notes on **Women's Liberation: We Speak in Many Voices.**)
- those black leaders who have maintained a distance from the black masses. (See **Black Mass Revolt.**)
- the whole generation of revolutionaries searching for a total philosophy of revolution.

As a step toward that end, we reproduce this third expanded edition of American Civilization on Trial, which includes as an Appendix an article on black caucuses by our black production worker editor, Charles Denby. We ask you to join with us in the task of achieving a unity of thought and action — for only in unity can a new society on truly human beginnings be established.

Preface

This second edition of **American Civilization on Trial** goes to press three months to the day after the first edition was put on sale.*-

The popular demand for our pamphlet is due to the fact that we alone have written of past history and of history in the making as one continuous development of the vanguard role of the Negro. This heightened interest in analysis is due also to the fact that in the short time between the Birmingham events in May and the March on Washington in August the massiveness of the resistance, the many sidedness of the demands of the **Freedom NOW** movement, the tremendous surge, courage and reason of this movement as against the barbarism of the Bull Connors with their hounds, hoses and murders have totally changed the objective situation in the United States.

Thus, the movement compelled the Kennedy Administration to admit a "rising tide of discontent" and execute an about-face with the introduction of a civil rights bill. In contrast to his original opposition to any March on Washington, on the alleged ground that Congress could not be forced, Kennedy came to support the March. Unfortunately it's the kind of support a rope gives a hanging man. Therein lies the danger to the **Freedom NOW** movement.

This has brought the movement to the crossroads. Though it is impossible to stop the momentum of the Negro struggle, its forward development can be impeded if the underlying philosophy for **total** freedom is in any way compromised. Here, precisely, are revealed both the strength and weakness of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The transforming events of Birmingham have revealed King's new stature both organizationally and philosophically. In his letter from a Birmingham jail to a group of "fellow clergymen," Dr, King rejected their attempt to confine the movement to legalisms. "We can never forget," he wrote, "that

everything Hitler did in Germany was 'legal' and everything the Hungarian Freedom Fighters did in Hungary was 'illegal' . . . this calls for a confrontation with the power structure." Dr. King writes: "To use the words of Martin Buber, the great Jewish philosopher, segregation substitutes an 'I-it' relationship for the 'I-thou' relationship and ends up relegating persons to the status of things." But King himself makes an impersonal ethic rather than the living mass movement, the point of creative origin and forward march of humanity.

The Negro leadership is listening more to Kennedy's civil rights measures than to the full aspirations of the mass movement. They fail to see that the alleged detente in the cold war and the intensification of the Sino-Soviet conflict will actually free the hand of the Administration to bear down against both labor and the Negro movement. This is why we say openly that, so far, the **Freedom NOW** movement has combined reason and activity **only to the extent of the immediate demands of desegregation**, and not to the ultimate of total freedom **from** class society.

In this situation, a small organization like ours has a pivotal role to play both as a catalyst and a propellant.

NEWS & LETTERS COMMITTEES, which have participated in every phase of activity and struggle from the Montgomery Bus Boycott to the March on Washington, have one unique feature that distinguishes us from all other organizations. It is this: **We have, from the very start, refused to separate theory from practice, or practice from theory.** Take the need to change the role of white labor in the civil rights struggle.

WHITE LABOR has so far shown a sorry spectacle. The labor leaders, like Meany, Reuther, McDonald and Hoffa, have all spoken big, and some have even marched with mass Negro demonstrations in the North, as in Detroit and San Francisco, but not in the South. When it comes to their own unions, they have neither helped upgrade Negro workers nor accorded them leading union posts commensurate with numbers or skill, nor have they done anything to enable the white rank-and-file to participate in the Negro struggle as an integral part of their common continuing struggle against management.

NEGRO WORKERS from a Chevrolet local in Los Angeles rightly picketed

the convention of the Urban League at which Walter Reuther was the featured speaker. They carried signs calling Reuther "HYPOCRITE!" In Detroit, Negro members of another General Motors local picketed the UAW's Solidarity House demanding the upgrading of Negroes in auto plants. Indeed, there isn't a plant in the country that doesn't reveal the tensions within labor.

Here, too, the Negro rank-and-file has shown its sensitivity by differentiating between the bureaucracy and the rank-and-file. Despite the appearance of leaders on marches, and despite individual situations, as at construction sites in Philadelphia and New York, where Negro pickets fought white workers, the Negro rank-and-file denounce the leadership and appeal to the white rank-and-file. **News & Letters**, which has attacked the labor bureaucracy not only for its role in the civil rights struggle, but also for its failure to fight management on Automation, joined with the Negro and white rank-and-file to help forge the unity needed in the civil rights struggle. We also assisted, in drafting a leaflet which soon made the rounds in Detroit factories. It was addressed to the labor leadership and said:

Hear ye then this — and learn your lessons from that Sunday March in Detroit and all the battles for Civil Rights, South and North. First, you are cutting your own throats because, without the unity of white and black workers, management can ride all over you, even as they did when you launched Operation Dixie and it proved to be just a still-birth.

Know ye, further, that the end of discrimination, even more than charity, must begin at home, and home for working people is the Union. BEGIN THERE.

Begin NOW to put an end to lily white departments.

Begin NOW the retraining and upgrading of Negro workers who now, as before unionism, are still the last to be hired and the first to be fired.

Begin NOW to tell the white workers the truth of their own conditions of employment and unemployment. For the truth is that, while percentage-wise, Negroes have more unemployment than white, it is still they, the white workers, the majority of Americans, who are still the majority in absolute numbers of those unemployed.

Reuther, you have begun contract negotiations a year in advance, with management. How about beginning to talk to us, your black brothers, 25 years after we helped to create the CIO?

THE NEGRO LEADERSHIP, on the other hand, far from exposing the role of the labor bureaucracy has actually protected it from the ranks by playing up the lip-service and ostentatious checks with which the union leaders give token support to the struggle. The greatest danger, moreover, is the fact that the labor bureaucracy is at the beck and call of Kennedy — and especially in this situation where they yield to Kennedy on everything from unemployment to civil rights.

All the more reason to continue instead, with us, in the full tradition of the Abolitionist movement, in which was concentrated every strand of struggle for freedom — abolition of slavery, woman's suffrage, labor movement — and thus released new human dimensions. Look at Sojourner Truth whose creative activity embraced not only the work with the Underground Railroad but also the woman's struggle. Look at the Marxist, Joseph Weydemeyer, who was both a general in the Union Army and editor of a Marxist journal in the United States (which published Marx's **Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte** 17 years before it was published in Europe).

We alone, in **Freedom Riders Speak for Themselves**, not only participated fully in the activity, but in making it possible for the Freedom Riders to speak for themselves have issued the only serious analysis, to date, of that great turning point and its continuity with what preceded and followed.

In the **News & Letters** Committees we have not only supported, reported, and participated in all the great actions, but have compelled world attention to focus on them as central to the global struggle for a new society.*

The **Freedom NOW** movement must not be stopped in its tracks nor derailed. It must, be expanded and deepened so that it leads to the total reconstruction of society on new human beginnings.

It is no accident that this second edition of **American Civilization on Trial** comes out when the movement is being put to the test. The road ahead is not smooth or easy. With this edition we invite you to face the challenge and join

the **News & Letters** Committees.

— *National Editorial Board*

* In addition to our list of publications (p. 34) it should be noted that **Freedom Riders Speak for Themselves** is being translated into French; **American Civilization an Trial** is being translated into Italian, and widely discussed among Japanese youth.

INTRODUCTION

1. Of Patriots, Scoundrels and Slave-Masters

"Subversive" is a favorite expression of the F.B.I., the Presidency, the Attorney General, and Congress. J. Edgar Hoover, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, not to mention Congress and the mad dog it considers its watchdog - the House Un-American Activities Committee - are certainly armed with immense, with world-shaking powers, which they, in their search, harassment, and persecution of what **they** conceive to be subversive, use individually and collectively.

Yet all these kings' horses and all these kings' men can't seem to uncover the most openly read and popular hate sheet calling itself "Rebel Underground," circulated on the University of Mississippi campus, which highly touts such seditious issues as: (1) calling for the execution of President Kennedy; (2) referring to United States Marshals executing a Supreme Court Decision for desegregating schools as "murderous paranoids"; (3) hinting, in no uncertain terms however, that Sidna Brower, the courageous editor of the student paper which dared criticize the mobs that reign over that campus, is a "foul wench"; (4) making life an unbearable ordeal not only for the Negro James H. Meredith, but for any whites whose attitudes are a shade less racist than their own moronic stew of bigotry; and (5) frothing at the mouth against "the anti-Christ Supreme Court." This isn't "just kids' stuff." This is the voice of those who were responsible for two actual murders, one of a foreign correspondent accredited, not to a battlefield in the Congo, but to the United States to report on "the American way of life." This is the voice of the Governor, not only of Mississippi, but of Alabama; and the voice of their counterparts in the Southern bloc in Congress, as well.

To these voices of hate has now been added the savage growl of vicious police dogs unleashed against Negroes seeking to register to vote in Mississippi and Alabama. The Simon Legrees with their hounds still serve their slave-masters!

In January 1963, a new Governor came to the helm in a state that vies with the magnolia jungle as the staunchest outpost of racism on this side of diamond **apartheid**, shouting his sedition for all the world to hear. Not only, says this paragon of "law and order "in the state of Alabama, is he, Governor Wallace, for "Segregation today, tomorrow and forever," but he will organize to spread this doctrine to the North. He judges by the manner in which the KKK, after World I, spread North. He forgets that this ambition of his is out of tune with these times-and beyond his capacities. This is so not because of the established powers at Washington, D.C., but because the self-activity of the Negroes has made it so. Indeed all this white Southern howling at the winds is due to the unbridgeable gulf between the post-World War I era and the post-World War II age when the Negro, far from running defensively away from lynching, has taken the offensive for his full rights on all fronts, and most of all in the **South**.

In contrast to the initiative of the Southern Negro, the whole world is witness to the shilly-shallying, dilly-dallying of the Kennedy Administration. At a time when the world crisis and challenge from totalitarian Russia demands the very essence of total democracy, and his own "will" would like to express itself with a New England rather than a Southern drawl, the peculiar American capitalism that has been both raised up, and thrown back by the unfinished state of its revolution, **compels** him to bridle his "will." Capitalism, not capitalism in general, but 'American capitalism as it expanded after the Civil War, sharpened the basic contradictions of the historic environment in which it functioned. **This capitalism was tied to the cotton plantations.** For global power's sake the Administration presently tries to explain away the tortoise pace on the civil rights front on the ground that, when the chips are down, the white South becomes at once transformed into "pure patriots." Samuel Johnson has long ago noted that patriotism has ever been the last refuge of scoundrels. **Nowhere and at no time was this truer than in the benighted South of today.** Even so conservative a writer as the Swedish scholar, Gunnar Myrdal, had to write that World War II, which increased the militancy of the Negro, had only one effect on the Southern white liberals - they refused to continue the little cooperation they had started with the Negro intellectuals against discrimination **unless** the latter accepted, nay, avowed, social segregation. So myopic of view is that region that the following passed for the words of a liberal! It is Mark Ethridge, ex-chairman

of the FEPC, writing in **The Virginia Quarterly** of July, 1942; "There is no power in the world - not even the mechanized armies of the earth, the Allied and the Axis - which can now force the Southern white people to abandonment of social segregation. It's a cruel disillusionment, bearing germs of strife and perhaps tragedy, for any of their (Negroes) leaders to tell them that they can expect it, or that they can exact it, as the price of their participation in the war." Mr. Myrdal had to conclude on the following note:

". . . The region is exceptional in Western non-fascist civilization since the Enlightenment in that **it lacks every trace of radical thought**. In the South all progressive thinking going further than mild liberalism has been practically non-existent for a century."¹

It should be obvious that the South's patriotism lasts **only so long** as the Negroes don't insist that the white South give up its slave master mentality.

The blindness to all this on the part of the Administration is self-induced even as its impotence is self-imposed. There is no need whatever for the Federal power - truly an awesome world might - to shy away at the challenge of a single state, especially when that state is so dependent on military contracts from the Federal Government for the major part of what economic power it has. The Ford management-trained Secretary of Defense can tell the President the exact extent of Federal aid. But Mr. Kennedy already knows that - and the politics behind it. **This** is what **he** sets.

It took a great deal of digging by his Harvard trained historian to come up with the obscure, inconsequential Lucius Q. C. Lamar as a "liberal" Southern hero of the past which the present needs to emulate.²

It would have been a great deal easier to find the quotation from Wendell Phillips that told the simple truth: "Cotton fibre was a rod of empire such as Caesar never wielded. It fattened into obedience pulpit and rostrum, court, market-place and college and lashed New York and Chicago to its chair of State." It still does.

Though cotton is king no longer, the politics based on racism reigns supreme in the South and fills the Halls of Congress with the abnormal might that comes from despotic social relations, quasi-totalitarian politics that would

topple easily enough if the Negro got his freedom.

But thereby would also be exposed the truth of American democracy: that the racism which is the basis of the political rule of the South is acceptable to the North, and has been so not only since it withdrew the Federal troops from the South at the end of Reconstruction in 1877, but ever since the ambivalent Declaration of Independence was adopted in 1776.

2. The Compelling Issue at Stake

American Civilization is identified in the consciousness of the world with three phases in the development of its history.

The first is the Declaration of Independence and the freedom of the thirteen American colonies from British Imperial rule.

The second is the Civil War.

The third is technology and world power which are presently being challenged by the country that broke America's nuclear monopoly - Russia. So persistent, intense, continuous, and ever-present has been the self-activity of the Negro, before and after the Civil War, before and after World War I, before, during and after World War II, that it has become the gauge by which American Civilization is judged. Thus, Little Rock reverberated around the world with the speed of Sputnik I, with which it shared world headlines in 1957, and which gave the lie to American claims of superiority. **The Civil War remains the still unfinished revolution 100 years after, as the United States is losing the global struggle for the minds of men.** President Kennedy asked that this entire year, 1963, the centenary of the Emancipation Proclamation, be devoted to its celebration. Cliches strutted out for ceremonial occasions cannot, however, hide today's truth. Because the role of the Negro remains the touchstone of American Civilization - and his struggle for equal rights today belies their existence - paeans of praise for the Emancipation Proclamation can neither whitewash the present sorry state of democracy in the United States, nor rewrite the history of the past. Abraham

Lincoln would not have issued the Proclamation had the Southern secessionists not been winning the battles and the Negro not been pounding down the doors of the Northern Armies demanding the right to fight.

By 1960, the year when no less than 16 new African nations gained their independence, the activities of the American Negroes had developed from the Montgomery, Alabama, Bus Boycott in 1956, the year of the Hungarian Revolution, to the Sit-ins, Wade-Ins, Dwell-Ins, North and South. In 1961 they reached a climax with the Freedom Rides to Mississippi. This self-activity has not only further impressed itself upon the world's consciousness, but also reached back into white America's consciousness. The result has been that even astronaut Walter Schirra's 1962 spectacular six-orbital flight became subordinate to the courage of James Meredith's entry into the University of Mississippi.

In a word, the new human dimension attained through an **oppressed people's** genius in the struggle for freedom, nationally and internationally, rather than either scientific achievement, or an individual hero, became the measure of Man in action and thought.

Negroes' Vanguard Role

The vanguard role of an oppressed people has also put white labor in mass production to the test. **And** it has put a question mark over the continuous technological revolutions, brought to a climax with Automation and nuclear power. For, without an underlying philosophy, neither the machine revolutions nor the splitting of the atom can produce anything but fear - fear of unemployment in the one case and fear of war in the other.

As was evident by the Negro's attitude in World War II, nothing can stop him from being the bitterest enemy of the existing society. In the midst of the war, the Negro broke out in a series of demonstrations in Chicago, Detroit, New York as well as at army camps. Along with the miners' general strike that same year, these were the first instances in United States history when both labor, white and Negro, and the Negro as the discriminated-against minority, refused to call a halt either to the, class struggle or the struggle for equal rights. **Both** forces challenged their own State **as well as** Communist

propagandists who had declared the imperialist war to have become one of "national liberation" which demanded subordination to it of all other struggles.³

Fully to understand today's activities - and that is the only meaningful way to celebrate the centenary of the Emancipation Proclamation - we must turn to the roots in the past. This is not merely to put history aright. To know where one has been is one way of knowing where one is going. To be able to anticipate tomorrow one has to understand today. One example of the dual movement - the pull of the future on the present and its link to the past - is the relationship of the American Negro to the African Revolutions. Because it is easy enough to see that the United States Supreme Court which, in 1954, gave its decision on desegregation in schools is not the Court which, 100 years before, proclaimed the infamous Dred Scott decision, there are those who degrade today's self-activity of the Negro. Instead, they credit Administration policy with changing the status of the American Negro.

They point to the Cold War and the need for America, in its contest with Russia, to win "the African mind." There is no doubt that the Cold War influenced the decision of the Supreme Court. Neither is there any doubt that the African Revolutions were a boon to the Negro American struggles. But this is no one-way road. It never has been. For decades, if not for centuries, the self-activity of the American Negro preceded and inspired the African Revolutions, its leaders as well as its ranks, its thoughts as well as its actions. The relationship is to and from Africa. It is a two-way road. This too we shall see more clearly as we return to the past. Because both the present and the future have their roots in a philosophy of liberation which gives action its direction, it becomes imperative that we discover the historic link between philosophy and action.

Birth of Abolitionism

Despite the mountains of books on the Civil War, there is yet to be a definite one on that subject. None is in prospect in capitalist America. Indeed it is an impossibility so long as the activity of the Negro in shaping American Civilization remains a blank in the minds of the academic historians. The bourgeois historian is blind not only to the role of the Negro but to that of the

white Abolitionists. Mainly unrecorded by all standard historians, and hermetically sealed off from their power of comprehension, lie three decades of Abolitionist struggle of whites and Negroes that preceded the Civil War and made that irrepressible conflict inevitable. Yet these are the decades when the crucible out of which the first great independent expression of American genius was forged.

The historians who dominate American scholarship have only passing references to the Abolitionist movement. Clearly no unbridgeable gulf separates this type of history writing from Russia's infamous rewriting of its revolutionary history. Only Negro historians such as W. E. B. Du Bois, G. Carter Woodson, and J. A. Rogers have done the painstaking research to set the record of American history straight by revealing the Negroes' great role in its making. With few exceptions, however, their work is ignored by the dominant white acadamecians. Literary historians, like Vernon L. Parrington in his **Main Currents in American Thought**, did, it is true, recognize that the soil which produced a Ralph Waldo Emerson produced also a William Lloyd Garrison.

Essayists like John Jay Chapman go a great deal further than Professor Parrington. He sides with the Abolitionists against the great literary writers comprising the Transcendentalists. "The Transcendentalists," writes John Jay Chapman, "were sure of only one thing - that society as constituted was all wrong. The slavery question had shaken man's faith in the durability of the Republic. It was therefore adjudged a highly dangerous subject . . . Mum was the word . . . from Maine to Georgia."

To this he contrasts William Lloyd Garrison's ringing proclamation: "I will be as harsh as truth and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject (slavery) I do not wish to think, speak or write with moderation. I am in earnest - I will not equivocate - I will not capitulate - I will not retreat a single inch - AND I WILL BE HEARD!"

In the 1921 preface to his biography of Garrison, Chapman boldly claims "that the history of the United States between 1800 and 1860 will some day be rewritten with this man as its central figure." This certainly separates Chapman decisively from the established historians who "analyze" Abolitionism as if it comprised a small group of fanatics removed from the

mainstream of American Civilization. Chapman certainly believed the Abolitionists to be the true molders of history. Such writing, however, remains a history of great men instead of great masses of "common men."

The Abolitionists, however, saw themselves differently. The great New Englander, Wendell Phillips, was fully aware of the fact that not only Negro leaders like Frederick Douglass or Harriet Tubman, but white Abolitionists like himself and even the founder of the LIBERATOR, William Lloyd Garrison, were "so tall" because they stood on the shoulders of the actual mass movement of slaves following the North Star to freedom. Without the constant contact of the New England Abolitionists with the Negro mass, slave and free, they would have been nothing-and no one admitted it more freely than these leaders themselves. **The Abolitionists felt that strongly because they found what great literary figures like Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville and Whitman did not find-the human force for the reconstruction of society.** This is what armed them 100 years ago, with a more accurate measure of "the Great Emancipator" than most of today's writers, though the latter write with hindsight. This is what gave the Abolitionists the foresight to see that the Civil War may be won on the battlefield but lost in the more fundamental problem of reconstructing the life of the country. This is what led Karl Marx to say that a speech by Wendell Phillips was of "greater importance than a battle bulletin." This is what led the great Abolitionist, Phillips, after chattel slavery was ended, to come to the labor movement, vowing himself "willing to accept the final results of a principle so radical, such as the overthrow of the whole profit-making system, the extinction of all monopolies, the abolition of privileged classes . . . and best and grandest of all, the final obliteration of that foul stigma upon 'our so-called Christian civilization, the poverty of the masses . . .'"

American Roots of Marxism

The spontaneous affinity of ideas, the **independent** working out of the problems of the age as manifested in one's own country, and the common Humanist goal made inevitable the crossing of the paths of Karl Marx and the Abolitionists.

