

THE REPORT and discussions reaching us from the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union are not only directed at eliminating the "cult of the individual"—they are especially aimed at uprooting doctrinarism. Marxists in the United States have been taking a few tentative steps in this direction, too, it should be noted, but they have not had the thoroughness exhibited by the Soviet decisions. Nor were these steps accompanied with the searching self-criticism which not only corrects but immunizes against repeating the same mistake.

It is my opinion that the official position of the Communist Party on the Negro question has been in need of overhauling for some time now. Indeed, there is now a grave doubt as to whether there was a basis for re-stating in 1946 the old analysis of the Negro people constituting a nation in Black Belt. And this is written with the full recognition of my own contribution to, and partial responsibility for, the final decision.

The decision to re-state the old 1931 position on the Negro question was taken at a time when American Communists were correcting the ravages wrought in the left-wing by the revisionism of Earl Browder. Browder had stated that the Negro people had already won the right of self-determination and therefore the old analysis no longer held. Browder was wrong, and for the wrong reasons: The Negro people could not have won the "right of self-determination," for they would thereby have won their equal rights.

BROWDER DITCHED the slogan "for the right of self-determination," not to pursue more vigorously the fight for Negro equality, but to bring the followers of Marxism into line with his thesis that "intelligent capitalists" would solve all outstanding conflicts without the oppressed having to engage in struggle.

In answering this distortion of Browder, I'm afraid we did so with another distortion which rested on good intentions, a

On the Way

by Abner W. Berry



Time for a New Look At the Negro Question

superficial study of the 1940 census and the doctrinarism which has persistently plagued U.S. Marxists.

The Marxists were discussing 1940 statistics super-imposed on a 1930 America as an answer to 1946 conditions. A world war had occurred in the meantime, which had introduced new features into the Negro people's movement. Even then there was being laid the basis for the historic anti-segregation suits, but this was not reflected in the 1946 discussions.

There had been in the six years since the 1940 census was taken a sizable influx of Negroes from farms to northern AND SOUTHERN towns and cities. Negro trade union membership had grown. In a word, all factors were gathering in Negro life for a vigorous assault on the jimcrow system, asserting their US. citizenship rights in opposition to southern restrictions on those rights.

I think it is due to this faulty analysis, reverting to the old to meet a current fallacy (Browderism in particular, in 1946), caused the left in the United States to become isolated from the broad struggle for integration that was developing. The Marxist movement had, and has, such to contribute to the fight for Negro equality which has now reached a historical high point.

IT IS STILL valid that the Deep South is dominated by a semi-feudal economy in which the Negroes are super-exploited and disfranchised. It is also true that this semi-feudal economy is, in turn, controlled by trusts and combines whose headquarters are located in northern cities.

The duPonts, for example, are one of the big powers in South Carolina; in Louisiana, oil and shipping combines wield the greatest economic and political power. So that the fight of the Negro people for equality is, in fact, a fight against imperialism and monopoly, as some southern Negro leaders are beginning to understand. There is also agreement among Negroes that there must be unity without regard to class lines in the struggle for equality; and the very fact that Negroes are uniting and are seeking and getting support in their fight from the labor movement shows mutual understanding of the basis and need for a Negro-labor alliance.

Then there are certain national factors which remain—Negro institutions are not waning but growing; color still determines the status of one's citizenship in the Deep South no matter what one's class status may be; and all Negroes bear a special relationship to the institutions of government in the old "Cotton Belt." And all of these undemocratic practices grow out of the semi-feudal conditions in the southern countryside which establishes the pattern for the towns and cities, as well. So that part of the Marxist analysis having to do with land reforms and the fight for bourgeois democracy still holds.

But these valid points are lost sight of in the old position. It is urgent that there be an early re-examination of the Negro question so that American Marxists may contribute as accepted participants in the struggle for Negro equality, a struggle which it can be said they opened up anew in the 1930's.