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ON THE NEGRO QUESTION

This document is not designed to attack or criticize the contributions made by comrades Fraser or Breitman. My purpose is to deal with the Negro question from the point of a practical approach towards overcoming a weakness of the party. The weakness is recruitment of Negroes into the party. This is a serious problem for the coming period. The questions posed are: how to approach, integrate, educate and recruit Negroes into the party. My comments are based upon the party's documents, some outside material and my understanding of the lessons to be learned from the experiences of different comrades in the Chicago branch.

First, I am in agreement with the general line of the resolution adopted by the party in 1948 on the Negro Question. At this time I am trying to help put forth an up to date, practical application of it. I think the key to what we are seeking is found on the first page of the draft resolution on the Negro Question, especially the third paragraph:

"Marxism teaches us that under imperialism the proletariat is destined to be the leader of all oppressed classes and groups. Petty-bourgeois revisionists of Marxism pervert this conception into the thesis that the Negro movement is in essence helpless and useless unless directly led by the organized labor movement or the Marxist party. This conception is merely a transference into the labor movement of the bourgeois doctrine that the Negroes are so backward that they are incapable of independent action and must therefore at all times be led, if not by the bourgeoisie, then by the proletariat. However radically phrased, this doctrine represents a capitulation to Jim Crow prejudices, leads to an under estimation of the revolutionary character of the Negro movement, and must be relentlessly opposed by the Marxist party."

We know that under capitalism the Negro people are doubly exploited, as workers and as an oppressed minority. This is the basis for the dual nature of the Negro struggle. We should also be aware that under capitalism, a minority (the ruling class) rules the majority (the working class). The tool used is the Jim Crow system, the essence of which is, in my opinion, inequality and injustice.

It is manifested in society in divisions of sexes, ages, color, races, religion and other backwardnesses, such as chauvinism, prejudice, intolerance, lack of respect for mankind. As a whole it generates a feeling of selfishness and insecurity. Since we are all products of this society, its features and manifestations are carried over into the revolutionary movement.

The dual nature of the Negro struggle is a result of this capitalist society, therefore, it demands a dual role of Negro bolsheviks and a dual education. (I will take up education later.) The following concepts: separate but equal; the Negro struggle is separate from the class struggle; or only Negroes can do Negro work, are all incorrect. I will explain why.

The first concept - separate but equal.

As a result of the Jim Crow system, Negroes are forced to live in the "ghetto" or black belt.

It has been said that the Negro people live as a nation within a nation. This has some validity, because they do. Within their own community they have their own way of life. Bourgeois ideology is, Negroes live as equals! - within their own community, of course. Another formulation is, Negroes are free to exercise their rights and privileges as citizens - within their own community. This concept bluntly means, isolated from the masses of white communities, they are equal. This is a bourgeois concept and should be combatted within the Marxist movement as well as without.

The second concept - the Negro struggle as separate from the class struggle.

This line of thinking flows from the first concept. It takes this form. The class struggle is discussed internationally, nationally, then locally and correctly so. But the Negro struggle is discussed locally as apart from the class struggle. The idea that the Negro struggle is a part of the international struggle of colored people has been accepted in theory, but not in practice.

The third concept - that only Negroes can do Negro work in the party.

This line of thinking flows from our bourgeois indoctrination, our lack of experience in and understanding of the Negro struggle and our weak educational program on the subject.

Before going into what should be done, I would like to make this point. We should stop proceeding on assumptions. Since we are striving to become Marxists, we should practice getting the facts before proceeding.

Many comrades, Negro and white, assume that when they come to the revolutionary movement this means they have overcome their prejudices, suspicions, chauvinism, lack of respect for the human race and other backwardness, all of which form part of our bourgeois training. The fact is we have not completely overcome such backwardness but we have made a big first step forward by coming to the revolutionary party, and we are moving in the direction of overcoming this backwardness if we consciously approach these problems.

I recall an experience with a leading comrade when I began coming around the party.

We had had several discussions, a couple of experiences with the party's program in my shop, but up till then we hadn't broached the Negro question openly.

When it came up, this leading comrade stated. "We cannot promise you that we can solve your problem, (meaning the Negro problem) but we will promise you an understanding of society, and a method to combat it." I told him I appreciated the way he had received me as an equal with respect, without patronizing as the Stalinists had done. His answer was: "I am learning respect for the human race."

This was my introduction to the party's position on the Negro question and the approach to Negroes.

What Should Be Done

An evaluation of the international struggle of the colored peoples. (The African and Colonial revolts.) This analysis, linked with an evaluation of the American scene (the Negro struggle), which will include the recent developments in America, such as the significance of the impending merger of the CIO and AFL, and the

effect on the Negro people. The southern strikes, Supreme Court decision on desegregation. The recent Jim Crow murders to force Negroes to stay away from the polls, and not to join the NAACP in the South.