Deep indeed are the American roots of Marxism. Since Marxism is not only

in books but in the daily lives of people, one must, to grasp its American roots, do more than inhabit an ivory tower. Far, however, from heeding Wendell Phillips' admonition that "Never again be ours the fastidious scholarship that shrinks from rude contact with the masses," American intellectuals have so adamantly sought escape from reality that they have become more conservative than the politicians. To use another expression of the great Phillips, "There is a class among us so conservative, that they are afraid the roof will come down if you sweep the cobwebs."

This characterizes our age most accurately. It applies just as appropriately to the end of the nineteenth century when the country turned from Populism to rampant racism because capitalism found it "simply liked the smell of empire."⁴

By then Phillips and Marx were long since dead. Fortunately, however, Marxism, being a theory of liberation, its Humanism springs ever anew in today's activities.⁵

Notes

¹ **An American Dilemma**, by Gunnar Myrdal, p. 469.

² "Who is Lucius Q. C. Lamar?", **News & Letters**, Oct. 1962.

³ **The Negro and the Communist Party**, by Wilson Record. University of N. Carolina, 1951, is a useful book on all the changes in the Communist Party line for the period of 1941-45. Many of the quotations here are obtained from that book.

⁴ **American Diplomacy, 1900-1950**, by George F. Kennan.

⁵ For the Humanism of Marxism in its American setting see **Marxism and Freedom** by Raya Dunayevskaya.

PART I: from the First through the Second American Revolution

The African, brought here as slave against his will, played a decisive role in the shaping of American Civilization.

Some⁶ there are who feel it is wrong to begin the Negro's history in America with his arrival here as a slave in 1619 since he had reached these shores long before then-with the discovery of the new world, in fact, mainly as servants or, in some cases, in the entourage of the explorers themselves. It is certainly true that in the first quarter of the 17th century there were as many as 10,000 free Negroes in the United States. This is not the point however. The point is that in slave revolts, first and foremost, in appeals of free Negroes, in the runaway slave being "conducted" North via the Underground Railway by fugitive ex-slaves, the Negro, free or slave, but especially slave, was decisive in the course American development followed.

The Ambivalence of the Declaration of Independence

It was the Negro's will to be free, not his alleged docility, that inspired the first draft of the Declaration of Independence in which Thomas Jefferson lashed out against King George III for conducting a "cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere . . ."

Upon the insistence of the Southern delegation at the Continental Congress, this paragraph was stricken from the Declaration. **In this first burial of full freedom's call lies embedded the social conflicts of today.** Though the section which specifically aimed, at the abolition of slavery was expunged from the Declaration of Independence so that the abstractions of freedom could fit the context of a slave society, so overpowering were its **implications** that it "sounded the tocsin"⁷ for the European revolutions that

followed. From the very birth of the nation there was a great divide between the leaders in government and the rank and file masses. It wasn't limited to the slave revolts in the South. It showed itself in unrest and repression of the free farmers in Massachusetts in the Shay's Rebellion, and of the workmen in Philadelphia and New York in their first strikes and formation of workingmen's parties.

1793, the year Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin that transformed cotton into a lush cash crop, was the year in which the House of Representatives refused to pass a law abolishing slavery. It was the year the first Fugitive Slave Act was passed against the runaways. A short five years later, the Alien and Sedition Law that was passed was aimed at all opposition to the ruling Federalists. The so-called Jefferson revolution which put an end to the odious Alien and Sedition Law did not, however, do anything to reverse the first Fugitive Slave Act which was soon to be followed by others more repressive.

The cotton gin had signalled not only the continuance of slavery in the 1790's, but the grafting upon it, at the turn of the 19th century, of all the added evils of commercial capitalism. The decade of 1820-1830 marked the birth of industrial capitalism so that Cotton was now King not only in the plantation economy, and in trade, but in New England textile and industry and politics in general. Cotton as King made and unmade presidents and induced so great a national conspiracy of silence that it poisoned the young democracy. The stream of runaways played a key role in impelling civil war. Ross Barnett's predecessor in office 100 years back, Governor Quitmar, complained that between 1800-1860 the South had lost more than 100,000 slaves, valued at 30 million dollars.

Yet, by sharpening antagonisms and social conflicts, "the cotton fibre" produced the most glorious page in American history, that written by the Abolitionists.

1. Abolitionism, First Phase: From "Moral Suasion" to Harper's Ferry

Negro Slave Revolts had reached a certain stage with Denmark Vesey in

1824 which led to a new approach to the attempts to gain freedom. An Underground Railway, which was neither underground nor a railway, was organized in 1825 to conduct runaway slaves to freedom in the North and in Canada. The following year the free Negroes organized the Massachusetts General Colored Peoples Association. Its paper, appropriately called FREEDOM'S JOURNAL, appeared in 1827, with its first editorial announcing, "Too long have others spoken for us."

David Walker's Appeal

The most sensational response, however, was achieved by a single Negro named David Walker, who, in 1829, published: **Walker's Appeal in Four Articles: Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in particular, and very expressly to those of the United States of America.** David Walker was a free Negro from North Carolina who had settled in Boston where he earned a living by collecting rags. His APPEAL was addressed to the free Negroes. He took them to task for their meekness. He urged them to make: the cause of the slave their own because the wretchedness of the free Negroes' conditions was due to the existence of slavery. Walker urged them to make freedom their business. He pointed to the superiority of Negroes, in numbers and in bravery, over the whites. He took the great to task as well. In response to Thomas Jefferson, who had referred to the Negro's color as "unfortunate," David Walker shouted "My Colour will yet root some of you out of the very face of the earth !!! America is more our country, than it is the whites-we have enriched it with our **blood and tears.**"

So extraordinary was the impact of this pamphlet that legislatures in the South were called into special session to enact laws against free Negroes as against slaves for reading it. They put a price of \$3,000 on the head of its author. Nevertheless, 50,000 copies of this 76-page pamphlet were sold and circulated from hand to hand. Those who could not read had others read it to them. The South trembled at the simple words of an obscure Negro.

The vanguard role of the Negro in the struggle for freedom helped bring onto the historic stage the most extraordinary of all phenomena of American Civilization: New England Abolitionism. The year that William Lloyd

Garrison⁸ founded the LIBERATOR, 1831, was the year also of the last and greatest of Negro slave revolts - that of Nat Turner. **The Cambridge Modern History** tells us.:

"The insurrection was at once attributed to Negro preachers and 'incendiary publications' such as Walker's pamphlet and the **Liberator** . . . To attack the **Liberator** now became habitual in all Slave-holding States. The corporation of one city forbade any free Negro to take a copy of it from the post-office. A vigilance committee in another offered \$1500 for the detection and conviction of any white person found circulating copies. The governors of Georgia and Virginia called on the mayor of Boston to suppress it; and the legislature of Georgia offered \$5,000 to any person who should secure the arrest and conviction of Garrison under the laws of the State.

"Undeterred by these attacks, Garrison gathered about him a little band of Abolitionists, and towards the close of 1831 founded at Boston the New England Anti-slavery Society, and in 1833, at Philadelphia, the American Anti-slavery Society."

Abolitionism: a New Dimension of American Character

Nothing since has superceded this merger of white intellectual with the Negro mass with the same intense devotion to principle, the same intimacy of relations of white and black, the same unflinching propaganda in face of mob persecution - and even death - the same greatness of character which never bent during three long decades of struggle until the irrepressible conflict occurred, and even then did not give up the fight but sought to transform it - and succeeded - from a war of mere supremacy of Northern industry over Southern cotton culture to one of emancipation of slaves.

The movement renounced all traditional politics, considering all political parties of the day as "corrupt." They were inter-racial and in a slave society preached and practiced Negro equality. They were distinguished as well for inspiring, aligning with and fighting for equality of women in an age when the women had neither the right to the ballot nor to property nor to divorce. They were internationalist, covering Europe with their message, and bringing back to this country the message of the

Irish Freedom Fighters.

They sought no rewards of any kind, fighting for the pure idea, though that meant facing the hostility of the national government, the state, the local police, and the best citizens who became the most unruly mobs. They were beaten, mobbed and stoned.

These New England Abolitionists added a new dimension to the word, intellectual, for these were intellectuals, whose intellectual, social and political creativity was the expression of precise social forces. They gloried in being "the means" by which a direct social movement expressed itself, the movement of slaves and free Negroes for total freedom. **Pacifist though they were in philosophy, they lined up with John Brown. Perhaps that explains why, despite the great native tradition of Abolitionism some of today's Negro leaders have travelled instead to India in search of a philosophy of non-violence.** Wendell Phillips eloquently explains why the pacifists of that day "came to the defense of the great martyr: "Harper's Ferry is the Lexington of today . . . Suppose he did fail . . . There are two kinds of defeat. Whether in chains or in laurels, Liberty knows nothing but victories. Soldiers call Bunker Hill a defeat; but Liberty dates from it . . ."9

2. Abolitionism, Second Phase: The Unfinished Revolution

On January 11, 1860, Marx wrote to Engels: "In my opinion, the biggest things that are happening in the world today are, on the one hand the movement of the slaves in America started by the death of John Brown, and, on the other, the movement of the serfs in Russia . . . I have just seen in the **Tribune** that there has been a fresh rising of slaves in Missouri, naturally suppressed. But the signal has now been given."<10

When the young Marx first broke from bourgeois society and elaborated his philosophy of Humanism in 1844, he paid little attention to the remains of chattel slavery. Now, however, Marx kept his eyes glued on the movement of the Negro slaves. When the Civil War broke out, and "the Great

Emancipator" did all in his power to limit it to a white man's war for Union, Marx began to popularize the speeches and analyses of the Abolitionists, especially those Wendell Phillips wrote against the Northern conduct of the war: "The President has not put the Confiscation Act into operation... He has neither insight nor foresight . . ."

Because Lincoln's main strategic concern was to conciliate the so-called "moderate" border slave states that remained in the Union, he wanted neither to free the slaves nor allow them to participate in the war as soldiers. Lincoln nullified the few attempts by generals on the spot (John C. Fremont in Missouri, David Hunter in Georgia, Florida and South Carolina, and Ben Butler in Virginia) to issue their own emancipation proclamations. As late as 1862, when Horace Greeley as editor of the **Tribune** published "A Prayer of 20 Millions" for the abolition of slavery, Lincoln replied: "My paramount objective **is** to save the union, and is **not** either to save or destroy slavery."

This denotes the first phase of the long Civil War which lasted four years and cost the lives of a million men. Phillips maintained that if it had been fought as a war of liberation - and the Negroes were pounding at all the doors, North and South, to let them fight - it could be easily won in a few months. When military expediency, however, dictated a change in course, Phillips maintained that "In this war mere victory on a battlefield amounts to nothing, contributes little or nothing toward ending the war . . . Such an aimless war I call wasteful and murderous."

When Engels too feared that things were going so badly for the North, that it would lose the war, Marx wrote: "A single Negro regiment would have a remarkable effect on Southern nerves . . . A war of this kind must be conducted on revolutionary lines while the Yankees have thus far been trying to conduct it constitutionally."¹¹

Finally, on January 1, 1863, Abraham Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation. It was no ringing declaration; his compromisist words moved gingerly to free only those slaves in the rebellious states. As one historian recently put it, it was "as emotional as a bill of sale."¹²

Turning Point

Nevertheless it is the turning point. This second stage of the war altogether transformed its character. The passing of this year in the Civil War outlines the contrast of centuries. Negroes flocked into the Army, battles began being won. Wendell Phillips declared: "I want the blacks as the very basis of the effort to regenerate the South!"

On the other side of the Atlantic, English workers, whose livelihood as textile workers depended on Southern cotton, held mass demonstrations to prevent their ruling class from intervening on the side of the Bourbon South, whose cotton kingdom supplied Britain's textile barons the raw materials for their world-dominating industry.

A new decade had indeed dawned in the world with the outbreak of the Civil War in the United States, the insurrection in Poland, the strikes in Paris, and the mass meetings of English workers who chose to starve rather than perpetuate slavery on the other side of the Atlantic. The actions culminated in the establishment of the International Workingmen's Association, headed by Karl Marx.

From the first, Marx took the side of the North, though, naturally as we saw, he was with Phillips' criticism of the conduct of the war, rather than with the President, of whom he had written to Engels: "All Lincoln's acts appear like the mean pettifogging conditions which one lawyer puts to his opposing lawyer. But this does not alter their world upheaval."¹³

He therefore separated himself from some¹⁴ self-styled Marxists in the United States who evaded the whole issue of the Civil War by saying they were opposed to "all slavery, wage and chattel." In the name of the International, Marx wrote Lincoln, "While the workingmen, the true political power of the North, allowed slavery to defile their own republic; while before the Negro mastered and sold without his concurrence they boasted it the highest prerogative of the white-skinned laborer to sell himself and choose his own master; they were unable to attain the true freedom of labor or to support their European brethren in their struggle for emancipation, but this barrier to progress has been swept off by the red sea of civil war."

As Marx later expressed it in **CAPITAL**, "In the United States of North America, every independent movement of the workers was paralyzed so long

as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded. But out of the death of slavery a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was the agitation for the eight-hour-day that ran with the seven-leagued boots of the locomotive from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California. The General Congress of Labor at Baltimore (August 16, 1866) declared: "The first and great necessity of the present, to free the labor of this country from capitalistic slavery, is the passing of a law by which eight hours shall be the normal working-day in all states of the American Union. We are resolved to put forth all our strength until this glorious result is attained'."

Soon after the war and the abolition of slavery, Abolitionism as a movement vanished from the scene. Of all its leaders, Wendell Phillips alone made the transition to the labor movement. The four million freedmen remained tied to cotton culture and therein lies embedded the roots of the Negro Question.

Notes

⁶ See **The Negro Revolt**, by Louis L. Lomox.

⁷ Preface to **Capital** by Karl Marx.

⁸ For a modern biography of William Lloyd Garrison, see the one by John J. Chapman in **The Selected Writings of John Joy Chapman**; Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, New York. For a more detailed biography, see William Lloyd Garrison- **The Story of His Life**, written by his children.

⁹ For a modern biography of Wendell Phillips see **The Prophet of Liberty** by Oscar Sherwin. Otherwise, see his own **Speeches and Writings**. These also illuminate the role of women in the Abolitionist movement and its connection with the start of the suffragette movement.

¹⁰ **Selected Correspondence of Marx and Engels**. Most of the other quotations from Marx's correspondence can be found easily in his writings from the dates given.

¹¹ Ibid. Aug. 7, 1862.

¹² "Lincoln and the Proclamation," an article in **The Progressive**, Dec. 1962, by Richard N. Current author of many works on Lincoln.

¹³ **The Civil War in the United States**, by Marx and Engels.

¹⁴ Just as Marx in his day separated himself, so Engels after Marx's death wrote: "The Social-Democratic Federation here shares with your German-American Socialists, the distinction of being the only parties that have managed to reduce the Marxian theory of development to a rigid orthodoxy, which the workers are not to reach themselves by their own class feelings, but which they have to gulp down as an article of faith at once and without development. That is why both of them remain mere sects and come, as Hegel says, from nothing through nothing to nothing." (**Letters to Americans** by Marx and Engels, p. 263.)



PART II: The Still-Unfinished Revolution

The ignorant white mobs, instigated by Faubus, Ross and their ilk in the Deep South who have been on the rampage ever since the 1954 United States Supreme Court decision to desegregate schools, may not know it, but the free public education from which they want the Negroes excluded, was first instituted in the South by the Negro during the much-maligned Reconstruction period. The Negro and white legislatures of the post-Civil War period gave the South the only democracy it had ever known - and has since forgotten.¹⁵

No one can rewrite history, which records that also for the first time, universal manhood suffrage as well as equal political, civil and legal rights for its citizens then became a way of life for the South. That such elementary democracy had to be brought there on bayonets and then only after the white supremacist secessionists were finally defeated in a bloody war lasting four years is only further proof of the philosophy of unfreedom of the aristocratic South that lorded it over the bent back of human beings reduced to slavery. This expression, "philosophy of unfreedom," - coined by the great German philosopher, G. W. F. Hegel, to characterize India's caste system - perfectly describes the ideology of the dominant South.

Even as an unfinished revolution the achievements of the Civil War, however, cannot be expunged from the historic record which is reflected in the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments, added to the Constitution by a radical Republican Congress and approved by the whole nation, which abolished slavery and **thereby** achieved Union.

No one can rewrite history, which, unfortunately, also records that these were virtually nullified once the Army was withdrawn. The counter-revolution in the South, however, was not of regional make only, although it was instigated there by the slavocrats who lost the war but won the peace **once they learned to accept the dictates of Northern capital**. In enacting the infamous "Black

Codes," the unreconstructed South knew it could do so with impunity once the Army was out. The withdrawal of the Army was not, however, the cause, but the consequence of the new, expansive development of Northern capitalism and the betrayal of four million newly-freed human beings who did not own the land they tilled.

'Liberal Tradition'

The new phase of Northern capitalist development had, of course, been a motivating force for the Civil War. But, the economic determinist view notwithstanding, it **was not** the propellant. The Second American Revolution was far more than an "economic revolution." Much as the industrialists wished to break the monopoly of commercial over industrial capital, of American slavishness to British textile manufacturing, cash and compromise was too ingrained an element of American capitalism for the industrialists to venture forth into civil war.

Only the most prodigious revolutionary exertions by slaves, Abolitionists and, in many of its stages, labor, could tear apart the power link of cash and compromise that bound together cotton and textiles; cotton growers, cotton shippers and financiers.

"If Lincoln has grown," wrote Wendell Phillips after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, "it is quite natural. **We** watered him." At the same time, however, it was no accident that Lincoln **chose** Andrew Johnson as his running mate for the second term, in place of the Vice-President of the first term, Hannibal Hamlin who was a friend of the Abolitionists. The objective compulsion of capitalist industrialization held Lincoln in thrall. The Civil War brought to a climax and summed up the paradox of the Jefferson-Jackson-Lincoln liberal presidential tradition. **In office**, Jefferson and the Jeffersonians were fulfilled Hamiltonians. **In office**, Jacksonian democracy turned out to be something very different from the rule of farmer and mechanic against Eastern finance capital. As a present-day admirer of Andrew Jackson, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. phrased it in his **Age of Jackson**: "The fate of the Jacksonian economic legislation was that common historical irony: it on the whole promoted the very ends it was intended to defeat. The general laws sprinkled holy waters on corporations, cleansing them of the

legal status of monopoly, and sending them forth as the benevolent agencies of free competition."

In the same manner, Lincoln, **in office**, developed the "American System" more in line with the concept of the "Great Compromiser," Henry Clay, than in the spirit of a "Great Emancipator" heading the Second American Revolution. This made it easy for that Tennessee Jacksonian, Andrew Johnson, in his own treacherous ways, to see that the revolution remained unfinished.

Johnson to Grant to Hayes

Surely it was not too sharp a change from the Credit Mobilier scandal-wracked Grant Administration to the consummate betrayal that was to take place in 1876. Upon the understanding that Federal troops would be withdrawn from the South the Electoral College voted for the minority presidential candidate, Rutherford B. Hayes, to become the President who would carry out the betrayal of the black freedmen.

The three basic constituents of the betrayal, that is to say, the unfinished state of revolution, were: (1) the freedmen did not get "the 40 acres and a mule" they were promised; (2) the old slave owners did get back their plantations and thus the power to institute a mode of production to suit cotton culture; and (3) the crop lien system was introduced with "new" labor: share cropping. Historians who state that "the Negro problem" is rooted in slavery, and stop there, fail to see the crux of the question. The "stigma" of slavery could not have persisted so long if the economic remains of slavery - share-cropping and tenancy - had not persisted. **Within the economic remains of slavery the roots of the Negro Question lie. Once Congress, in 1867, failed to pass Thaddeus Stevens' Land Division Act which would have given each freedman 40 acres and \$50 for a homestead, the rest was inevitable.** It is this backwardness of the agricultural economy which led Lenin, in his 1913 study, "New Data on the Laws of Development of Capitalism and Agriculture," to remark about "the striking similarity between the economic position of the American Negro and that of the former serf of the central agricultural provinces in Russia." Even in Russia, where there was some fraudulent attempt to give the serf the land, it was impossible for the Russian serf to rise above the needs of the backward economy. All the more

where the Negro did not get his "40 acres and a mule." Cotton remaining dominant, semi-feudal relationships were inevitable. The division of labor set up by the cotton economy may not be disturbed. The social relations arising on the basis of the cotton economy remain "less changed than the soil itself on which the cotton is grown."¹⁶

Boss and Block Relationship

Naturally the infamous "Black Codes" which the plantation owners now enacted and were free to execute and "the gentleman's agreement" with Northern capital, as well as with the help of the KKK, paved the royal road back for white supremacy South. But once we place the problem in its proper economic framework, the **human** factors can emerge and then we see the **limitations** of all laws, written and unwritten. Nowhere is this clearer than in the benighted South as the counter-revolution comes into head-on collision with masses in revolt in the decade of the 1880's and 1890's and Populism sweeps the South. When this new attempt at revolutionary change occurred, "the boss and black" relationship was fully dominant.

The cropper has neither control of the nature of his crop nor the marketing of it. The cropper owns nothing but his labor power, and must part with half of the crop for "furnishings." Somehow the rest of the crop seems likewise to go to the merchant upon whom he depends for his every purchase of clothing, food, implements and fertilizer. The cropper is charged exorbitant prices but he must not question the word of the boss who keeps the books and makes the "settlement," at which time the cropper finds himself in debt and thus unable to leave the land.

To this day more than one-third of the croppers is one and one-half years behind in debt. The "plot" for the maintenance of "white supremacy" in the South arose from the actual process of cotton production. There was a "gentleman's agreement" that Southern industry - textiles - develop - **under the condition that it leave untouched the black labor supply of the plantations.** When the New Deal came South, "the paternalism of the planter, the dependency of the tenant so meticulously maintained, the stern objections on the part of the landlord to any change in the traditional relationship" (17) made it difficult and in some cases impossible for the

Government to deal with the cropper directly. The fear of the planter that the cropper be removed from his influence and learn that he is not **personally** dependent upon him set up well-nigh insurmountable barriers to the cropper's getting any benefits from the A.A.A.

The county agent in charge of the A.A.A. payments, for instance, had to make the credit store the point of distribution of A.A.A. checks. The result was that the merchant retained the check either for "unpaid debts" or for "future furnishings" to his tenant. Or the merchant would suggest that the checks be given to him outright. Under the prevailing relationship in the rural South, such a "suggestion" is tantamount to an edict that the Government agent has to obey.

The prevailing relationship which makes such a suggestion a law is known as the "boss and black" relationship, and its economic root is the cotton culture. **That is so pervading a relationship that it still holds though cropping is no longer an exclusively Negro occupation** - there are in the old South now five and a half million white tenants to over three million Negro tenants, though of the croppers, the Negroes still constitute the majority.

"The old boss and black attitude," write the authors of the most concise economic study of cotton culture, "pervades the whole system. . . . The fixed custom of exploitation has carried over to the white tenant."¹⁷

Nothing fundamental changed in Southern agriculture during the half century that separates the New Deal from the year of betrayal, 1877.

As we wrote at the time of the New Deal, "What the Southern Block bellows in Congress may irritate the sensitive ears of the Harvard man in the White House, but when he comes down South they tell him what to do." Nothing has changed, in the two decades since, except that JFK, instead of FDR, now occupies the White House. No wonder we have advanced so little from 1877 when Union, "one and indivisible," meant unity forged in the struggle against labor for imperialist adventures. To understand today's racism as well as tokenism, it is necessary to return to that page in history when the "gentleman's agreement" of Northern capital with the South set the stage for the unbridled violence against labor.

1. Northern Labor Struggles Against Capital's Stranglehold, 1877-97

1877, the year the Federal troops were removed from the South, was the year they were used to crush the railroad strikes stretching from Pennsylvania to Texas. The Pennsylvania Governor not only threatened labor with "a sharp use of bayonet and musket," but the Federal Government did exactly that at the behest of the captains of industry. The peace pact with the Southern bourbons meant unrestrained violence on the part of the rulers, both North and South, against labor. On the other hand, labor began the decade of the 1870's in Europe with the Paris Commune, the first workers' state in world history. So numerous were the American followers of the Paris Commune that Wendell Phillips said that all that was needed to meet a Commune was "to scratch a New Yorker."

The ruthlessness with which capital asserted its rule over labor that worked long hours for little pay, which was further cut at the will of the factory owners every time a financial crisis hit the country, drove labor underground. The first National Labor Union had a very short span of life. The Knights of Labor that replaced it organized white and black alike, with the result that, at its height (1886) out of a total membership of one million no less than 90,000 were Negroes. **Nevertheless, no Northern organization could possibly get to the mass base of Negroes who remained overwhelmingly, preponderantly in the South. For, along with being freed from slavery, the Negroes were freed also from a way to make a living. Landless were the new freedmen, and penniless.** As the 1869 Congress Resolution of the National Labor Union put it, "American citizenship for the black man is a complete failure if he is proscribed from the workshops of the country." When Northern labor emerged as a new force in the 1877 railroad strikes, Negro labor was still South and still in agriculture.

The severe financial crisis of 1873 dealt a death blow to the Eight Hour Leagues, but not to the idea for an eight-hour day. In 1884 not only the idea, but the actions to put it into effect, were once again initiated, this time by the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada, later to be known as the American Federation of Labor.

The struggle for the eight-hour day during the decade of 1880's, however, got a blood bath from the counter-revolution initiated by the capitalist corporations aided amply by the government. The anarchist labor leaders, Parsons, Spies, Fischer and Engel, were railroaded to the gallows.

The year was 1886, a year which became the dividing line in American labor. On the one hand, it was the year when no less than 80,000 were out on strike for the eight-hour day. On the other hand, it was the year in which the counter-revolution succeeded in breaking the back of the most militant sections of the labor movement through the hanging and imprisonment of its leaders.

It was the year the A. F. of L. "took over" the struggle for the eight-hour day. On the one hand it was undeterred by the hysteria or the backing away from the movement by the Knights of Labor which in that year reached its highest point of development **and** began its decline. On the other hand, the union restricted labor organization to a craft basis. Its reliance on the upper stratum of labor - its skilled trades - was to impel it toward "business unionism" and acceptance, **with capital**, of membership in so-called civic federations. It was itself involved in racism with its demand for the "Chinese Exclusion" act, not to mention racially separate locals for Negroes. Its indifference to the unskilled was to cause such isolation from the Negro that it would become impossible to organize heavy industry without **breaking away from that craft union stranglehold** .

And yet in the 1880's it formed the transition from diffuse to concentrated labor struggles. During the heart-breaking 1890's such historic battles were fought as the steel battle of Homestead, Pa., 1892; the silver mines at Coeur d'Alene in Idaho; and the great Pullman (Illinois) strike of 1894, led by Eugene V. Debs who, while in jail, was to be won over to socialism. As he put it:

"In the gleam of every bayonet and the flash of every rifle **the class struggle was revealed** . The capitalist class. The working class. The class struggle."

In retrospect, even bourgeois historians have had to record: "If the Homestead skirmish introduced the nation to the use of private armies by captains of industry, the Pullman conflict made it familiar with two powerful

engines of the federal government-the judicial ukase, known as the writ of injunction, and the use of regular soldiers in industrial dispute."¹⁸

During the late 1880's and 1890's too, despite Gompers' concept of "pure and simple trade unions" without political overtones, much less international relations, it was the A.F. of L. which sent delegates to the newly formed second Marxist International and got it to approve the American suggestion for a general strike, world-wide if possible, for the eight-hour day. "Since a similar demonstration has already been decided upon for May 1, 1889," read the International Resolution, "this day is accepted for the international demonstration." As we see, far from May 1 having been "imported" from Russia, it was **exported the world over by American labor** .

Peasant Revolts, New and Old

Surely today, when in every country in Latin America, in the Middle East, in Asia, in Africa, the cry is for agricultural reforms - and a never-ending deluge of American books keep preaching for it "so that Communism should not be the victor" - surely we ought finally to understand the relationship of land and peasant in our own South and not keep piling stupidity upon stupidity to explain away "the Negro Question." To just such a betrayal of peasant revolt during the Lutheran Reformation Marx attributed the state of backwardness of the Germany of his day. In his **Peasant Wars in Germany**, Frederick Engels, the lifelong collaborator of Karl Marx, pointed out that it was not only the peasants who were betrayed when they did not get the land during the 16th century German Reformation, but Germany itself "disappeared for three centuries from the ranks of countries playing an independent part in history."

In the case of the white supremacy Solid South, its re-establishment, at first, was short lived. The violent KKK lynch lawlessness, rope and faggot rule was shaken to its very foundations within one short decade after the removal of the Union Army. **This** revolutionary upheaval came **from within**, not without. It arose out of the great discontent of the farmers with the new form of monopoly planter-merchant-railroad vested interests which brought the "new South" its greatest crisis. Populism spread like a prairie fire bringing the "Solid South" a more fundamental challenge than even the Civil War.

2. Black and White Unity and 1-1/4 Million Forgotten Negro Populists

Most amazing of all was the organization of the National Colored Farmers' Alliance. Just as the history of the slave revolts, when it was finally revealed, put an end to the myth of Negro docility, so this still little-known glorious chapter puts an end to the myth that the Negro "can't be organized." Think of it:

At the very height of the prejudice-ridden post-Reconstruction period, when the South was supposedly solidly white in thought and action, the Populist movement that was sweeping the country found its most radical expression in the South.

The National Colored Farmers' Alliance alone numbered one and one-quarter million members and, although separately organized from the white agrarians, waged their class battles as one. It was a power to be reckoned with both in state and national politics, and was instrumental in the elections of Populist governors as well as national and state representatives.

"Now the People's Party says to these two men," the reference was to one white and one Negro, and the speaker was white Georgian Tom Watson, "You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings. You are made to hate each other because on that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both. You are deceived and blinded that you may not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars both."

Fantastic as it may sound coming from the mouth of one who, with the turn of the century, was to become the typical white supremacist, it was characteristic during the height of the Populist groundswell in the South. Populists not only spoke that way but acted as the Abolitionists had in their day. When a young Negro preacher, H. S. Doyle, was threatened with lynching, Watson not only hid him in his home, but sent a call for Populists to protect him. Farmers rode all night to get there, and with arms stacked on

Watson's veranda, and fully 2,000 farmers there as a defense guard, Watson said: "We are determined that in this free country that the humblest white or black man who wants to talk our doctrine shall do it, and the man doesn't live who shall touch a hair on his head without fighting every man in the People's Party."

Watson made hundreds of such speeches in the decade of the 1890's. He spoke repeatedly from the same platform with Negro speakers to mixed audiences of Negro and white farmers, all on the theme of the need of white and Negro solidarity to fight "the money kings" who are to use "the accident of color" to divide the unified struggles: "This is not a political fight and politicians cannot lead or direct it. It is a movement of the masses, an uprising of the people, and they, and not the politicians, will direct it. The people need spokesmen, not leaders, men in the front who will obey, not command."

Here is how the distinguished Southern historian, C. Vann Woodward, no fire-eyed radical, sums up the decade of the 1890's in his study of **Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel** : "Never before or since have the two races in the South come so close together as they did during the Populist struggles." The unity of white and black was soon, in turn, shattered by the combined interests of the Bourbon South with monopoly capital that had won the struggle over labor in the North, and spread its tentacles over the Caribbean and the Pacific. Monopoly capital's growth into imperialism puts the last nail in the coffin of Southern democracy and thus not only re-establishes racism in the South but brings it to the North.

Populism

The unbridled violence of private capital - its Pinkerton detectives and armed thugs as strikebreakers; the Supreme Court, with its use of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, not against the corporations armed to» the teeth, but against the unarmed strikers battling for the elementary right to a livelihood; all finding their full class expression in the use of troops by the Federal Government, **compelled** both labor and agriculture to challenge capital's monopoly of the seats of government. It did so with a new mass party - the People's Party - more popularly called Populism, which reached its highest point in the 1896

election.

The class struggles of the two decades, 1877 to 1897, had shaken up capital. While labor did not succeed in freeing itself from capital's stranglehold, it had seriously challenged its dominance. During the same period agrarian discontent resulting from the agrarian depressions of the '80's and '90's completely overturned the uninhibited rule of the Southern plantocracy. Despite the removal of the Federal troops, despite its now unlimited power, the violence of the KKK and the more bestial lynchings, the new South experienced a greater overturn in social relations than during the Civil War itself. **This** civil war didn't come there on the point of a Yankee bayonet. It was **internal** and it succeeded in establishing white and black solidarity under the banner of Populism, at the very time when the class struggles in the North gave socialism its native roots among workers and farmers. Matching the agricultural was the industrial unrest which, from 1881 through 1900, recorded 22,793 strikes involving no fewer than 6,105,694 workers.

Intellectual Ferment

The emergence of labor as a new power affected every aspect of life. The resulting intellectual ferment gave birth to muckrakers as well as theoreticians, to writers of Utopias as well as such professional associations as the American Economic Association (AEA). The associations were born under a leadership that stressed the need to abandon ruthless "laissez faire," and instead "to humanize" economics.

As founder of the AEA, Richard T. Ely had praised Marx's CAPITAL as one of the "ablest politico-economic treatises ever written." His colleague, John R. Commons, laid entirely new foundations for a world view of American history with his 11 volume **Documentary History of Industrial Society** and two volume **History of Labor**. He had also laid a totally new basis for education with his advice to his students "to visit workingmen in their homes and to join a labor union for only then could the needs and aspiration of the working class be really understood" since "books did not teach and educated man did not know reasons for workingmen's behavior."¹⁹

The hack writers, however, followed big capital in judging Richard T. Ely's

The Labor Movement in America as "ravings of an anarchist or the dream of a socialist."

Nor were the fathers of American sociology unaware of the class struggles and the need to humanize social relations. The muckrakers even more than sociologists, historians and theoreticians did indeed produce as great a disturbance in "public opinion" as the labor struggles did.

It was not any single event like the Utopias described by Edward Bellamy in his **Looking Backward**, or a theory like Henry George's single tax (though his **Progress and Property** certainly stirred up a political movement), or an expose of Standard Oil by Henry Demarest Lloyd.²⁰

In **Wealth Against Commonwealth** his exposure of private capital was interlaced with attacks on legislature, like the statement that "Standard Oil had done everything with the Pennsylvania legislature except to refine it."

It was that all together their attacks on "invisible government" - monopoly's stranglehold on all life - brought to the light of day the corruption in government, shook up legislatures as well as public opinion. **Unfortunately the muckrakers were so busy searching for the invisible government that they didn't see the very visible march of monopoly toward imperialism.** They wanted government "cleansed of corruption," not shorn of its **organism**, its **class** composition, even as the professional societies wished to "humanize" economics, not to establish a humanism, that is to say, a classless, non-exploitative society. Monopoly's expansion into imperialistic adventures took them by surprise.

Notes

¹⁵ **Black Reconstruction**, by W. E. B. Du Bois, is the only scholarly work on the subject. Yet to this day it is disregarded by white historians, Northern as well as Southern.

¹⁶ **Deep South**, by Davis, Gardner, and Warner, p. 266.

¹⁷ **The Collapse of Cotton Tenancy**, by Johnson, Embree and Alexander.

[18](#) **The Rise of American Civilization**, by Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, 1945 edition.

[19](#) **The Economic Mind in American Civilization**, Vol. Ill, 1865-1914, by Joseph Dorfman.

[20](#) The most comprehensive study is the famous work of Ida Tarbell, **History of Standard Oil** .

PART III: Imperialism and Racism

One thing should be said for Abraham Lincoln. He had neither the smell for empire nor for monopoly capitalism. As a young Congressman, he opposed the Mexican-American War and thereby threw away his chances for re-election. As a mature man, just before his assassination, he looked askance at the beginnings of corporate capitalism: "I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country. As a result of the war, corporations have been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places will follow. The money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until all wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed. I feel at the moment more anxiety for my country than ever before, even in the midst of war. God grant that my suspicions may prove groundless."

In this centenary of the Emancipation Proclamation, we must therefore take a look at "the smell of empire" that combined with the economic remains of slavery to establish racism as a "permanent" feature of American life, even as European capital's carving up of Africa in the 1880's established "the white man's burden," or racism, as the new feature for all of capitalist imperialism.

1. Rise of Monopoly Capital

The United States' plunge into imperialism in 1898 came so suddenly that Populism hardly noticed it. Although for a decade and more Populism had fought monopoly capital which gave birth to imperialism, it was not weighted down by an awareness of any connection between the two. This was not the result only of the deflection of the struggle of the people vs. monopoly into the narrower channel of free silver vs. banker. **Behind the apparent suddenness of the rise of imperialism stands the spectacular industrial development after the Civil War. The unprecedented rate of industrialization telescoped its victory over agriculture and its transformation from competitive to monopoly capital.** Because monopoly capital had appeared first in transportation, the Mid-Western wheat belt as

well as the post-Reconstruction South resented their veritable bondage to the railroads that controlled the outlet of, and thus set the prices for, their products. The agricultural population had been the first to revolt, the first to organize into a new political party, and the ones mainly responsible for getting the first anti-trust Acts of 1887 and 1890.

It was this precisely which so shook up the Southern oligarchy that it quickly gave up its resentment of Northern capital's victory over agrarianism in order to unite with its former **war** enemy to destroy their mutual **class** enemy, Populism. **Together**, North and South pulled out all stops - the violence of Northern capital against labor was more than matched by the Southern oligarchy's encouragement of the revival of the rule of rope and faggot against a mythical "Negro domination" inherent in Populism.

That **additive of color**, moreover, now had a promissory note attached to it: a veritable heaven on earth was promised the poor whites in the new white-only enterprise - textiles. So began "the great slaughter of the innocents"²¹ that will first in the late 1920's explode into the unwritten civil war of unarmed, starving textile workers against armed, well-fed Southern monopolists - the great Gastonia, North Carolina strike. But for the late 1890's the Southern monopolists - in agriculture as in industry - became so frightened over the explosive force contained in Populism, the threat to **their** rule, that they happily embraced the North, Northern capital.

Monopoly capital first appeared in transportation before it appeared in industry, but from the first it was built on Andrew Carnegie's principle: "Pioneering doesn't pay." Empire building through consolidations did. Swallowing up of smaller capital, destruction of cut-throat competition alongside of monopolization, not to mention cheating on top of exploitation - that was the way of all great American fortunes built by means more foul than fair during those two decisive decades. Four times as much acreage as had been taken up by homesteaders was given to railroad companies. Bourgeois historians must record what even bourgeois politicians had to admit - after the fact, of course. In **Rise of American Civilization**, Charles A. Beard states: "The public land office of the United States was little more than a centre of the distribution of plunder; according to President Roosevelt's land commission, hardly a single great western estate had a title untainted by

fraud."

Monopoly was on its way in all fields and with just as unclean hands²² - Rockefeller started the oil trust; Carnegie, steel; Morgan, banking; while Jay Gould, Leland Stanford, James J. Hill, Cornelius Vanderbilt first kept to railroads and then spread tentacles outward until all together they impelled the Federal Government to its imperialist path.

Slavery and Capitalism

Long before American capital's discovery of the easy road to wealth, Marx had described European capital's birth: "The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signaled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief momenta of primitive accumulation. On the heels treads the commercial war of the European nations, with the globe for a theater . . . Great fortunes sprung up like mushrooms in a day; primitive accumulation went on without the advance of a shilling." **The capitalist leopard couldn't change its spots in the United States even though its primitive accumulation had to be achieved within the confines of its own land. Direct slavery was still the method of developing Southern agriculture, wage labor that of developing industry. Despite the famous free farmer in the West and its seemingly endless frontier, free land was still more, fantastically more, at the disposal of railroad magnates than available to homesteaders, and that fact held though the "magnates" were first to become such. Here too "great fortunes sprung up like mushrooms in a day" not for every man but for those who knew how to get government to help new industrialism, hot-house fashion, to blossom forth into monopoly form.** It is no historic secret that the later the bourgeois revolution against feudalism or slavery takes place, the less complete it is, due to the height of class opposition between capital and labor. The lateness in the abolition of slavery in the United States accounts for the tenacious economic survivals of slavery which still exist in the country.

2. Plunge Into Imperialism

Nevertheless, as the strength of Populism and the solidarity of black and white that it forged showed, the economic survival of slavery couldn't have persisted, much less dominated the life of the Negroes North as well as South, **IF** they hadn't been re-inforced by the "new" Northern capital. It was not the "psychology of Jim Crowism" that did the reinforcing. **The "psychology of Jim Crowism" is itself the result, not the cause, of monopoly capital extending its tentacles into the Caribbean and the Pacific as it became transformed into imperialism, with the Spanish-American War.** So great, however, was the corruption of capitalism that the muckrakers were blinded by it; that is to say, diverted by it from grasping capitalism's **organic** exploitative nature that would **naturally** transform itself into quasi-totalitarian imperialism. The result was that when the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898, it had the appearance of a sudden manifestation out of nowhere. In truth it was long building up. Latin America had known, ever since 1820, that while the Monroe Doctrine could protect it from **European invasion**, there was no such protection from **American aggression for which the Doctrine was designed**. Were we even to exclude the imperialistic adventure of the Mexican-American War of 1846 on the excuse that it had been instigated, not by Northern capital but by the Southern wish to expand the territory for slavery, these facts that are incontrovertible preceded the Spanish-American War:

(1) three full decades of phenomenal industrial expansion followed the end of the Civil War; (2) three full decades of undeclared civil war were waged against labor in the North; and (3) the combined might of Northern capital and the Southern aristocracy was used against the challenge from agriculture - Populism. The removal of the Federal troops was only the first of the steps in this unholy alliance which two decades later jointly ventured into imperialism. **It could not be otherwise. The capitalistic mentality and the slavemaster mentality are not very far apart when the domination of the exploiters is challenged by the working people. Indeed, monopoly capital needed Southern racism for its plunge into empire. North and South, the thirst for empire was brilliantly white.** As America shouldered the "White Man's Burden" she took up at the same time many Southern attitudes on the

subject of race. "If the stronger and cleverer race," said the editor of the **Atlantic Monthly**, "is free to impose its will upon 'new caught, sullen peoples' on the other side of the globe, why not in South Carolina and Mississippi?"²³

Professor C. Vann Woodward notes that "These adventures in the Pacific and the Caribbean suddenly brought under the jurisdiction of the United States some eight million people of the colored races, 'a varied assortment of inferior races,' as the **Nation** described them, 'which, of course, could not be allowed to vote'."