An evaluation of the role of the NAACP, our relationship to it, our role in it. The working out of long term and short term perspectives.

This is important for several reasons.

- 1) It makes Negro work a part of mass work, instead of something separate or special.
- 2) We can see Negro work in its totality.
- 3) It provides a field for political mass work for comrades who find it difficult to get into other fields of mass work, regardless of race.
- 4) It gives a definite general and specific direction to our Negro work.
- 5) It will be approached as mass work, rather than "special work for special people."
- 6) It will point out the need for education on this aspect of mass work, so that our comrades are prepared to undertake this political task just as they are prepared to do other mass work.

The party recognizes the NAACP as the Negro organ of struggle. In Chicago we find a large percentage of Negroes have little confidence in the NAACP. This is also expressed by several Negro comrades.

The Jim Crow system is the material basis for the dual nature of the Negro struggle, and a Negro organization. The party can help tremendously in furthering the struggle of the Negro people for equality. The unions can also help, but all of this help has to be channeled through the Negro organization because of the racial aspects involved.

The NAACP at this stage is, by and large, conservative. The most militant sections are in the South. The "talented tenth" are in the leadership of the NAACP. They are a privileged caste whose material interest is tied to the capitalist class, in spite of their contradiction, of being discriminated against because they are

Negroes.

They constitute a bureaucracy in the Negro struggle, and play the same role as the bureaucracy in the labor unions – to reform the system. That is, without affecting their privileged way of life.

The NAACP is the only nationally recognized Negro organization. We view the NAACP as an organ of struggle for the Negro people, just as the union is the organ of struggle for the workers. We also view the role an organization must play, not because of its leadership, but in spite of it.

It has been this NAACP conservative leadership, who during each membership drive, has not projected a program in the interest of the mass of Negro people. As a result, the membership in Chicago has fallen yearly.

This conservatism exists because for some time the NAACP has had a petty-bourgeois base. A change in its base would mean a transformation of the character and nature of the organization, and the Negro struggle will take a different form. It would then project a program in the interest of the mass of Negroes. In this process, increase its membership, throw up a new leadership. This is the fundamental need of the NAACP.

We can see signs of the beginnings of this process. Such as:

In the recent militant strikes in the South – in the process of the struggle, the doing away with some of the Jim Crow forms.

The Supreme Court decision on desegregation of schools. The attack upon the NAACP in the South and the murder of some of its leaders. The attack against the attempts of Negroes to vote.

More recently, the lynching of Emmett Louis Till, a 14 year old Negro youth of Chicago, who was kidnapped and murdered in Mississippi. This led to a spontaneous demonstration by the people of Chicago.

The Till case is posing the contradiction of the Negro leaders, who like the labor leaders, are supporting the Democratic Party. These Negro leaders are condemning the Dixiecrats from hell to breakfast for the Jim Crow murders.

One question posed is: how can they condemn this southern administration in 1955, and then come back in 1956 and ask the Negro people to vote for this administration?

On Education

I think a serious study in the history of the Negro struggle is one way in which we can combat bourgeois ideology and miseducation.

a) the bourgeois ideology that Negroes are incapable of independent action – they always have to be led.

b) the miseducation we received in bourgeois schools about American history and Negro history.

It will help toward seeing the class struggle in its totality and a recognition of the revolutionary character of the Negro struggle.

A lack of understanding of the Negro struggle is caused by bourgeois ideology and miseducation. The effect in the party is a reluctance of white comrades to do Negro work.

This is not intended to detract from the tremendous job done around specific issues such as: the Fontana case, Trumbull Park and others. Quite the contrary, it is a supplement to them.

An analogy is this, during a period of upsurge when the masses are in motion, many militant workers come to the party. In the Negro struggle we get some militants around the party during a fight around a specific issue. Our experience in the past has been that not too many Negroes remain after that fight is over. Why? Many questions are left unanswered. They find it hard to cope with reality. Basically it is their lack of understanding, frustration and education in class struggle, and no perspective (that is, a conscious perspective). Before trying to give a possible solution, I would like to cite other examples.

In one of the documents on the Negro question written by comrade Fraser, he mentions the intellectual Negro who comes to the radical movement to escape the strain and pressures of bourgeois society. Also how they are repelled by the idea of doing Negro work. Further, Fraser poses whether we should approach the Negro people as Negroes or workers. In my opinion

there is some validity to the concept that intellectuals coming into the party seeking an escape, resent being sent back out to do work within the group which they take their frustrations out on.

We should be aware of some of the contradictions the intellectuals find themselves in. On the one hand they react to Jim Crow in society. On the other hand, they react to the masses of Negroes, because they feel it is these masses who hold them back.

We must also recognize the frustrations they suffer as a result of the miseducation in school and illusions about the world they will enter upon leaving school.

Now let's examine the question fundamentally. What brings Negroes to the revolutionary movement? Whether they are intellectuals or workers – we need both.