The **Atlantic Monthly** was no exception, Professor Woodward reminds us once again, this time in his article in the **Progressive** (Deel, 1962): "In the pages of **Harper's**, **Scribner's**, **Century**, the **North American Review** can be found all the shibboleths of white supremacy." The daily press, of course, was no different.

"The Boston **Evening Transcript** of 14 January, 1899, admitted that Southern race policy was 'now the policy of the Administration of the very party which carried the country into and through a civil war to free the slave.' And The **New York Times** of 10 May, 1900, reported editorially that 'Northern men . . . no longer denounce the suppression of the Negro vote (in the South) as it used to be denounced in the reconstruction days. The necessity of it under the supreme law of self-preservation is candidly recognized.' "

Nor does that mean that the academic world that "should" know better. was any different in New York than in Mississippi: "The doctrines of Anglo-Saxon superiority by which Professor John W. Burgess of Columbia University, Captain Alfred T. Mahan of the United States Navy, and Senator Albert Beveridge of Indiana justified and rationalized American imperialism in the Philippines, Hawaii, and Cuba differed in no essentials from the race theories by which Senator Benjamin R. Tillman of South Carolina and Senator James K. Vardaman of Mississippi justified white supremacy in the South."

Even Samuel Gompers and the A.F. of L., which began by opposing this imperialistic venture, ended by capitulating to it. Only the independent Negro

movement maintained a consistent and principled opposition to this plunge into imperialism:

" . . . in 1899 the Afro-American Council , . . demanded an end to lynching and the enforcement of the 14th and 15th Amendments. This was the year of the Spanish-American War which gave the United States the Philippines; and DuBois and other Negro intellectuals, together with a large section of the Negro press, actively supported the recently formed Anti-Imperialist League, castigated the war as unjust, and linked it to their own struggle with the demand that America should put itself in order at home before expanding overseas. This Negro campaign against American imperialism did not stop with the acquisition of the Philippines; and, in 1900 many voices - including that of the African Methodist Episcopal Church Bishop, Henry M. Turner - were raised against the use of Negro troops in the United States' effort against the Boxer Rebellion in China."²⁴

3. Racism

This poison in the air from the smell of empire pervaded North as well as South even as it had already pervaded Europe when it set about carving up Africa in the previous decade. It is true that despite dollar diplomacy's "lapses" in not sticking only to the dollar profits but participating both in marine landings and the actual occupation, American imperialism was not on the level of the spoliation and barbarism of Europe's conquest of Africa.

The greater truth, however, is that Theodore Roosevelt's "manifest destiny" does not fundamentally differ from Britain's jingoistic "white man's burden" or from the French "mission civilisatrice" or the German "kultur." All white civilization showed its barbarism in the conquest of the whole Afro-Asian, Latin American and Middle Eastern worlds.²⁵

The debate over whether imperialism means a search for exports and investments or imports and "consumer choice" sheds no illumination on the roots of racism and its persistence over the decades so that by now the hollowness of American democracy reverberates around the globe and makes the newly awakened giants of freedom in the economically underdeveloped

world look sympathetically to the totalitarian Sino-Soviet orbit which had not directly oppressed it. Whether imperialism's exploitation was due to the need for cotton or copper, coffee or copra, cocoa or diamonds, super-profits for finance capital or "prestige" for national governments, **its inhumanity to man is what assured its return home to roost on native racist as well as exploitative grounds** .

The Spanish-American War was no sooner over than the United States began forcing the door open to trade in China. The 1900 election campaign was built around this imperialistic note. It was not merely out of the lips of a young senator from Indiana that we heard jubilation²⁶: "The Philippines are ours forever . . . And just beyond the Philippines are China's illimitable markets. We will not retreat from either . . . We will not renounce our part in the mission of our race . . ." When McKinley was assassinated there came to rule over this new empire from Latin America to the Philippines, and from Hawaii to some open doors in China and Japan, Theodore Roosevelt - that alleged trust buster and very real empire builder.

Racism, in the United States **and/or** abroad, helped pave the way for totalitarianism with its cult of "Aryanism" and its bestial destruction of an entire **white race** in the very heart of Europe.²⁷

Those who wish to forget that at the root of present-day **apartheid** South Africa was the "civilizing mission" of the white race which meant, in fact, such horrors as the extermination of the Khoisan peoples by the Boers, of Leopold II's reduction of 20 to 40 million peaceful Congolese to 8 million-are the ones who took the extermination of the Jews in Nazi Germany "in stride" - until the Nazi search for "lebensraum" meant a challenge to their own area of exploitation.

Surely, on the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation when the holocaust of World War II is still fresh within the memory of living men, it is high time to stop playing psychological games with racism. It is precisely such playing with the question as to whether the Civil War was to be limited only to the question of Union, and not extended to the abolition of slavery, which **both** prolonged the war and left the revolution in human relations in so unfinished a state that to this day we suffer from its state of incompleteness. In

1905 labor made one more try for a fundamental change.

4. New Awakening of Labor - the I.W.W.

The imperialist mark of the 20th century did not for long go unchallenged.

First, the South: while light industry by-passed the Negro, heavy industry did not. Being at the very bottom of the social structure, capitalist society pushed the Negro into the worst paid industries. Since, however, as capitalist industrialization developed, those very industries - coal, steel, iron - became pivotal to the whole movement, the Negro was very strategically placed in industry. There was no mass migration North until World War I, but in the South the Negro did become an integral part of labor from the earliest days of heavy industrialization - and a militant member of whatever unions took root there.

Between the two extremes - textiles which employed no Negroes in the direct process of production, and mines and steel mills in which Negroes were more or less equal in number to whites - there were the so-called strictly "Negro jobs" - saw mills, fertilizer plants, etc. These employed mainly Negroes. They remained unorganized. They were located rurally so that the Negro was as much isolated as a factory worker as if he were a peasant still. Nevertheless the break from share-cropping and personal dependence on planter-merchant had been made.

By 1900 the United Mine Workers claimed one third of the total organized Negro labor force. By no accident, the discontent with the craft unionism of the A.F. of L. came first of all from the Western Federation of Miners, which merged into the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) in 1905. It was built on militant class struggle lines, industrial unionism 30 years ahead of the C.I.O. It also had, first, a socialist, and then a syndicalist philosophy of "one big union" which would not merely fight to better conditions of labor and raise wages, but to control production.

At the height of its power, the I.W.W. claimed one million members, 100,000 of whom were Negroes. The most important of the I.W.W. unions among

Negroes were precisely in the the prejudice-ridden South, in the lumber industries in Louisiana and Texas and among the longshoremen and dockworkers in Baltimore, Norfolk and Philadelphia. The Brotherhood of Timber Workers in the lumber camps of Louisiana, Texas and Arkansas had 35,000 members in 1910, 50 per cent of whom were Negroes.

1905 is a year that opens a new page in the role of labor not only in America. It is the year of the first Russian Revolution. It is the year of the first victory of a colored race over a white one - with Japan's victory over Russia in the Russo-Japanese War. However, neither Japanese labor nor Russian followed their own governments. Instead the Social Democratic leaders in both countries - Plekhanov and Sen Katayama - shook hands against capitalism and chauvinism in each country.

In the United States, too, we see the vanguard role of the I.W.W. not only as labor in general, but specifically in relationship to Negro labor who thereby not only as "mass" but as **reason** refashioned American unionism. The most prominent of the Negro I.W.W. organizers was Ben Fletcher who was jailed with the founders of the I.W.W., Haywood, Chaplin and others for their opposition to World War I.²⁸

Unfortunately, the overwhelming majority of the Negroes - no less than 86.7 per cent in 1900 - had remained in agriculture and were thus unaffected by the rise of the I.W.W. The Negro was to experience no serious proletarianization and urbanization until the First World War, when the flow of immigrant labor was shut off and Northern capital was compelled to comb the South for labor needed in war industries. By then the war hysteria, persecution by the government and imprisonment of its leaders brought about the decline of the I.W.W. The only thing that awaited the Negro in the North was isolation and extreme frustration.

Notes

²¹ **Capital**, by Karl Marx. Marx had been referring to the factory system in England, but it holds as well for America. The full quotation reads: "Colonial system, public debts, heavy taxes, protection, commercial wars, etc.-these children of the true manufacturing period, increase gigantically during the infancy of Modern industry. The birth of the latter is heralded by a great

slaughter of the innocents."

²² See **History of Great American Fortunes**, by Gustavus Myers.

²³ **The Strange Career of Jim Crow**, by C. Vann Woodward, 1961 Galaxy book edition. It is a sad commentary on the state of Northern scholarship that this expose of the academic world and press in the North, as well as of the Supreme Court's bending to those racist trends, comes from the pen of a Southern historian who is doing it, at least in part, only in order to excuse the slowness of desegregation in the South. Since no one can possibly consider a century old struggle a race with time, much less "majestic instance, the Professor tries to whittle down the concept of 100 years by showing that Jim Crowism didn't get fully established until the beginning of the 20th century, as if the stench of white supremacy by any other name, like slavery, black codes, lynchings, does not smell as bad.

²⁴ This quotation is from an article by George P. Marks, "Opposition of Negro Newspapers to American Philippine Policy, 1899-1900," in **The Midwest Journal** (Jefferson City, Mo.), Winter 1951-1952. It is cited in *Independent African*, by George Shepperson and Thomas Price; University Press, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1958, p. 101.

²⁵ Because we are limiting ourselves to U.S. imperialism's effects on racism, we cannot here go into the details of its conquests. There are many good books on the subject. One of the latest details how "The U.S. reduced 5 of the Latin-American nations to the status of quasi-protectorates within less than 2 decades . . . The Cuban protectorate was set up in 1902 with a naval base and the security of foreign investments as the main goal . . ." Even, when with the New Deal, the Good Neighbor policy was established and direct rule given up, we at no time, even to this day, did anything to free the countries from being one-crop or one-mineral economies subordinated to America. See **Imperialism and World Politics**, by Parker Thomas Moon, 1926, as the old standard; and for a later and moderate view, **A History of the Modern World**, by Joel Colton, revised 1962 edition, Alfred A. Knopf, N Y.

²⁶ The reference is to Senator Albert J. Beveridge, quoted in Foster Rhea Dulles' "**The U.S. Since 1865**", University of Michigan Press, 1959, p. 173.

[27](#) **The Origins of Totalitarianism**, by Hannah Arendt.

[28](#) See **The Black Workers**, by Sterling D. Spero and Abraham L. Harris; and **Negro Labor in the U.S.**, by Charles H. Wesley.



Cartoon reprinted from *News & Letters*, December, 1956

PART IV: Nationalism and Internationalism

1. The Negro Moves North

"There is no use calling on the Lord - He never hears."

- Casey in **Uncle Tom's Cabin** by Harriet Beecher Stowe

One and one-half million Negroes left Southern farms to come North during and immediately after World War I. These two unprecedented waves of migration in 1916-1918 and again in 1921-1924 brought about an unparalleled population explosion that seemed to have happened over-night, whether it was such a phenomenal growth in Negro population as in Gary, Ind., which experienced a 1,200 per cent growth or "only" a 66.3 per cent increase in New York from 91,709 to 151,847. Detroit's Negro population between 1910 -1920 jumped from a mere 5,741 to 40,838, a 611.3 per cent increase.

Far from finding paradise "up North," however, the Negroes soon discovered that they had been brought from Southern plantations to take the most ill-paid, back-breaking jobs in Chicago stockyards, Pittsburgh steel mills, Detroit auto factories, Philadelphia docks. Sometimes they had been brought in to break a strike, and in any case they found the union doors as closed to them as industry had been hitherto. **Indeed, so long as basic industries remained unorganized, the Negro couldn't become an integral part of the trade unions which were divided by crafts limited to the skilled workers. The color bar was thus both industry and union made.** The second shock that hit the migrant worker was that the move from country to city was not really to the big city but to the small, overcrowded ghetto, where he was surrounded on all sides by prejudiced whites. Unemployment would soon, with the end of the war, reinforce the prejudice through competition for jobs. And the Klan had followed the Negroes North to organize anti-Negro

prejudices and outright attacks against them. This was whipped up further by the anti-foreign, anti-Red hysteria following the end of the war and the success of the Russian Revolution which had had such a great impact the world over, including the United States.

The social humiliation to which the Negroes were subjected daily, in and out of the factory, in and out of the ghetto, in and out of stores and places of entertainment, was not limited to Negro migrants. **Whatever generation had got lost in Paris, the black veteran had to return from fighting a war "to save democracy" to face a Jim Crow America where bigotry and intolerance seemed to reign supreme.** Bloody race riots and a barbaric outburst of lynchings climaxed the move North. "Red Summer 1919" was a description, not of the extension of the Russian Revolution, but of the fantastic number of race riots - no less than 26 in the last months of 1919. **The Negroes did not take all this lying down. They gave as good as they got. And then they searched for an organization, a philosophy that would express not only their frustrations and profound disillusionment, but their spirit of revolt and desire for total freedom. But they found neither an existing Negro organization nor a Negro leadership. The so-called "talented tenth" might as well speak Greek as English. Communication between leadership-self-styled and otherwise-and mass had broken down.** Into this great divide within the American Negro a West Indian printer and orator named Marcus Garvey stepped with a dream of "uniting all the Negro peoples of the world into one great body to establish a country and Government absolutely their own."

2. Garveyism vs. "Talented Tenth"

"We are the descendants of a suffering people; we are the descendants of a people determined to suffer no longer."

- Marcus Garvey

In January 1918 Marcus Garvey began to publish a weekly called NEGRO WORLD, claiming to reach "the mass of Negroes throughout the World." Very nearly overnight it attained a circulation of 50,000, and at its height in

1920-1921 claimed 200,000. It literally shook up also the colonial world and was banned in much of Africa.²⁹

Its internationalism did not exhaust itself by its West Indian editorship, nor by its home in the United States, nor its appeal to Africa. Sections of it were printed in French and Spanish for the benefit of other West Indian and Central American Negroes. Garvey's editorials were always front-paged, and addressed to the "Fellowmen of the Negro Race." Its pages stirred with pride over the heroes of the Negro: from tales of Negro slave revolts in America to the Zulu Revolt of 1906 against British rule; from the rise of the Ethiopian empire to Toussaint L'Ouverture's victory against the French in Haiti.

There were, as well, newly-told tales of great African civilizations "when Europe was inhabited by a race of cannibals, a race of savages, naked men, heathens and pagans . . . Black men, you were once great: you shall be great again. Lose not courage, lose not faith, go forward. The thing to do is get organized; keep separated and you will be exploited, you will be robbed, you will be killed. Get organized, and you will compel the world to respect you. If the world fails to give you consideration, because you are black men, because you are Negroes, four hundred millions of you shall through organization, shake the pillars of the universe and bring down creation, even as Samson brought down the temple upon his head and upon the heads of the Philistines."³⁰

Garvey set about organizing the American Negroes and immediately disproved the myth that they "couldn't be organized." Literally by the millions they flocked into his organization, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). This was the first time that a Negro organization was established on a country-wide basis. At its height in 1920-1921, it claimed six million. It was overwhelmingly proletarian. Marcus Garvey had appealed to the American Negro over the heads of the established Negro leaders who lived in a world far removed from the daily lives of the Negro mass. Where they were preoccupied with themselves as the "talented tenth," or, at best, participated in long-drawn-out legal battles, Garvey spoke of what to do here and now.

It was easy for the Negro intellectual to expose the fakery in such schemes as

"the Black Star Line" that would take the American Negro "back to Africa," as well as "to prove" that the Negro wanted to **integrate into, not separate from**, the mainstream of American life. **But thereby the Negro intellectuals also proved how isolated they were from the profound unrest stirring the mass of Negroes, their total despair of ever achieving full democracy within the post-World War I American civilization.** Where they had urged and were proud of the Negro's participation in the war, Garvey lashed out: "We are going to organize ourselves all over the world that when the white men say - any white man wants a black man to die in the future, they have to tell us what we are going to die for. (Applause). The first dying that is to be done by the black man in the future will be done to make himself free."³¹

Long before the African revolutionaries came onto the historic scene, Marcus Garvey raised the slogan "Africa for the Africans." Impractical as were the specifics of the "Back to Africa" scheme in the historic context of an Africa divided up among the European imperialist powers, the concept of "Africa for the African" anticipated the African **revolutions** that would put an end to colonialism. And it was **totally opposed to the Pan-Africanism of the "talented tenth" of Du Bois and Diagne.** Where the latter appealed to the League of Nations for "partial self-determination of natives of the **German colonies**" (my emphasis), asking the League to hold "the land and its natural resources . . . in trust for the natives," Garvey declared the League "null and void as far as the Negro is concerned in that it seeks to deprive the Negroes of their liberty." In its stead he demanded that black men themselves, here and now, "establish "Africa for the Africans."

The "talented tenth" still obscures the connection between this great mass movement of Negro Americans immediately after World War I and the flowering of Negro genius in music, literature and sports. It is precisely to this great unrest that the Harlem Renaissance and what became known as the "New Negro" owe their existence. The mass movement gave the "talented tenth" their voice and not the other way around.³²

It was not the fakery in Garvey's schemes, like the money collected for the Black Star Line, that made Du Bois, along with almost all other Negro intellectuals, actually sign a petition addressed to the United States Department of Justice, demanding his deportation. It was that the American

Negro intellectual had never been able to break through to the Negro masses.³³

Garvey most certainly had. In retrospect, W. E. B. DuBois finally saw it and had to write: "It was a grandiose and bombastic scheme, utterly impracticable as a whole, but it was sincere and had some practical features; and Garvey proved not only an astonishingly popular leader, but a master of propaganda. Within a few years, news of his movement, of his promises and plans, reached Europe and Asia, and penetrated every corner of Africa."³⁴

To other intellectuals, like Ralph Bunche, Garveyism remained beyond comprehension even as late as 1940 when he wrote: "When the curtain dropped on the Garvey theatricals, the black man of America was exactly where Garvey had found him, though a little bit sadder, perhaps a bit poorer - if not wiser."³⁵

Dr. Bunche, clearly, was no wiser.

3. Marxism

"When in 1920 the American government started to investigate and to suppress radical propaganda among Negroes, the small radical Negro groups in America retaliated by publishing the fact that the Socialists stood for the emancipation of the Negroes, and that reformist America could do nothing for them. Then, I think, for the first time in American history, the American Negroes found that Karl Marx had been interested in their emancipation, and had fought valiantly for it."³⁶

The speaker was the great Negro poet, Claude McKay. The place was Moscow. The year was 1922, long before Communism had become transformed into today's totalitarianism. At the previous Congress, in 1920, Lenin had presented his special **Theses on the National and Colonial Questions**, and preliminary to that Congress he had included Ireland and "the Negro in America" as part of the National Question and asked "all comrades, particularly those who have definite information on any of these very complicated questions, to express their opinion and make suggestions for

amendments or additions . . ."

Lenin used the word, "nation," in its broad sense of oppressed nations and minority groups; and included both national minorities and colonial majorities in the **Theses**. In his very numerous polemics on the National Question, throughout World War I, and again in his 1920 **Theses** after he had gained power in Russia, Lenin emphasized that concrete historic situations, not abstract considerations, formed the focal point of both the theory and the actions on the National Question.

The decisive thing was that "all national oppression calls forth resistance of the **broad masses** of people." It is insufficient to state that revolutionists would support these movements, he maintained. It is not only a question of support. It is a question of support and the development of national struggles, not for abstract reasons, **but because these struggles must inevitably develop along the lines of independent mass activity.**

Ever since his study of **Imperialism** in 1916, Lenin held that imperialism has brought about a differentiation not only between the oppressor nations and the oppressed ones, but also **within** the proletariat. Lenin was especially adamant on this point in his polemics with his Bolshevik colleagues.

In his polemic with Pyatakov on the National Question, Lenin defended a "dualism" of propaganda on the ground that the proletariat in the oppressor nation differs from the proletariat in the oppressed nation "**all along the line**": **economically**, the worker of the oppressor nation more easily becomes part of the labor aristocracy; **politically**, he participates more fully in the life of the country; and **intellectually**, he feels superior because he is taught disdain for the laborer of the oppressed nation.³⁷

Lenin threw the accusation of "national egoism" against those Marxists who failed to recognize the merits of the National Question as it applied both to easily recognized nations like the Irish, or minorities like the ghetto Jew in Poland or the Negro in the United States. The problem of national egoism does not, of course, resolve itself merely into the fact that the proletariat of the oppressing nation is taught disdain for the worker of the oppressed nation. National egoism has a firmer basis: an economic foundation. The point of specific political implication in Lenin's **Imperialism** is that, owing to the

super-profits of imperialism, imperialism is able to bribe a section of its own proletariat and thereby lay the basis of political opportunism.

Claude McKay

This precisely applied to the American Socialists and Communists.³⁸

Claude McKay said that "they are not willing to face the Negro Question." **Much has since been written of the sameness of the Negro and American culture in order to prove that the Negroes are not a nation. But what these writers have failed to show is: why, then, does there nevertheless exist a Negro problem? The sameness of the Negro and American culture does not explain this. And that is the hub of the matter.** It is the general success of assimilation in the historic development of a country like the United States that lends credence to the type of ultra-left phraseology behind which lurks national egoism. In Europe the national minorities fought for independence **from** the larger society. But in the United States the national minorities that came to this country fought for integration **within** the larger society. They, the immigrants, more or less succeeded. The exception to the integration is the Negro. Why? Surely it isn't the Negro's doing; he only wants his assimilation accepted. We see that here is a complex pattern that cannot be solved by abstract criteria as to what constitutes a nation.

It is the Negro's **special** oppression, the deprivation of his political rights, the discrimination against him on the job, Jim Crowism and racial segregation that makes of him "a problem."

It was McKay, writing critically on "Garvey as a Negro Moses," (**LIBERATOR**, April 1922) who said: "Where men like Booker T. Washington, Dr. DuBois of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and William Monroe Trotter of the Equal Rights League had but little success, Garvey succeeded in bringing the Associated Press to his knees every time he bellowed. And his words were trumpeted round the degenerate pale-face world trembling with fear of the new Negro . . . He was the biggest popularizer of the Negro problem, especially among Negroes, since 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'. He attained the sublime."

The fact that the Negro masses could embrace so Utopian a scheme as "Back to Africa" - a utopianism all the more suicidal since their customs, language, and culture are American-reveals both how frustrated the Negroes feel at ever achieving full democratic rights in America and how desperately repressed they feel as a national minority. And, what is more important, they mean to do something about this.

If the movement developed into diversionary channels, as the Garvey movement did, and if the socialists were unable to make a dent in its ranks, it only proves that the only way to influence **masses in motion** is by **understanding** the underlying, economic, philosophic and social causes, not by throwing epithets at them.

Those who failed to understand that the **principles** of the Marxist approach to the National Question apply to the Negro struggle for assimilation **into** the national culture as much as to the European national struggle for independence **from** the national culture of the oppressing nation are the very ones who were disoriented when the African Revolutions in our era opened both as national revolutions **and** under a banner of Marxist Humanism and internationalism.

Until the Communists began to vie for **this** third new world in our era, Lenin's 1920 **Theses on the National and Colonial Question** seemed to have been "lost." Their "rediscovery" of the **Theses** in Khrushchev's time was for the same purpose as their "application" of it to the American Negro in 1928 when it was sloganized as "Self-Determination of the Negroes in the Black Belt." **This sounded to the Negroes as yet one other form of segregation. By the time of World War II it became outright betrayal.**

(Paradoxically enough, the demand for a separate territory for the black nation is the very basis of today's Black Muslim movement. While its origins date back to the remnants of the Garvey movement, it is only recently that they have come to national prominence and claim 100,000 members. It is the negative features of their program - of being anti-white - that wins them a following. Their positive program - whether it refers to the superiority of men over women, of Islam over Christianity, or their rejection of the very idea of integration - makes them only peripheral to the mainstream of the Negro struggle today rather than at the heart of it).

*(When the Black Muslims try to separate the races again at this stage, they not only cannot compare in mass allegiance with that won by Marcus Garvey at a far different historic period, but they find themselves following some of the caucuses within the unions rather than leading out of the unions. With the rise of the CIO the Negro did become an integral part of the labor movement, and thus the frustrations that persist in the life of a minority in this country are inseparable from the general struggle for a new society here. Greater detail on the Muslim movement is contained in **The Black Muslims in America**, by C. Eric Lincoln, Beacon, 1961. See also their official newspaper, **Muhammud Speaks**.)*

Notes

²⁹ Mr. George Shepperson, a professor in Scotland who has specialized on the African, (especially Nyasaland) independence movements, and the "triangular trade" of ideas between America, the West Indies and Africa, states that it is not altogether out of bounds. For example, the migratory labor cycle between Nyasaland and South Africa did help disseminate Garveyism as seen from the case of the African "who was sentenced to three years' hard labor in September 1926 for importing into the Protectorate two copies of **The Worker's Herald** and six of **The Negro World . . .**" (**Phylon**, Fall 1961). See also "Notes on Negro American Influence on the Emergence of African Nationalism" by George Shepperson in the **Journal of African History** (1-2, 1960).

³⁰ **Black Moses**, by Edmund David Cronon, Univ. of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1955, is a good biography, in which many of Garvey's speeches are included and the general historic period is analyzed. But it is no substitute for **Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey**, edited by his widow, Mrs. Amy Jacques Garvey, the first volume of which was published in 1923 and the second in 1926. (Universal Publishing House, N.Y.)

³¹ **Revolutionary Radicalism, Report of the Joint Legislative Committee Investigating Seditious Activities**, Filed April 24, 1920, in the Senate of the State of New York, Part I Revolutionary and Subversive Movement Abroad and at Home, Vol. II, Ch. V, Propaganda Among Negroes, pp. 1476-1520. There are several speeches by Marcus Garvey the one quoted here appears on

p. 1514. There is a most valuable section on A. Philip Randolph and the remarkable magazine. Messenger, with some beautiful cartoons, as well as a report on the I.W.W. and Ben Fletcher. Considering the reactionary nature as well as pure stupidity of this infamous Lusk Committee it is all the more surprising that such valuable source material can be gotten here. Published in Albany, N.Y. This was also the period of the frameup of the martyred Sacco and Vanzetti. It was in this period when Alabama passed the anti-labor law against the striking Birmingham miners which was used against Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. in an attempt to break the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

³² In **Black Moses** Cronon quotes Garvey's "Declaration of the Rights of the Negro People of the World" which deals with the capitalization of the word "Negro." He also includes the 1929 New York State Board of Education's order that this be done, as well as the New York Times report in 1930 explaining that it was done, in "recognition of racial self-respect for those who have been for generations 'in the lower case'." The American Negro scholar, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, founder of The Association for The Study of Negro History, did yoeman's work here as well as in establishing Negro History Week. For the Harlem Renaissance in general, see **The New Negro** by Alain Locke, and also **Anthology of American Negro Literature**, Modern Library book, 1944.

³³ Henry Lee Moon did recognize this division between "talented tenth" and the masses, when he summed up, in retrospect, the Niagara Movement led by Du-Bois and others in 1903: "Their cause was just, their motives pure, their goals noble and practical; but they were perhaps too far removed from the masses to inspire them to action - too conscious of their own privileged position as a black elite" **Balance of Power** .

³⁴ (34) **Dusk of Dawn**, by W. E. B. Du Bois.

³⁵ (35) **A World View of Race**, submitted as manuscript for Myrdal's **An American Dilemma**, available in Schomburg Collection, New York City.

³⁶ **Fourth Congress of the Communist International**, Abridged Report of Meetings held at Petrograd and Moscow, November 7 - December 3, 1922. McKay's speech appears on pages 260-261. Published in Great Britain. The

previous report of the American delegates in which L. Fraino and John Reed appeared on the same subject can be obtained from the **Stenographic Report, Second Congress of the Communist International**, 1921, but that is available only in Russian, Consult especially pp. 131-132.

³⁷ Lenin, **Collected Works Vol. XIX**, p. 248. See also **Selected Works. Vol. X**, for the **Preliminary Draft of Theses on the National and Colonial Questions**," and for the **Report of the Commission**, pp. 231-244.

³⁸ The Communists were not the only ones who could not understand the Negro as a "National Question." The Socialists could not either. Nor was it only a question of being white and thus insensitive to the duality and intensity of the oppression of the Negro. The Debsian 1903 formula - "Properly speaking, there is no Negro question outside the labor question" (**International Socialist Review**, Vol. VI, 1903, p. 1113) - dominated A. Philip Randolph as well during the very height of Garveyism. It would take another 20 years and another World War, and especially the neverending Depression, before A. Philip Randolph would act on this specialized basis both in the organization of the March on Washington, and Committee to End Jim Crow in the Army.

**THE TERRIBLE
SHAME OF AMERICA**

WHITE SUPREMACY



Cartoon reprinted from
News & Letters, Oct. 5, 1955

PART V: From Depression through World War II

The dream part of American civilization, with its mass production, "non-entanglement in Europe," and jazz era ballyhoo about the "new capitalism" whose prosperity would be endless because its "exceptionalism" made it immune to economic crisis, came crashing down on everyone's head with the economic collapse in 1929.

Production had come to a near-standstill. The unemployed reached fantastic proportions - 17 million. Fully one-third of the nation-the President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, had to admit-was ill-fed, ill-housed, ill-clad. It was also ill-paid when it did work, for the conditions of labor, with the introduction of the beltline in the 1920's, had worsened. It remained what Marx had described the English factory to have been - "a House of Terror," its barrack-like life made the more unbearable with a speed-up Marx had never witnessed in his lifetime. What, above all, President Roosevelt did not admit was this: **the workers' disillusionment with capitalism was total.**

No one any longer believed what the rulers told them-whether that concerned "peace, prosperity and progress," or the speed of the production line or racism. Along with the rest of white America, labor may have been blind to the Negro as the touchstone of American Civilization. But with the Depression in the early 1930's, labor experienced so profound a disillusionment with capitalist society, that it included the craft unions which along with color bar, used their skilled classifications to keep themselves isolated from the overwhelming majority of the labor force - the semi-skilled and unskilled. Along with the despotism of capital, craft unionism had to go.

1. The CIO Changes the Face of the Nation and Makes a Break in Negro 'Nationalism'

New passions and new forces coalesced in the upheavals of the 1930's to give birth to the CIO. This was not simply a trade union organization that finally established industrial unionism in the United States. The speed with which this was done - 1935-1937 - when in Europe it had taken decades - brought it up to the state of organization of Europe's socialist trade unions. And, though each had **spontaneously**, arrived at a new method of struggle, the point is that the simultaneousness of THE SIT-DOWN electrified the world of labor and shook capitalism to its very foundations.

Everything was new about - the CIO³⁹: For the first time, on a **national** scale, white and black labor had united to gain union recognition. For the first time, organized labor struck where it hurt capital most, in all the basic industries-rubber coal, steel, auto. For the first time, employed and unemployed did not work at cross purposes. On the contrary, the unemployed would often, along with another new phenomenon-women's auxiliaries - man the picket lines while the workers sat down inside. For the first time, control over the **conditions** of labor-the recognition of the union - predominated over all other demands, even of wages. Nowhere more than in America had the capitalist outcry about "the invasion of private property" produced a greater militancy than among the workers who insisted on sitting down at those machines they had always worked but never controlled.

The CIO changed the industrial face of the nation. It created a break also in the "nationalism" of the Negro.

Black Labor and Talented Tenth⁴⁰

Just as, during the first phase of "Nationalism," Garveyism, the Negro worker found himself opposed by his "talented tenth," so this time too. This time it couldn't find "fakery." Although it itself has nowhere enough capital or power actually to do the exploitation of labor and must satisfy itself just with the crumbs from capital's table, the talented tenth nevertheless easily fell into the argument that "the best friend" of the Negro is the capitalist. Many added that the "most prejudiced" among the whites is the laborer. There is nothing new about this argument; it has been passed around by the slavocracy from time immemorial.⁴¹

Not all the talented tenth and established Negro organizations opposed black labor making common cause with white labor. There were notable exceptions, the most outstanding being the **Pittsburgh Courier**. Both its editor, Robert L. Vann, and columnist, George S. Schuyler, in 1937, not only did the best reportorial job on the organization of the CIO and the movement toward white and black solidarity, but lashed out against established Negro leaders. Considering Schuyler's present reactionary stance, it is important to see how differently he spoke under the impact of the CIO:

"Nowhere were the 'educated' classes cooperating with the unions to aid the work of organization, save in a few notable instances and there by only one or two individuals . . . Their desertion of the struggling Negro workers in this crisis constitutes one of the most shameful chapters in our recent history. The new position Negro labor has won in this past year has been gained in spite of the old leadership. It has been won with new leadership; militant young men and women from the ranks of labor and grizzled black veterans of the pick and shovel and the blast furnace."⁴²

It is true that, without the Negro, the CIO could not have organized the basic industries where Negro labor was pivotal. It is no less true that labor's unity was a fact that could never again be controverted, not even when the Negro once again strikes out on his own during World War II and presently.

2. March on Washington

The outbreak of World War II in 1939 and the gearing of the American factories for war output very nearly wiped out unemployment - white unemployment. But nearly 25 per cent of the Negro work force remained unemployed in 1940. The very fact that, both South and North, the Negro had become urbanized and unionized only sharpened his sense of oppression as a national minority. The very potency within the trade unions made this ghettoization and unemployment outside the more frustrating. This time the great unrest among the Negroes did not go unheeded by the American Negro leadership.

A. Philip Randolph, President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, organized a March on Washington Movement. This all-Negro mass organization planned to mobilize 100,000 for its march on the nation's capital. Under its pressure President Roosevelt issued Executive Order No. 8802 which barred discrimination in war industries. While this small version Fair Employment Practices Act did stop the March on the capital, it did not stop the movement as an organization which then proceeded to transform itself into a Committee to End Jim Crow in the Army.⁴³

Again, the winning of some of his demands only sharpened the Negro's sense of lacking all rights. In housing, especially, conditions became unbearable as more and more thousands of workers, white and Negro, moved into the industrial centers. Neither the CIO, which by now had about one and one-half million Negro members, nor the March on Washington Movement in a narrower field, had achieved what the Negro was fighting for - full democratic rights. They seemed impossible to achieve.

However, this time, far from either joining any "Back to Africa" movement, or taking the defensive when attacked by KKK and such racist elements, the Negro took the offensive. In the year 1943 there was an outburst of mass Negro demonstrations in New York, Chicago, Detroit. It was the year also of the first great wartime strike among miners which, inevitably, had a great number of Negro members. The American Negro took the offensive and showed great discrimination in what he attacked.

Something new occurred also in the sense that there were instances of white solidarity, especially in Detroit, where the CIO undertook to have white and Negro work **in and out of the factory** alongside of each other.

Above all, none dared attack it as unpatriotic. None that is except the Communists.

3. The Communists Oppose the Independent Negro Movement

At the beginning of World War II, the slogan of the American Communists

was "The Yanks Are Not Coming." They tried duplicating the treachery of the Stalin-Hitler Pact by joining with the fascistic "America Firsters" - to Communists, anything at all which would keep America from entering the war on the side of the Allies was justifiable. If they opposed anything at all in the original organization of the March on Washington Movement, it was that it was not militant enough because it allowed itself to be led by A. Philip Randolph. All this was changed overnight when, in June, 1941, Germany invaded Russia. The imperialist war was now declared by these quick-change artists, who undeviatingly follow Russian foreign policy lines, to have become "a war of national liberation." They began demanding the immediate establishment of "a second front" - everywhere, that is, except for Negroes in the United States.

Now they began to attack A. Philip Randolph as a veritable "subversive" and the March on Washington Movement as being "too belligerent." By its fight for jobs for Negroes, said the Communist Party's Vice-Presidential candidate and Negro Leader, James Ford, it was "creating confusing and dangerous moods in the ranks of the Negro people and utilizing their justified grievances as a weapon of opposition to the Administration's war program . . ."

These "justified grievances" didn't seem to warrant, in the eyes of Communists, even so mild a program as that of the **Pittsburgh Courier** which had launched the slogan of the "Double V": "double victory for democracy at home and abroad." This, said the **Daily Worker**, in its special symposium on the Negro question in March, 1942, destroys national unity! "Hitler is the main enemy and the foes of Negro rights in this country should be considered as secondary."

Many a sympathizer of the Communists and what they had done on such cases as the Scottsboro Boys in the 1930's were taken aback. As George Schuyler put it: "Whereas at one time they were all for stopping production because of Jim Crow employment policies, low pay or bad working conditions, they are now all-out for the Government's policy of no wartime strikes and have actually endorsed labor conscription, i.e., human slavery. Everything must be done to save Russia even if Negroes' rights have to go by the board."

The Communists proceeded also to rewrite Negro history. Robert Minor, in "The Heritage of the Communist Political Association," discovered that "the abolition of nation oppression is a bourgeois-democratic reform" and therefore is achievable **within** the framework of American capitalism so long as the "Negro people pursue the correct course - the Frederick Douglass course of full support of the war . . ."

Outside of the slanderous statement about that great Negro Abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, as if he uncritically supported the Civil War, **the Civil War did finally turn into a revolutionary war which abolished slavery. It thus merited also the support of the international working class which was given by the International Workingmen's Association headed by Karl Marx. World War II, on the other hand, remained an imperialist war, as was evident by the type of support given it by American Communists. They came out (1) in support of the no-strike pledge by the trade unions, not to mention being for company incentive plans; (2) against any independent activities by Negroes for their rights either on the job, or in the army, or anywhere; (3) helping railroad the Trotskyists to jail under the Smith Act; and (4) vying with the D.A.R. in its "patriotism," that is to say calling "subversive" all who disagreed with them. Even the NAACP had become too militant for them.**

(Above all, Frederick Douglass was a leader of the Abolitionist movement which did not stop its independent activity during the Civil War. Though he unequivocally supported Lincoln when he issued the Emancipation Proclamation, here is how he described Lincoln at the unveiling of the Freedmen's Monument to Lincoln: "It must be admitted, truth compels me to admit, even here in the presence of the monument we have erected to his memory, Abraham Lincoln was not, in the fullest sense of the word, either our man or our model. In his interests, in his associations, in his habits of thought, and in his prejudices, he was a white man. He was pre-eminently the white man's President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men . . . You are the children of Abraham Lincoln. We are at best only his stepchildren; children by adoption, children by force of circumstance and necessity. But . . . we entreat you to despise not the humble offering we this day unveil to view; for while Abraham Lincoln saved for you a country, he delivered us from a bondage, according to Jefferson, one hour of which was worse than ages of

the oppression your fathers rose in rebellion to oppose.")

During the 1943 mass demonstration, the Communist Councilman Benjamin A. Davis appeared with Mayor La Guardia in Harlem and on the same platform spoke against the Negro outburst.

According to Earl Browder: "The immediate achievement in this period under the present American system of complete equality for the Negroes has been made possible by the crisis and by the character of this war as a people's war of national liberation." And just in case there was any illusion about the "complete equality for the Negroes" requiring any activity, the Negro Communist, Doxey A. Wilkerson, spelled it out for all as no more, and no less, than the "full support of the win-the-war policies of our Commander-in-Chief."

So eager were the Communists in their support of the Roosevelt Administration that they spoke not only of "war-time unity" but **post-war** plans. We don't mean those of the Cold War that they did not anticipate. No, in that same 1944 pamphlet, **What The Negro Wants**, Wilkerson wrote "To draft idealistic war plans for the Negroes . . . tends to divert much needed energy from the really urgent task of today: to win the war." Shades of the Bourbon South!

No wonder the Negroes by the thousands - for they had joined the Communist Party during the 1930's - tore up their Communist Party cards and were not again fooled by the new change in line that came with the Moscow Cold War which made the American Communists once again (for how long?) come out "for the Negro liberation."

Notes

³⁹ **Sitdown**, by Joel Seidman, League for Industrial Democracy Pamphlet, New York City. See also **THE CIO and the Negro Worker, Together for Victory**, Congress of Industrial Organizations pamphlet, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁰ **Black Workers and the New Union**, by Horace R. Cayton and George S. Mitchell, Univ. of N. Carolina Press, 1939; consult also **Negro Labor** by Robert C. Weaver, Harcourt, Brace and Co., N.Y., 1946.

⁴¹ In **Caste, Class, and Race**, the distinguished Negro sociologist, Dr. Oliver Cromwell Cox, analyzes how artfully the Southern "aristocrats" maintained their power through playing the poor whites against the Negro and vice versa. He adds; " It should be emphasized that the guardians of the economic and social order in the South are not poor whites; indeed, it is sheer nonsense to think that the poor whites are the perpetuators of the social system of the South. The fierce filibustering in the national Congress against the passage of an anti-lynching bill, or against the abolition of the poll tax; the hurried conference of governors to devise means of emasculating a Supreme Court decision for equal educational opportunities; the meeting of attorneys general for the purpose of side-tracking an anti-Jim Crow decision for railroads; the attitude of Southern judges toward Negroes in courtrooms - these are obviously the real controlling factors in the Southern order. The poor whites are not only incapable but evidently also have no immediate interest in doing of such things." (p. 577).

⁴² "Reflections of Negro Leadership," **Crisis** , Nov. 1937.

⁴³ **The War's Greatest Scandal! The Story of Jim Crow In Uniform**, published by the March on Washington Movement.

How Much Has The South Changed?



**Old Engraving Depicts Discovery
of Negro Slave Revolt Leader
Nat Turner in 1831.**

PART VI: The Negro as Touchstone of History

Rip Van Winkle awoke after twenty years; the old radicals sleep on 100 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, as they did at the outbreak of the Civil War when Marx considered their high-sounding "Marxist" opposition to wage slavery "as well as" chattel slavery as no more than escapism from reality. After Marx's death, Friedrich Engels, his life-long collaborator, was so aroused against the American socialists for isolating themselves from the existing trade unions, that he wrote a friend that Bismark's anti-socialist laws "were a misfortune, not for Germany, but for America to which they consigned the 'Knoten.

Insofar as American Marxism is concerned, the 20th century was no improvement on the 19th. Just as the **world** significance of the struggle to abolish slavery, and the national importance of the existing trade unions escaped them in the 1860's and 1880's, so did the new national-international pivot of the Negro struggle in the early 1920's. Neither the actual struggles led by Marcus Garvey, nor the prolific writings of Lenin on the National Question, could arouse them from their torpor on the "Negro Question."

By 1941 the policy of jingoistic American Communists bore no resemblance whatever to the Marxist theory of liberation **either** on the question of the emancipation of labor **or** the self-determination of oppressed nations. Long before this transformation into opposite, however, Claude McKay rightly accused American Communists of being unwilling "to face the Negro Question." In a word, they too are products of the bourgeois society in which they live and thus do not see in full the contradictory foundation of American Civilization; **its** Achilles heel is enclosed **not** in the "general" class struggle, but in the **specifics** of the "additive" of color in these class struggles. Precisely because of this the theory of liberation must be as comprehensive as when Marx first unfurled the banner of Humanism.

From its birth in 1843, Marx, at one and the same time, fought capitalism **and**

"vulgar communism"; exposed alienation **at its root** - not alone in ownership of property or even in exploitation of labor, but also in the **fetishisms** of its philosophy, "popular culture," political superstructure. It is this total underlying philosophy of the ruling class which assumes the "fixity" of a law of nature.⁴⁴

It must be abolished, uprooted. Abolition of the profit motive and transformation of private into state property could not achieve this **unless** what was most degrading of all in class societies - the division between mental and manual labor - was abolished and a new society established on truly human foundations.

Because slavery stained American civilization as it wrenched freedom from Great Britain, the Negro gave the lie to its democracy. At first he was alone in so doing. But with the birth of Abolitionism, and for three stormy decades thereafter, American civilization was placed on trial by whites as well as Negroes who together focused on the antagonism between the ideal of freedom and the reality of slavery. **The Negro became the touchstone of this class-ridden, color-conscious, defaced civilization which had an ever-expanding frontier but no unifying philosophy.** To achieve unity between North and South not only did a Civil War become inevitable but it was compelled to unfurl a new banner - Emancipation Proclamation - before it could win this long, bloody war. **Thereby it also proved that, at bottom, the sectional struggle was in fact a class struggle.** For those who thought that this truth was limited to the struggle between North and South, but did not hold for **the** "classless" Western democracy, where "everyman" could become a property owner, an independent farmer, the agricultural crises of the 1880's and 1890's came as a greater shock than the Civil War.

Frontier Illusion

For the first time since this country achieved its independence, it became clear to all that **capital**, rather than the pioneer in the covered wagon, put its mark on this nation. The theoretician of the frontier - the historian, Frederick J. Turner - rightly records this mark upon the expansion westward which dominated the development of this new nation "conceived in liberty":

"But when the arid lands and the mineral resources of the Far West were reached no conquest was possible by the old individual pioneer methods. Here expansive irrigation works must be constructed, cooperative activity was demanded in utilization of the water supply, capital beyond the reach of the small farmer was required . . . Iron and coal mines, transportation fleets, railroad systems, and iron manufactories are concentrated in a few corporations, principally the United States Steel Corporation. The world has never seen such a consolidation of capital and so complete a systematization of economic processes." **What Professor Turner does not record is that, with the destruction of Populism, the frontier dream "passed into" monopoly capital. That is to say, from being the distinguishing mark of the American Civilization, the frontier disappeared as a way out from the class-begotten civilization.** Monopoly capital and its thrust into imperialism, no doubt, did not mean for the white working people what it meant for the Negroes: the total collapse of their aspirations. That's precisely why the Negro remained the Achilles heel of this civilization.

But while material progress and "reforms" may have helped sustain an illusion long since passed among the rest of the population, the frontier became an illusion, not the reality of American Civilization which by the turn of the century took its place alongside the other capitalist civilizations carving empires out of the African, Asian, Middle Eastern and Latin American countries.

What is pivotal to the study of the role of the Negro in American Civilization is that, at each turning point in history, he anticipates the next stage of development of labor in its relationship with capital. Because of his dual oppression, it could not be otherwise.

1. Urbanization of Negroes

Take the present shift of the Negro struggle from the North to the South. Although at the moment it seems predominantly student youth in leadership, this new force did not arise in a vacuum. It arose within the context of a growing urbanization and industrialization of the South. The most important effect of the post-war industrialization of the South has been that cotton is no

longer the main source of Southern wealth. Although cotton remains the second most important crop in the United States, the South - so permeated with the ideology stemming from slavery and its economic remains which had dominated the South from 1790 to 1940 - cannot hold on to the quasi-totalitarian relations when its economic basis has gone. Of 11,666,000 production workers in the United States in 1958, three million were in the South (including the border states), and in the deep South there were two million production workers.

By 1959, there was an increase of half million production workers in the United States (total: 12,238,000); the number remained substantially unchanged in the Southern border states, but in the Deep South there was a 10 per cent increase, to 2.2 million.

The urbanization of the Negro when, for the first time in his history, there is a slight majority of Negroes living North, has meant a phenomenal move from country to city right within the South. Between 1950 to 1960 the move of the Negro population has been most dramatic as it fell in rural areas from 37 per cent to 27 per cent. **Indeed, both North and South, according to the 1960 census, the Negro is more urbanized than the white: 72 per cent for the Negro against 70 per cent for whites. The trend has continued.** This movement from country to city shows itself in yet another way when we consider the total non-white civilian labor force 14-years old and over. (In this case, the term "non-white" includes also American Indians, Orientals, etc., who total less than one per cent of the population, even after the inclusion of Alaska and Hawaii since 1960.)

In 1950, this age group numbered almost 40 per cent of the total non-white population, or about six million out of some 16 million. Of these, more than four million, or about 69 per cent were urban, and nearly two million, or about 31 per cent were rural. By 1960, the group had dropped to 35 per cent of the total of non-whites, or 7% million out of 20% million; but its urban-rural ratio had increased to 78 per cent urban as against 22 per cent rural, or 5% million to one-and-a-half million. In 1950, 17% per cent of this group worked in agriculture; ten years later it was only 7% per cent. **That 92½ per cent of the non-white labor force over 14 years of age is either working or looking for work in America's cities is the imperative human motive**

force behind the unfolding struggle in the South.

If the great strength and surge of the Negro struggle, from the post-World War I years to the post-World War II years, was centered in the North - and at the beginning of World War II, it was Far West ⁴⁵ - **the great strength and surge of the past decade has been in the South where the Negro masses are remaining to fight for new human relations in the very heart and stronghold of American repression. The new stage of Negro struggle that began with the Montgomery, Alabama, Bus Boycott movement revealed the proletarian stamp in the organization of the protest - 100,000 Negroes walked for one year - and in the creative self-activity of organizing its own transport and weekly mass meetings to assure and develop its own working existence.**

The new stage of struggle deepened when high school and college youths in Greensboro, North Carolina, on February 1, 1960 sat down at a department store's segregated lunch counter.⁴⁶ From an entirely different source, it was as **spontaneous** as the refusal of Mrs. Rosa Parks to move to the back in the Montgomery bus. The climax these struggles reached, when the Freedom Rides did finally originate North and included whites as well as Negroes, was inspired by the movement in the South. The South, not the North, led. The committees which sprang up to coordinate the work **followed**, rather than led, these spontaneous movements which were **outside** the scope of the **established** organizations.

This is true not only in relationship to the stillbirth of the CIO called "Operation Dixie," but also of the Negro organizations from the NAACP to the CORE, from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). All followed the spontaneously evolving movement. None anticipated either the Bus Boycott of 1956 or the Sit-ins of 1960 or Freedom Rides of 1961. As the movement which first arose around a working-woman, then sprang up among high school youth, and now seems most predominant among college youth, there is, however, also more of a tendency to make it appear as an **individual's** fight for education rather than a **people's** fight for total democracy, economic as well as political, educational as well as social.

It is not an individual fight. The social dynamite with which the South is charged is exploding at a time of unprecedented industrialization there. **It is true that in the South, even less than in the North, industrialization has not raised the Negro to the status of the white worker nor dissolved his struggle for elementary democratic rights into the general class struggle. Differentials in wages, seniority, upgrading have by no means been abolished.** There is not the illusion of 1937 when the birth of the CIO seemed to open a totally new life. The national trade union leadership, long since transformed into a bureaucracy, seems to live on a different planet altogether. It is too busy travelling all over the globe - all over that is except South USA - too busy selling the State Department line on "the American way of life," to be overly concerned with white labor, much less the Negro, though he numbers nearly two million within the AFL-CIO and many more unorganized outside.

The Negro is still the last to be hired and the first to be fired. The duality of this era of proletarianization when the new stage in production - Automation - is daily throwing people by the thousands and tens of thousands into a **permanent** army of unemployed intensifies the Negro's feeling of frustration both against capitalism and the labor bureaucracy.

In its report of August 1962, the Bureau of Labor Statistics showed that, as compared to a 4.6 per cent of the white labor force being unemployed, the Negro unemployed number 11.4 per cent. **But it is precisely around Automation and precisely among miners where the Negro is most numerous and most integrated that the American worker has, ever since 1950, raised the most fundamental question of any society: what kind of labor must man perform, why must there be such a division between thinking and doing, between work and life.**

This search for a philosophy of life, that is to say a link between theory and practice, received a world-shaking impetus from the African Revolutions which showed the indivisibility of the Freedom NOW movement.

2. The Two-Way Road to African Revolutions

The most exciting chapter in human affairs since World War II was written by the African Revolutions. The first All-African People's Conference, in 1958 when Ghana was the only independent state, disclosed not just Pan-Africanism but the making of a Negro International.

Tiny Guinea's "No!" to France won her freedom and thereby reaffirmed that **the** greatest force for remaking the world remains the human being. In less than a decade no fewer than 22 African nations won their independence.

The banner under which this freedom from colonialism has been achieved - Pan-Africanism - is not a purely African phenomenon. It has had a multiple birth and development in which the American contribution is important. Where standard history texts, in their vulgar materialistic way, still dwell in detail on the long-dead triangular trade of rum, molasses and **slaves** - between Africa, the West Indies and the United States - it is the ever-live triangular development of internationalism, masses in action and **ideas** which is the dominant force today.

All the "Utopian" ideas that have since become facts of life, underlying philosophies of actual revolutions - from the theory of Nigritude to the slogan of "Africa for the Africans"; from nationalism to an international of the Negro; and from freedom from colonialism to socialist Humanism - have had their origin in this vital traffic between Africa, the West Indies and the United States. With human relations spanning the continents, came also the true history of Africa. As the pioneer Negro historian, Carter G. Woodson, put it, "The race has a past and it did not begin on the cotton and sugar plantations of America." Greater than the intellectual interchange at the turn of the century was the history of Negro struggles in this country - from the time of slave revolts to Populism - which inspired such revolts in Nyasaland as the Chilembwe Rising of 1915.⁴⁷

As we saw, the greatest mass movement among Negroes in the United States was led by a West Indian, Marcus Garvey.

Whether many ideas came to Africa from actual slave revolts and continuous struggles since the end of slavery in this country, or was transmitted there through intellectual channels - and the Negro colleges played no small part in training many of the present leaders of the independent African states - **it**

would be forcing the point beyond recognition to try to attribute to the Negro American the actual world-shaking events that the Africans themselves participated in during the 1950's. The absurdity of such a claim would be seen at once were we to move from what was British Africa to what was French Africa, and attempt to give France credit for the socialism of Sekou Toure in Guinea because he participated in Paris congresses. No, in stressing the exchange of ideas we do not mean to impute a one-to-one relationship - that is, a direct, immediate, invariable, or automatic connection-between ideas and revolution either in the past or presently, either in the United States, the West Indies or Africa.

The Underlying Humanism

The historic greatness of today's development, no matter what the roots are, flow from the **spontaneity**, the **timing**, the political **maturity** of our **age** and our **world**. It is not just black, or even colored, but white as well. Nor is it directed only against Western imperialism as the East German and Hungarian Revolutions for freedom from Russian totalitarianism showed. The shock of recognition comes from the Humanism underlying all revolts-in advanced as in technologically underdeveloped countries, the United States or Africa, Asia or Latin America, the Middle East or Western Europe. The internationalization of such words as "Uhuru," "Sit-In," "Independance," "Freedom Ride," "Freedom Fighter," have merged into the world-wide **Freedom NOW**.

Recently, NBC interviewed some newly-arrived African students. One Nigerian student was asked how he happened to choose this country although a scholarship had also been offered him in London where there is less discrimination than here. His reply was that the African does get "a good education in Great Britain - and enters the career service." But the same education in the United States - precisely because any Negro, the African included, encounters discrimination - "makes the African into a revolutionary and that is what I want to be."

The African student summed up the two-way road from and to African Revolutions more correctly than all the standard history texts and the current liberal journalistic reports. Also pointed to is the stage we may call "What

Happens AFTER?" - what happens after independence is won? Is a new aristocracy, only this time of "intellect" rather than imperialism, to take over? Is the relationship between African and Negro American, as rank and filers, to be subordinated to inter-governmental aid programs? And are ideas to be forced into the narrow confines of immediate needs?

What Happens AFTER?

Of all the African socialists, Sekou Toure is the one who appeals most to the left in both Africa and the United States because of the historic sweep of his deeds and the passion of his views. His little country's "No!" to the mighty (but not almighty) De Gaulle France, electrified the world with its daring and its challenging philosophy: "The science resulting from all human knowledge has no nationality. The ridiculous disputes about the origin of such and such a discovery do not interest us since they add nothing to the value of the discovery. It can therefore be said that African unity offers the world a new humanism essentially founded on the universal solidarity and cooperation between people without any racial and cultural antagonism and without narrow egoism and privilege. This is above and beyond the problem of West Africa and as far removed from the quarrels which divide the highly developed countries as are the conditions and aspirations of the African people."

The confidence in the African masses - "all peoples are capable at any time of administering themselves and of developing their personality. There are no minor peoples, except under slavery or foreign oppression" - had the sweep of Lenin on the eve of the Russian Revolution when he maintained that "only from below" can the revolution become invincible. But, in the "rediscovery of its African personality," in contrast to the discovery of the genius of the Russian proletariat as "merely" the beginning of the **international** revolution, this great African leader excludes all "foreign" ideologies - of the working class, as of oppressor: "Africa cannot agree, to the detriment of respect for her personality, her civilization and her proper structure, to become an organic structure of any system of states or ideologies whatsoever." As if Marxism were not the unity of theory and practice, he maintains that "philosophy does not interest us. We **have concrete needs.**"

This same preoccupation is to be found in Nigeria. As Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe expressed it: "I cannot divorce theory from practice. What philosophy we have has not been systematized in such a way as to make it appreciated outside our shores. Let me give you the basis. Our way of life is tied with land tenure. Here it is communal - the implication is that every person has a stake in the land. He cannot sell it but his sons are heirs. It belongs to them. You don't own it as individuals in the sense that you can sell it for profit, and it became communalistic. They hold the land in common. Thus we have no landless peasantry . . . and there is no permanent laboring class, although this is becoming so. Since there is no landless peasantry, nor a **permanent** wage earning class, Marxian socialism doesn't apply to us; African, Nigerian socialism does. No doubt the theory should be systematized, but it has not yet been done.

"Welfare state, our own brand of socialism, is not Communism or Marxism or Fabian guild, but something to suit our way of life. To this we will stick. Welfare state is rooted fundamentally in socialist beliefs. Most of our people believe in free enterprise but not that it should mean profit at all costs."

In spite of these sentiments from the established Leaders, the Nigerian masses do not feel that there have been any fundamental changes in their lives as a result of their recently-won political Independence. From opposition meetings it is obvious that there is a difference in the conception of African socialism between those in office and those on the outside. The same is true in Senegal. Yet President Leopold Senghor admits neither to these differences nor to any fundamental difference between the Casablanca and Monrovia blocs into which the African states are divided. Of that he says: "The difference is not serious. What is serious is the division between the United States and the Soviet Union."

This is certainly true if one is concerned with the world power struggle rather than with relations among socialists, as well as with the world ramifications of the theoretical development of African socialism. Especially attractive was Senghor's June, 1959, speech at the Constitutive Congress of his Party of African Federation where he singled out "Marx's positive contributions. They are: the philosophy of Humanism, economic theory, dialectic method," and of these he chose the Humanism as the most basic. More recently (May, 1962)

his statement about the affinity of Russian Communism and American capitalism was both true and hilarious. "The program of the 22nd Russian Communist Party Congress is like that of the United States - completely materialistic - a civilization of frigidaires and TV. You have Communism, you have American free enterprise, and you have the plan in Western Europe.

"Each ideology has a truth, but only in part. Where is the ideology which is not all materialistic, which permits room for the spiritual? That is our ideology. I think I should say in all justice that we use the socialist method. We are socialists and use the democratic method which preserves liberty. That is why here in Senegal we have a dual direction: (1) Economically, it is the direction of the plan. (2) Culturally, we are for the Negro African blending with that of Europe. Here (turning to the wall of his presidential suite) is a beautiful painting that is authentically African, but the Senegalese artist is a product of the Ecole des Beaux Arts de Paris.

"I think that the division between Monrovia and Casablanca is a superficial division. We are for the unity of the two African Blocs. The vocabulary they use now is that of East and West, but in Africa the problem is not one of class, or state capitalism. The problem which is supreme is the new cultural existence. We want a culture which is African. The division between Monrovia and Casablanca is not the real problem. The real problem is a struggle between the USA and the USSR. "When President Sekou Toure calls for full re-Africanization, the problem is one of Negritude. But Africa is economically greatly retarded and the need is for the scientific technology that Europe has, the efficiency of the American. We have a dual problem, a situation of undevelopment and the problem of Negritude. It is a problem of method. It is necessary to have a method with which to approach this reality.

"Negritude isn't pure resurrection. It is a modern adaptation of African history and culture. We take the technique of Europe in order to permit the creation of a new civilization for the Africa of the 20th century.

"There is a socialism, but the socialism in Europe is dépassé because the African reality is spiritual. In Marxism there is determinism, scientific and discursive reason and humanism. The revolution is scientific and it is philosophic. Einstein is 20th century, but so is the artist 20th century. The 20th century culture is more than scientific. Communism is not the whole

truth. It is abstract and scientific. In this, capitalism resembles communism.

"The culture which today finds a method for Black African where we can take science from Communism and capitalism, and from African poetry and knowledge is the culture we need. From this point of view, both in the United States and the Soviet Union there is not this sense of reality. We want a culture that is African, the conclusion of the PHENOMENOLOGY of Teilhard de Chardin."

The trouble with President Senghor's humanism is that it is general and abstract where it should be concrete and specific. The fundamental difference between Senegalese socialism and that envisaged by Marx does not reside in the difference between "spiritualism" and "materialism" but between theory and practice. The tragedy of the African Revolutions stems from the fact that its leaders are so weighted down by the consciousness of the backwardness of the technology, the need to industrialize, and rapidly, that they turn for aid almost exclusively to the powers-that-be in the technologically advanced countries, instead of the proletariat in those lands. Naturally, we do not oppose any African country accepting aid from any source whatever, be that De Gaulle's France, Kennedy's America, or Khrushchev's Russia. Western imperialism has plundered Africa for centuries, plundered it both of its manpower and its natural resources. It is high time for at least some of this African wealth to return to the country of its real origin. This, however, is not the point at issue for Humanists. The point at issue is the relationship, first to one's own people, the very ones who made independence possible; second, to the underlying philosophy of freedom which is not to be degraded to a changing tactic dependent on the relationship of forces with the enemy; and third, above all to the world proletariat which is equally desirous with the African to put an end to the crisis-ridden, capitalistic world that is presently hell-bent for nuclear destruction.

Freedom NOW

The ideology, the Freedom NOW, which elicited the elemental creativity of the masses that reshaped Africa, and thus the world, in less than a decade, will surely need a more international content for the forward move of humanity. This is an inescapable feeling when, daily in Africa, one meets

young Africans who are increasingly concerned with new human relations, new world relations, that is to say, a totally new human dimension. In the Gambia, for example, new world relations meant to the youth, not government-to-government, but people-to-people. The Young Workers Movement wanted to hear about socialism the world over, and they specified the Freedom Riders in the United States as well as the Zengakuren of Japan, the Socialist Youth of Great Britain as well as the Nigerian Youth Congress. Here is a country which, with the elections in May, 1962, was the last of the British colonies in West Africa to have taken the first step toward self-government. It looked up to independent Africa, wanted to be part of Pan-Africanism, but also did not fear to admit that Pan-Africanism had become "an umbrella" for a competitive variety of African movements. The Gambia youth asked, with true humility, couldn't they, **just because** they were the last to gain freedom in West Africa, not separate Black Africa from the socialist movement - from the working people in America, Europe, Russia, the Orient- "to create a new world on **human** beginnings?"

The same thought has been expressed repeatedly in the United States by the courageous young Freedom Fighters in their unflagging struggles against the Southern racists. As we wrote in "SOUTH AFRICA, SOUTH U.S.A." (**News & Letters**, April, 1960): "Despite (the) use of force, added to mass arrests and the harassing Imposition of insulting 'local laws,' the young Freedom Fighters of the South refuse to be intimidated. Far from abating, the sitdown movement and mass demonstrations for basic human rights grow daily in scope and volume . . .

"The example of the Southern protest movement has electrified Negro and white youth throughout the country, including some in the South itself . . . By their self-activity, the students in South U.S.A. have lighted the only path to freedom - mass activity."

In "NEW FREEDOM CAMPAIGNS MARK FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF SIT-INS" (**News & Letters**, Feb. 1961), we wrote: "Just as the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1956 was followed by a bus boycott by Africans, a year later, in Johannesburg, South Africa, so the current South U.S.A. sit-ins have inspired a bi-racial sit-in against tearoom segregation in Captown, South Africa . . . the self-activity of the Negro masses . . . illuminate (s) the road to

the reconstruction of society on new, truly human beginnings."

Notes

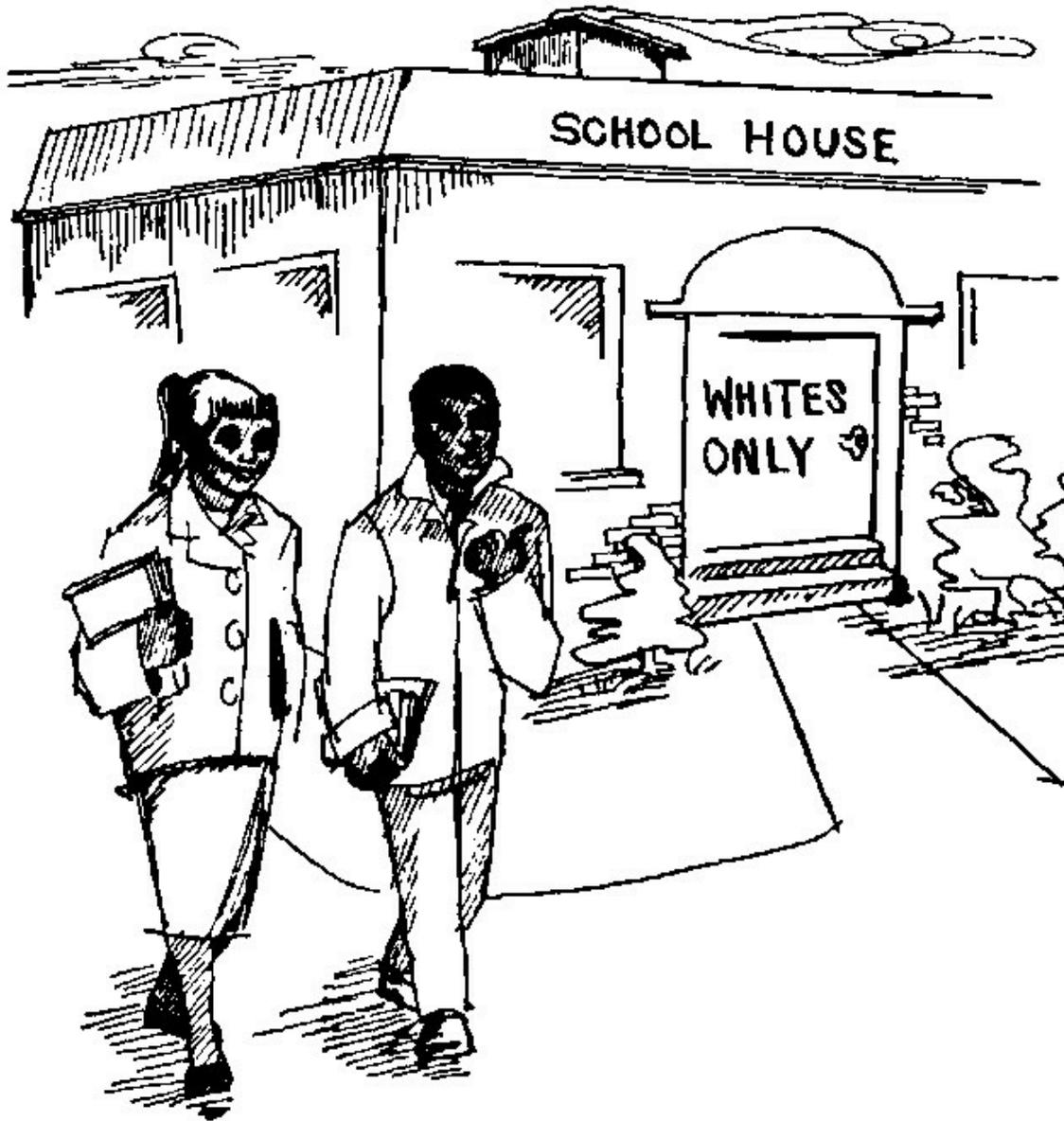
⁴⁴ See chapter on "Fetishism of Commodities" in **Capital**, by Karl Marx, Vol. I.

⁴⁵ See the special issue of **The Journal of Educational Sociology**, November, 1945, which was devoted to "Race Relations on the Pacific Coast," edited by L. D. Reddick.

⁴⁶ **Unfinished Revolution**, by Tom Kahn, New York. 1960, has a chronological list of sit-in and other protest demonstrations from Feb. 1 through August 1, 1960.

⁴⁷ We have limited ourselves, of necessity, to the aspects of the African Revolutions which relate to the development of the historic role of the Negro American. For further views of Africa in its own right, see our News & Letters Pamphlet, "**Nationalism, Communism, Marxist-Humanism and the Afro-Asian Revolutions.**" See also our **POLITICAL LETTERS**: No. 26, "The American Katanga Lobby and the Congo Crisis"; and Nos. 33 - 38, a series of letters from West Africa which ends with "Which Way Now? Under the Impact of Communism and Neo-Colonialism." For an account of the Chilembwe Rising see Shepperson and Price, **Independent African**. See also, **Africa Seen By American Negroes**, published by Presence Africaine, and available from American Society for African Culture, New York, N.Y.

"Let's Give This One a Try!"



Picture reprinted from **News & Letters**,
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PART VII: Facing the Challenge, 1943-1963

1. The Self-Determination of People and Ideas

A new stage of Negro struggle opened the same year as the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Many a radical who acknowledges the high Stage of world development by the outbreak of the latter, refuses so much as to mention the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the same breath. For those who think that the snobbery is due to the fact that the Hungarian Revolution culminated in such recognizable proletarian forms of struggle as Workers' Councils as against Montgomery's continuous mass meetings are blind entirely to the underlying philosophy of both - a new type of humanism - which likewise remains unacknowledged by these self-proclaimed "vanguardists."

The truth is old radicals are forever blind to the **positive**, the **subjective** new dimensions of any **spontaneous** struggle. Each struggle is fought out in separateness, and remains isolated. While the way to hell may be paved with Little Rocks, the way to a new society must have totally new foundations not alone in action but in thought.

The Second American Revolution was left unfinished by the Emancipation Proclamation which straddled the fence between human liberation and a union of states. It will be kept in the same state of suspended animation by all who think that tokenism - the appointing to high Administration posts of a few Negroes-can meet the challenge of 100 years of struggle for Freedom NQW.

The President may make headlines in April, 1963, as he did during his 1960 election campaign, by a solicitous phone call to the imprisoned Martin Luther

King's family. All the more damning then is the **true measure** of tokenism: the Administration's tolerance of police dog attacks against vote registrants in Mississippi and Alabama. In today's unleashing of the hounds we see more than the shades of Simon Legree chasing Little Eva across the ice. We see the killer dogs of Hitler's Storm Troops and of the Communist "vopos" guarding the Berlin wall.

As the Freedom NOW movement expands from the struggle for desegregation to the fight for voting rights, it enlists the active support of Northern artists: comedian Dick Gregory in Greenwood, Miss.; Michigan painter G. Ray Kerciu in Oxford, Miss.; Al Hibbler in Birmingham, Ala.

Parallels and Turning Points

The Birmingham outburst is not only the latest incident in which Rev. Shuttlesworth continues to play a leading role. It is the beginning of a most fundamental chapter in the freedom struggle because it involves the South's most industrialized city.

American civilization has been on trial from the day of its birth. Its hollow slogans of democracy have been found wanting from the very start of the labor and Negro struggles at the beginning of the 19th century. The first appearance of trade unions and workingmen's parties in the United States paralleled the greatest of the slave revolts and the emergence of the Abolitionist movement. This parallelism is the characteristic feature of American class struggle. Only when these two great movements coalesce do we reach decisive turning points in United States development. In drawing together all the lines of theory and struggle for freedom which have gone into the making of the American mind, we have seen such a climax in the rise of the CIO and the inevitable break from the Garvey movement, on the one hand, and from the exclusiveness of the old craft unions on the other.

The AFL-CIO's current failure seriously to relate its struggles with those of the Southern student youth is not only a result of the organizational failure of "Operation Dixie," but of the lack of a unifying philosophy. At the same time it must be clear to the young Freedom Fighters that the many separate organizations in their struggle also **lack a unifying philosophy**. It is wrong to

think that a "coordinating committee" is all that is needed. The great forces of student youth have now been enlarged by the adult Negro workers in Greenwood and Birmingham to write today's dramatic page in Southern history. Yet this is only a manifestation of the vast forces gathering below the surface to put all of American civilization on trial. What is needed as you penetrate deeper into both the struggles and the aspirations of the Negroes is not still another organization "to coordinate" the work.

What is needed is a new Humanism.

It is the unifying, philosophy of Marxist-Humanism which, in the years of our existence, has "enabled us not only to follow, support and participate in the Negro struggles,' but in some ways to anticipate their development. As one of our Freedom riders said in our pamphlet, FREEDOM RIDERS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES:

"I feel that because the Negro question has always been the most critical one in the United States, Civil Rights is the name of Freedom in this country for both black and white, and for both student and worker. Since the mid '50's there has been no other movement which has expressed such creativity and determination to be free NOW. This is why I think that whether the Freedom Rides continue, or whether the struggle to end segregation and discrimination once and for all takes a different form, the fight for freedom will not stop until we have torn up the old, from root to branch, and established truly new human relations based on new beginnings. I think that the Freedom Rides, and whatever may come after them, are a form of just such new beginnings!"

2. The New Voices We Heard

We have heard the new voices ever since 1943, the year of the growth of the National Resistance Movement in Europe, the year of the miners' strike and Negro demonstrations in the United States. For the first time in American history right in the midst of a **war**, a section of the proletariat and a minority grouping representing one tenth of the nation, were saying: our main enemy is at home. As has happened throughout U.S. history, an activity by the

Negroes demands that all others "take sides." Whereupon the American Communists showed up on the same platform as the police and the established forces of "law and order" to demand that the demonstrators "go home."

The Negro intelligentsia, on the other hand, deaf to the new voices, were busy constructing theses and analyses for" use by Gunnar Myrdal, a Swedish scholar, who was putting together a comprehensive study of the Negro, titled **An American Dilemma**. The dilemma, he said, arises from the contradiction between the American ideal of equality and the American reality of inequality. The only proposal he made was for the enfranchisement of the Negroes, **starting with** "the higher strata of the Negro population." (sic!) As we wrote then: "The appeal of the social scientist is not a challenge; it is a whimper.

"Here you have the political formula of this massive work in a nutshell! Here is a scholar who has digested the major part of the available literature on the subject of the Negro problem, who has conducted field studies and case histories, all of which lead him to uphold 'value premises' that demand the full participation of the Negro in all aspects of American life, who holds no brief for intellectual Uncle Tomism of either Negro or white variety, who says the South is as backward intellectually as economically, that its ignorance is, in fact, unique in non-fascist Western civilization, and yet so bourgeois is he that his class instinct prevails upon him to produce so impotent, so ludicrous a 'solution' as to turn the American tragedy into a Swedish farce!"

*(While **News & Letters** did not appear until June, 1955, some of us who founded **News & Letters** had developed these Marxist-Humanist views of the role of the Negro in American history in 1943 and because we consider it as part of our present heritage, the views quoted here from "Negro Intellectuals in Dilemma" were reprinted in **News & Letters**, February, 1961.)*

Too obvious to need to be told is that what was crucial in the situation were not "value premises" - either the immoral ones of the white South or the moral ones of Sweden's Gunnar Myrdal.

The way, the only way, a historic tradition can persist for a century is

through being fed and nourished on economic roots deeply embedded in the community. And to get "reborn" each generation it must feed on new, national life-giving economic sustenance. This it gets now, as it did, at the turn of the century, from imperialism, reinforced by the totalitarianism in the air!

However, Myrdal would not concern us were it not for the ideological treachery of very nearly the entire talented tenth that did a great deal of the research and preparation for the work before it was published, and then, **after** they saw what conclusions he had drawn from their research, still praised him to the sky. Much as it may surprise those of today who are used to the conservative U.N. Undersecretary, Ralph Bunche in those years was a radical and, **as such**, presented the sorriest spectacle. Our review of **American Dilemma** continued: "The sorriest spectacle of the Negro 'talented tenth' is presented by Ralph Bunche. Mr. Bunche is critical not only of the economic, political and social status of the Negro but of all existing Negro organizations that strive to ameliorate this condition. He calls them 'philosophic and programmatic paupers.' In his pamphlet, **A World View of Race**, he even comes up with a solution to the Negro problem:

"The Negro must develop, therefore, a consciousness of class interest and purpose and must strive for an alliance with the white working class in a common struggle for economic and political equality and justice'."

Yet this most radical of radicals found it permissible to shelve his more radical conclusions in the Schomburg collection, while his research data are used by Mr. Myrdal for his own conservative ends. This is not at all accidental. Mr. Bunche's revolutionary thunder is no more than radicalism of the chair.

Mr. Myrdal at least did see that not only is there nothing to fear from such professorial radicalism but that a study of the one Negro leader that was part of a mass movement, Marcus Garvey, could not be entrusted to such hands. Why Mr. Myrdal himself had not undertaken "intensive historical investigation" for a study lasting four years covering 1,400 pages of text, into which the Carnegie Corporation sank a quarter of a million dollars, may remain inexplicable to most readers. But we correctly concluded then: "To anyone who is concerned about the Negro question today, this neglect of the

Garvey movement has just about reached its end.

"There is stirring in the Negro people in the United States today a racial consciousness which has at present found its most extreme expression in the writings of Richard Wright. Wilfred H. Kerr, co-chairman of the Lynn Committee to Abolish Segregation in the Armed Forces, has noted the phenomenon, which calls 'Negroism.' These are portents on the horizon which can be ignored only to the peril of the labor movement."

3. What We Stand For - and Who We Are

"The self-determination therefore in which alone the Idea is, is to hear itself speak."

- Hegel

Because we did foresee the portents on the horizon of the Negro's national and international development, we foresaw the dynamism of ideas that would arise both from the American class struggles and from the African independence movements. Thus, in 1950, when once again the miners, a great proportion of whom are Negroes, came out on general strike, this time against what was later popularized as Automation, we had our ears attuned to the new Humanism. It was in the great tradition of Marxism and Abolitionism, but on a much higher historical level since the participants of the struggles of our era have absorbed the rich experiences of the last century.

This time the worker was out to abolish alienated labor under capitalism, and was searching for ways to unify within himself all his talents, manual and mental. As one Negro miner put it ; during the 1950 strike: **"There is a time for praying. We do that-on Sundays. There is a time for acting. We took matters in our hands during the Depression, building up our union and seeing that our families did not starve. There is a time for thinking. The time is now. What I want to know is: how and when will the working man - all working men - have such confidence in their own abilities to make a better world that they will not let others do their thinking for them."**

This desire to break with those who want to do the thinking for the workers - the labor leaders made into labor bureaucrats - led to the break between the rank and file and John L. Lewis. When he asked them to return to work, they remained out, demanding answers to the new man-killer, the continuous miner. They didn't win, it is true, but the process of doing their own thinking on the question of Automation started something entirely new on the part of workers in all other industries, and not only on the question of labor, but on civil rights and African revolutions, on war and peace, on new human relations.

Consider this discussion in an auto factory in Detroit as we recorded it in our pamphlet, **Workers Battle Automation:**

"Three years in a row Automation has reduced the number of weeks we worked. It sure gives you time to think. The other day I read where a scientist in California said that it didn't really matter **who** threw the first H-bomb. Once it's released, we would be only 'one-half hour away from total annihilation'."

A Negro then began talking about the last war: "You don't think I would have gone to war if I had a choice. I didn't want to give my life. I almost dropped dead when they swore me in. I almost said, 'No.'"

"I couldn't say I had a recognition in this country. I'm not classed as a first-class citizen. Other people come here and they get first-class citizenship. We're born here, my mother and her mother before her and she could list four generations before that. Still we're not first-class citizens. **"I didn't class myself as an American. I was just thinking of myself as a man. They're integrated since then but we were strictly segregated. Even if you went to the front line you were separated. You might fight next to whites and sleep in the mud with them, but when you got back, you were segregated.**"

"I wouldn't want to live anywhere else. I know the way here. But I want conditions to be improved one hundred per cent. It makes you think what the college kids are doing down South."

In another section of the same pamphlet, we wrote:

"It has been said that 'Revolution is evolution in the fullness of time.' It seems to me that evolution has now reached that point of change where men can thrust forward in a way that will leave the H-bomb, sputniks, and the like as part of the 'pre-history of man.' The youth of the world in the year 1960, with the Hungarian Revolution and its Workers' Councils behind them, facing guns and demanding that their voices be heard are putting Marxist-Humanism into practice.

"A new man will emerge. A new society.

"I feel like I can almost hold it in my hand or taste it - I believe it to be so close.

"At the moment I think the form of organization of the workers **is all in their thinking. They are organizing their thinking.**"

A New Unity, a New Humanism

Unfortunately, intellectuals seem unable to believe workers have thoughts of their own. Much less are they capable of listening to them. This of course is not restricted to the United States. Until 1953, all one heard about totalitarian regimes, outside of the horror it is to live under them, concerned their invincibility and success in brainwashing the people, and particularly so the workers. Suddenly, in one single day - June 17 - the East German workers exploded against the work norms, raised the slogan of "Bread and Freedom." Thus they put an end not only to the myth of totalitarian invincibility and ability to brainwash workers, but they opened an entirely new page in world history. **The very people who said it could never happen now began to play down what did happen.** In contrast to those who were blind to the continuous daily revolts of workers against capitalism, private or state, our very analysis of **how Russia, from a workers' state had been transformed into its opposite - a state-capitalist society - led us to see the new form of workers' revolts, both as workers and as an oppressed nationality.**⁴⁸

The very people who played down the East European Revolts, from Stalin's death, in 1953, through the Hungarian Revolution, in 1956, also played down the Negro struggles from the Montgomery Bus Boycott, in 1956, through the

Freedom Rides, in 1961, to the current struggles in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. We, on the other hand, do not divide the underlying philosophy from participation in all these struggles.

Above all, we hold fast to the one-worldedness **and** the new Humanist thinking of all oppressed from the East German worker to the West Virginia miner; from the Hungarian revolutionary to the Montgomery Bus Boy cotter; as well as from the North Carolina Sit-inner to the African Freedom Fighter. The elements of the new society, submerged the world over by the might of capital, are emerging in all sorts of unexpected and unrelated places. What is missing is the **unity** of these movements from practice with the movement from theory into an overall philosophy that can form the foundation of a totally new social order.

Thus, in 1958, we wrote in **Marxism and Freedom**: "The modern intellectuals will lose their sense of guilt and bondage when they will react to 'the compulsion of thought to proceed to these concrete truths' - the actions of the Negro school children in Little Rock, Arkansas, to break down segregation, the wildcats in Detroit for a different kind of labor than that under present-day Automation, the struggles the world over for freedom. The alignment precisely with such struggles in the days of the Abolitionists and of Marx is what gave these intellectuals that extra dimension as theoreticians and as human beings which enable them to become part of the new society. It will do so again . . .

"A new unity of theory and practice can evolve only when the movement from theory to practice meets the movement from practice to theory. The totality of the world crisis has a new form - fear at the 'beep-beep' from the new man-made moon. The American rush 'to catch up' with the **sputnik**, like the Russian determination to be the first to launch the satellite, is not in the interest of 'pure! science' but for the purpose of total war. Launching satellites into outer space cannot solve the problems of this earth. The challenge of our times is not to machines, but to men. Intercontinental missiles can destroy mankind, they cannot solve its human relations. The creation of a new society remains **the** human endeavor. The totality of the crisis demands, and will create, a total solution. It can be nothing short of a New Humanism."

In the five years since **Marxism and Freedom** appeared, the Freedom

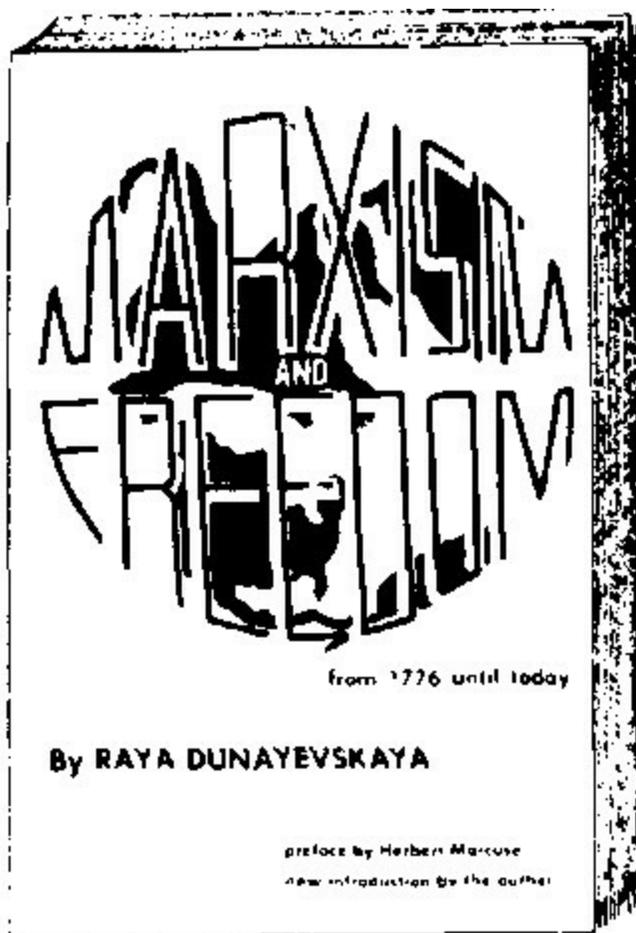
movements have given ample proof of the Humanist surge of masses in action seeking to reconstruct society. Today, as in the days of the Abolitionists, we see the new beginning. It is high time now to proceed to a middle, a theory; and an end - the culmination of the creative drama of human liberation into a new society freed from exploitation and discrimination and the wars that go with it. Only then can all man's innate talents first develop and man gain a new dimension that puts an end once and for all to his **pre**-history in class societies. The ideal and the real are never as far apart as the Philistines, in and out of power, would make it appear. Whether we take the 200 years of American development, or the last 20 years of world development, one thing is clear: the turning point for the reconstruction of society occurs when theory and practice finally evolve a unified organizational form. We have reached the turning point.

Notes

[48](#) See Chapter 15 "The Beginning of the End of Russian Totalitarianism" in **Marxism and Freedom**, by Raya Dunayevskaya.

Trilogy of Revolution

"The movement of the runaway slaves, who followed the North Star to freedom, brought on the Civil War ... "Under the impact of the Civil War, Marx . . . gave an entirely new structure to his theoretical work (Capital)."



Marxism and Freedom

" . . . just as the Sojourner Truths and Harriet Tubmans learned to separate from what they called their 'short-minded' leaders who would not fight for woman's suffrage in the Negro hour' of fighting for Black male suffrage, so the new Women's Liberation Movement arose from participation in the Black freedom struggles of the '60s, and the Black women, in turn, made their own

declaration."

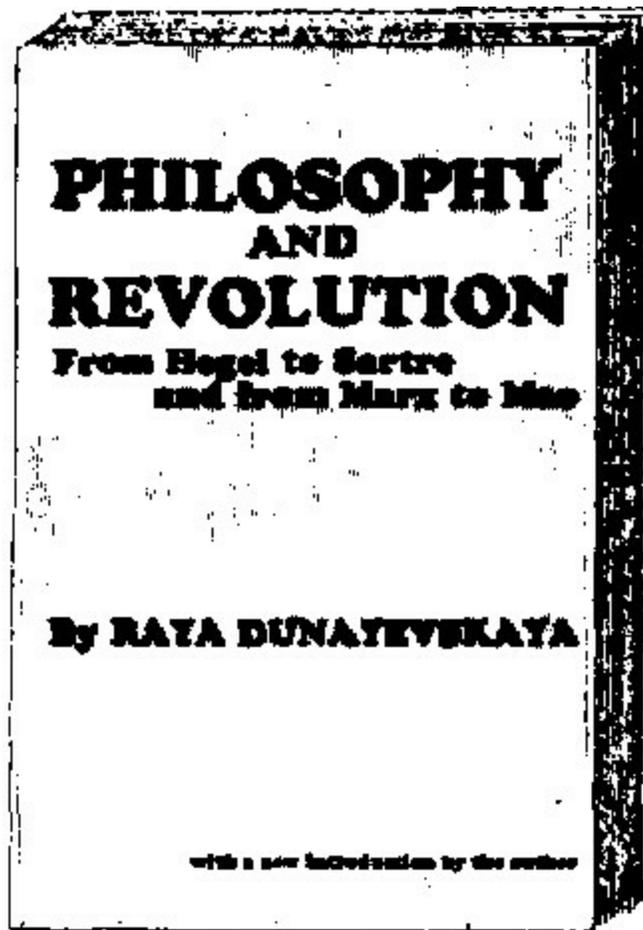
"We will encourage the Black community to stop falling into the trap of the white male Left, utilizing women only in terms of domestic or servile needs. We will remind the Black Liberation Movement that there can't be liberation for half a race.' "



Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution

"it is not possible to comprehend the African reality apart from the

compelling objective forces of world production, the pull of the world market, and the underlying philosophy of the masses which Marx called 'the quest for universality.' The fact is that the new energizing principle' was not sucked into the world market and even now, after all the setbacks, shows nothing as disastrous as the malaise which besets the affluent U.S. Far from rigor mortis having set in among the poor Africans,' they are continuing the discussion of the relationship of philosophy to revolution, and not only among themselves but internationally."



Philosophy and Revolution

All 3 works published by Humanities Press to celebrate the Marx centenary.

Appendix: Black Caucuses in the Unions - Charles Denby

THE WHOLE NEW STAGE OF BLACK REVOLT that has now moved directly into the factories has to be seen as part of the long, long history of black caucuses. To understand both today and tomorrow, you first have to know what the black caucuses were yesterday, when they sprang up spontaneously at the end of World War II.

I remember the first strike I ever led. It was over the discrimination against black women workers in our shop. It was during World War II, when I was at Briggs and I was so new in the shop that I didn't even know what a strike was. I was working in the dope room, where you put glue on the airplane wing. You had to paint on so many coats of glue and then it was baked and painted again. The room was sealed and ventilated through some kind of fans in the ceiling. The fumes and odor were so bad we had no appetite left by lunchtime.

When I was first hired, there were all white men in the room. But as they hired blacks, the whites were transferred to better jobs. One day they brought in the first black woman. By the end of that week they had brought in about five black women, and there were only one or two white men left. That's when we decided to get those girls out of there. The women had been talking about their husbands who were in the service in Germany - and here they couldn't even get a job in the sewing room next door. That was for white women only. These things just burned us up.

None of us knew anything about the union, but I finally got to talk to our white Chief Steward,' who told me the reason there were only white women in the sewing room was because they had so much seniority, 10 or 15 years. We knew they were lying, because some of those girls were just out of high school. So we told the Steward that if he didn't do something about it we were all going to quit at the same time, on the same day. We didn't know it would be called a strike. All we knew was that every factory had "Help

Wanted" signs up and if we quit and went together to some other factory, we'd be working the next day.

On the day we walked out, they locked the gates on us. (That was the first we knew that the huge fence around the shop wasn't so much to keep saboteurs out, as to keep us in.) By that time, other workers inside the factory were coming out with us. We didn't even know what they were coming out for. I thought maybe they just had a problem like we did. It wasn't until the company sent for me as the "strike leader" that I realized what we had actually done.

We learned a lot in that strike, including what to expect from the union leaders. It was a Negro committeeman who, after the company had agreed to transfer the black women to the sewing room, talked them into going to Mack plant where they would make 15¢ an hour more - but be separated from the rest of us. They didn't know until the fifth day they were there that Mack didn't even have a sewing room and that they were going to work on a press.

The TULC and the "Gentlemen's Agreement"

ONE STAGE IN THE BLACK WORKERS' REVOLT, in fact, arose because workers began to realize that we would have to fight the union bureaucracy as much as we had fought management up to then. This unrest was what led A. Philip Randolph to organize the Trade Union Leadership Council (TULC) ten years ago. What workers didn't know was that there was some sort of "Gentlemen's Agreement" between Reuther and Randolph.

UAW members all over the country were attacking the bureaucrats - much as the black caucuses are doing today, except that there was no exclusion of whites such as you find in some of the current black caucuses. Randolph came to Detroit to hold his little convention and ran it just like the UAW conventions, "from the top," evading all the questions the rank and file wanted to discuss.

After the convention, we kept pressing Randolph about the question of

discrimination in the shop and he told us plainly that this was not going to be an organization to take up grievances of black workers on the shop level. All TULC was going to do, he said, was to raise the question of discrimination but writing grievances would have to be done through regular channels. A lot of the workers said, "Hell, this is what we've been doing all the time and nothing has ever happened." But, because they made a big splash in the papers, many black rank and filers came around, in the beginning.

The leaders always emphasized that it was *not* a "black organization." Yet that is just what the black workers wanted to make it - not by excluding whites but by *blacks controlling it*, for themselves, not for the UAW. As TULC developed, it played around more with community problems than shop problems and when it did raise shop questions, it was more concerned with the building trades or things outside of the UAW than inside it. Reuther has always been a master of substitution - and he managed to teach Randolph the same trick.

After two years there was a tremendous drop in membership, and today, no matter how urgently a meeting is called, you seldom see a rank and filer around. Recently they called a meeting, and sent letters to every older black "activist" they could think of. They said they called it to discuss how they could protect themselves from the "vicious racist extremists" - like the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM). But there were more young black workers outside picketing the meeting than older blacks inside attending it.

The whole situation was summed up pretty well when 26 young black workers were fired after a wildcat strike at the Eldon Axel plant and went down to picket Solidarity House, early this year. The UAW sent a black official, Sheldon Tappes, to meet with them. Tappes had to admit that if TULC had done what it was organized for, there wouldn't have been any such development as DRUM. And one of the young black pickets answered "And if Reuther and the other bureaucrats had done what the *union* was organized for, there wouldn't have been any need for TULC."

A New Stage Today

AN ENTIRELY NEW STAGE WAS BORN with the appearance of groups like DRUM within the auto shops. The Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement was organized after Chrysler fired seven of the black workers who had struck the Dodge Main plant last year to protest a speed up on the line, while the UAW Convention was being held in Atlantic City. In July, when DRUM called for a strike to support a list of demands against racism, both by Chrysler and the UAW, the call brought thousands of workers out of the plant and shut down production for two days.

In February of last year, several months *before* the Dodge strike in Detroit, 500 workers at the Mahwah, New Jersey, Ford plant had shut down production for three days after a racist foreman called a production worker a "black bastard." Out of that spontaneous wildcat, the United Black Brothers of Mahwah Ford was organized. This caucus has just led another wildcat strike over continued racism at that plant.

What is new about these caucuses is that they represent a much more basic opposition than any Reuther has ever before faced. The UAW had, until the appearance of these new caucuses, pretty much eliminated any organized opposition - by any means, ethical or unethical. The bureaucracy has not really had to give a damn about rank and file problems in the shop for years. Now they are facing some real opposition, *from below* .

In the early stages of the black caucus at Dodge, DRUM raised a proposal that amounted to "dual unionism." They proposed in their paper that all black workers stop paying dues to the UAW and pay them instead to DRUM, to be used in the black communities. Many black workers I spoke with, who were very sympathetic to DRUM'S activities *in the plant* , were opposed to this idea completely. They were all for a black caucus that would fight racism and inhuman working conditions in the plants. They were all for militant black workers taking over leadership in the unions for the purpose of making a complete change at the point of production. But they became skeptical of the objectives behind a proposal like this.

Black workers at Sparrow's Point, a Bethlehem Steel mill in Baltimore, on the other hand, formed a group outside the union, called the Committee for Equality, rather than forming a caucus within the union. They had a specific situation there, in which they could apply pressure on the government to end

its multi-million dollar contracts with the company unless the company stopped discriminating. These workers created a "dual union" of a sort but it was tactical in their case. They felt they had to find some way to shake everything up - the racist company, as well as their racist union. And it worked.

The opposition of the black workers is part of the opposition of black people as a whole to white racist America, a movement that has been gaining in momentum ever since 1961.

In 1964, a mass picket line of about 500 got world headlines by surrounding the GM building in Detroit with signs saying "Racism Hurts All Labor," "Automation Layoffs - Lily White Departments - Slow Upgrading - What is my job future?" The demonstration had been called by the NAACP and was distinguished from traditional labor picket lines by the presence of student youth and the singing of Freedom songs. GM agreed to negotiate and even without the threat of a demonstration, Chrysler and Ford did the same. What happened after the talks is another question.

In 1965, SNCC helped to organize a Mississippi Freedom Union and later a Tennessee Freedom Union. They had found, while trying to work on voter registration, that what black people in the South wanted most was to do something about their \$3 a day wages and miserable working conditions. From organized labor all they got was evasiveness.

Later that same year, the grape workers in California began their strike for a farm workers organization with the help of CORE and other civil rights groups. By March of the next year, 1966, the Freedom Union idea moved North to the cities when CORE organized a pilot project in Baltimore - and the Maryland Freedom Union was born. The greatest victory there was the manner in which the unorganized black workers of Baltimore took matters into their own hands when nursing home workers walked out first and then called to tell the "organizers."

That same year, *organized* black workers were also taking matters into their own hands. When the UAW convention delegates met in Long Beach, California in the summer of 1966, they found black workers from Local 887 of the North American Aviation plant picketing the convention to protest

discrimination by their local union against Negroes, women and Mexican Americans. They said, simply: "We've written lots of letters to Reuther. We even sent them return receipt requested. We have a pocketful of receipts. But no answers."

By September, these same NAA workers held the first "civil rights strike" of its kind to protest the discriminatory practices of the company. They wrote me that "One Negro worker who had been trying to be a drill press operator for two years was finally accepted the day after the strike. Another worker who had been told a few months earlier that he had failed (by one point) the test for machine operator's apprentice was told he had been accepted. Another was promoted to assistant foreman, whatever that means. And the company even announced that a Negro top brass was promoted to a \$30,000 a year job. Long live tokenism!"

Shop Papers Appear as Diversity Grows

ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS out of that NAA situation was the appearance of a mimeographed shop paper, edited by these black workers themselves, which they called *The Protester*.

In Detroit, a group of auto workers at the Highland Park Chrysler Plant had come out that same year with a mimeographed shop paper called *The Stinger*. Another *Stinger* has just appeared this year at the Mack Avenue Chrysler plant.

The richness and diversity of the black workers' groups is constantly growing. Moreover, there are significant *differences* between the various black workers' groups that are springing up everywhere. The Mack Avenue "Stinger," for example, though it is edited by blade workers, makes a distinction between the "whitey" who is a rank and file worker, and the "whitey" who is either a company representative or a union bureaucrat. The black editor puts it this way: "It's true that we are fighting discrimination against black workers in the shop as one of the most important questions of our lives. But that isn't the only question.

The reason many of the white workers in our shop also read - and even support - *The Stinger*, is that we are raising the question of the *inhuman conditions* of all workers in production. Automation speed-up and the inhumanity of the company and union bureaucrats is against workers as a whole. That is what *The Stinger* is fighting, and why white workers have told us they are glad we are distributing it."

There is nothing more stupid than to think that all black workers think alike, or that there is only one face to the whole new phenomenon of the black caucuses. This was one of the most important points discussed at a conference sponsored by *News & Letters* in Detroit in January of this year, where black youth, workers, women and intellectuals had a chance for the first time to discuss with each other.

One black auto worker at the Detroit Conference felt that "too much of the activity of softie black caucuses is pointed to getting on supervision rather than elevating labor on the line. The company doesn't care whether it's a white man or a black man as long as they get the production out. The company is getting very expert at using black supervisors to fight black workers."

Some younger auto workers felt that "trying to get a coalition with white workers is impossible because they are hung up in their racist bag." But a steel worker from the East described the black workers' organization in his mill which was so effective in ending some of the racist practices there that it was recognized by white workers who had their own problems with the union. When the black workers invited a group of white workers to come with them on one of their marches, the same white workers who hadn't wanted to associate with "those raving black militants out to destroy everything" suddenly decided maybe it wasn't such a bad idea, after all, and couldn't wait for the next march.

The United Black Brothers at Mahwah have also made it a point to appeal to all the workers in the shop. A leaflet issued in their wildcat two months ago put it this way:

Why We Ask Your Support? - Because the same thing can happen to you. The company has been laying off men by the dozens, but the lines have not

slewed up a bit. You have been given more work, and if you can't do it, you lose your job or get time off. The supervisors are harassing the men and calling them all kinds of names such as 'Dirty Guinea Bastard', 'Black SOB', and 'Stinking Spick', to name a few . . . We, the United Black Brothers, demand an end to this now and those guilty of these charges be removed . . . We ask all of you to stay out and support us in this fight!

What Is New Is Revolution

THE GREATEST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE NEW CAUCUSES EMERGING today and those that appeared before is that most of us who were in black opposition groups up to now thought that the most important thing to do was to throw out the leadership, or change the union structure, or something of that nature. The young people today aren't thinking that way. They are thinking in terms of a complete change - of revolution.

They are just filled up to their necks with racism. And with the war. One professor from Cornell, during the recent revolt there, reported talking to one of the black students about their use of guns. He had sympathized with their demands but he had been trying to point out to them how powerful this country is and to warn them that they were facing tremendous oppression if they continued using such tactics. The black student had just laughed in his face: "You're talking about oppression coming upon me? I've been oppressed all my life. It's you and the people who call themselves liberals who are going to feel the oppression that's coming." It shocked the professor, because he knew the black student was right.

Young blacks today aren't joking about the complete change they are out to get. When the group at Dodge named themselves the Revolutionary Union Movement, it was very significant. Years ago if workers called themselves "revolutionaries," other workers would have shied away from them. Today the very word can attract workers.

It is too early to draw any sweeping conclusions about what will happen next with many black groups that exist independently and spontaneously in shops throughout the country. No national caucus is on the horizon yet and to give

the impression that one already exists, much less to imply that DRUM is it - as the *Guardian* did in its March 8 special supplement on the black workers' revolt - is futile self deception. In the recent shop elections, DRUM lost badly at Dodge Local 3, despite the fact that the membership there is overwhelmingly black. It is true that the union bureaucracy is not telling the whole truth when they claim that *they* won everywhere. At the Eldon Axel plant, for example, where 65% of the workers are black, ELDRUM ran candidates for only a few positions and, although they lost, black workers are in complete control of the local for the first time. Doug Fraser, Executive Board Member-at-Large for the Chrysler Division, claims that these workers are the "moderates" he was supporting. But ELDRUM supported them, too. And, most important of all, workers know that black workers have never controlled that local before.

The most honest way to judge the response of black workers is to compare the manner in which thousands responded to DRUM'S call for a wildcat last year and the way they reacted at a mass meeting called after the 26 workers were fired at the Eldon Axel plant. The meeting was held in a large church and about five or six hundred workers crowded inside. The majority were younger workers but there were many older workers, too. The first thing that struck me was that those in control of the meeting were not workers in the plant or in any plant.

The speakers went on at great length attacking white racism - with the most vulgar name-calling possible. They spent a lot of time clowning and trying to be comedians. Once in a great while they touched on the vital issue of shop problems. Finally, the principal speaker was called. As soon as he got up, he raised his little red book above his head and said, "My Comrades of the Black Revolutionary Movement, how many of you have this book?" He had to ask several times before four or five raised their books in reply. The speaker told the audience that this was what the movement was all about and gave the address where everyone should go after the meeting to get his copy of "Comrade Mao's Thoughts." When he went on to call Mao "our closest ally" many of the workers in the audience began squirming and I felt that this sort of meeting was what labor bureaucrats need to destroy the movement.

It is clear that the labor bureaucracy will try either to crush it or to kill it by

"joining" it. It has done that with every spontaneous movement that ever arose, including the unemployed movement of 1959. Many workers are already sure that Reuther's activity with the black hospital workers in Charleston, S.C., was forced on him by what has been happening in his own union. DRUM has not only attacked Reuther and called him a "racist pig" - but has told *why* they call him that. He has to try to remove that stigma from his "image."

He has not fooled black workers. Of course, they are only too happy to see him give \$10,000 to the hospital strikers. But when they see him marching on a picket line in Charleston or Selma or anywhere else, they know that he hasn't been on a picket line with his own UAW workers for so many years he's forgotten what it's like. Reuther is always glad to integrate anything - outside of his own UAW.

The one thing the young black workers may not fully realize is that every time a black independent movement has appeared, the "politicos" who have rushed in to take it over, have helped reactionaries like Reuther to kill it before it can get off the ground. It was true in the first black organization within the union that I was involved with, as early as the '40s. There were about 200 of us, and we "stormed" Lansing and every black worker I knew was enthusiastic about where we were going. But the Communists and the Trotskysists moved in and began a naked fight over control of our organization. It is not so much that the so-called "radicals" come rushing in but every time they come rushing in *they want to take control and direct it*. The same thing is happening today. The only thing the Maoists do differently is to send blacks instead of whites to take control.

The question at this point is: Will the momentum of the movement be great enough to see the black caucuses become a national force separated from the labor bureaucracy and strong enough to keep control in the hands of the rank and file? Or will the bureaucrats and the Maoists succeed in nipping it in the bud?

Everyone in the shop is laughing at the Alliance for Labor Action, which they consider just some more of Reuther's power politics against Meany. They know that Reuther is hoping the black workers in the South will save his neck. Reuther forgets that they have brothers in the North who insist he has to

prove his Labor Action at home, in his own union. The black workers have made it clear that they want to stick to shop problems, not get diverted to Reuther's latest schemes for "community organization." That is the message of the wildcats and the shop papers that have appeared in such diverse forms.

CHARLES DENBY has worked in auto plants for 25 years and is the Editor of *News & Letters*