I think most Negroes come to the party because they are seeking answers to many questions posed, and are willing to do something towards resolving them. If met in the party with a conscious approach to the class struggle as well as the Negro struggle, with an understanding of the Negro struggle, it will demand seriousness on their part. The process of learning about the contributions of the Negro people to America, will ease the frustration by enabling these potential Negro recruits to combat bourgeois ideology in their day to day life in their community.

From this serious tone will follow an attitude and approach to the party task of seriousness by new comrades. Also a willingness to learn more about socialism. In spite of themselves they will begin to get many answers, to have a perspective and a goal.

Most important, these new comrades will begin to understand the relationship of the Negro struggle to the class struggle, and acquire an awareness of the role they must play in the coming struggle. If this stage is reached and I don't see why it shouldn't be, the resentment towards doing Negro work will disappear. The approach will become: What can I contribute to the struggle for socialism?

On the question of approaching the Negro people as Negroes or workers, I would say both

are correct, providing we have a good understanding of the class struggle as well as the history of the Negro struggle. I would say it would depend on the understanding of the individuals involved.

Now to cite examples of what I mean.

A comrade who was in a situation had this experience. This comrade had established his seniority when the McCarthy issue and the Trumbull Park incident broke out. Armed with our program, with the help of The Militant, the Trumbull Park pamphlet, our public meeting, etc., this comrade was able to gain considerable influence among the production workers. He was able to bring several of these militants to our party affairs. For example, during our last sub drive he sold 11 Militant subs and 2 F.I. subs.

The industry is predominately Negro. The comrade involved is white, works in a lily-white department, comes from the South, speaks with a real southern accent. The bulk of these contacts are Negro workers. Now that McCarthy has been slowed down and the Trumbull Park incident is not as openly heated, these contacts are still close.

However, the comrade is becoming frustrated because he can't seem to bring them closer to the party. I am not criticizing the good job being done by this comrade but only trying to point out the need for dual education, the need to constantly study to gain a better theoretical understanding of the class struggle. Also the need to understand fundamentally the history of the Negro struggle.

This is important because the history of the working class and the Negro people has been that each upsurge of the working class has been followed by an upsurge of the Negro people. Examples:

- 1) The Russian Revolution – The Garvey movement.
- 2) The Haymarket Massacre – The Populist movement.
- 3) The Rise of the C.I.O. – The rise of the NAACP, March on Washington movement.

This has been the procedure in the past. I do not mean to imply here that this will be the

process in the future, or be absolute and say it will always be this way. For with a fundamental understanding and a correct analysis and evaluation we will be able to predict which will be first at any given stage of the class struggle.

The following is an experience of another comrade who was in a situation. The comrade involved worked a bastard shift. This shift did not permit him to attend union meetings, so this whole group of workers were isolated from the mass of workers.

The comrade had observed two militant workers who impressed him, but he found it very hard to approach them. Still harder to broach the subject of socialism. Somehow the subject of Negro history came up. This opened the door for this comrade to begin combatting bourgeois ideology regarding the Negro people. The comrade was able to do this because recently in Detroit he gave a speech on "Negroes and the Labor Movement." In preparing for this speech he had done quite a bit of research and gathered a considerable amount of material. These two workers have not been recruited as yet, but a way was found to approach them.

With an opening the process will flow from Negro history to the labor movement, the need for unity, then on to the struggle for socialism. Recognizing this will be a process over a period of time. Now some comrades may be of the opinion that it was much easier for him because he was a Negro. He will agree it may have helped, but without some understanding of the class struggle as well as the history of the Negro struggle it will be hard to maintain their interest.

We have accepted the idea in general - the need of the Negro people to unite their struggle for emancipation with the struggle of the labor movement.

I think the problem of the Negro people is basically the same problem that the working class has - education and leadership.

Education in the class struggle with a revolutionary leadership. What the labor movement and the Negro people need is to build a left-wing that will adopt a class struggle program, which will demand a revolutionary leadership - one capable of leading the working class to victory.

This is our task. In order to be able to carry it through we should understand not only the history of the labor movement but also all of its important counterparts. I feel that the Negro question is an important counterpart.

We know our perspective in the labor movement is to build a left wing. This is also the need of the Negro people. The question is: Who's going to build it in the Negro movement? If this is our task then we should begin to prepare now in all branches, recognizing that in branches where there are no Negro comrades it means more understanding and consciousness rather than saying it will be much harder.

The reality is there is a real need for a Negro cadre. It is in this period that the party will have to build it.

Claude de Bruce
October, 1955

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DRAFT RESOLUTION ON CHINA

A Critical Comment

The Draft Resolution on the Chinese Revolution has raised a number of theoretical problems which are of the utmost importance to consider. Since 1914 humanity has been confronted with the decay of the capitalist world order. The international working class, since that time, has again and again demonstrated its readiness to have done with this system only to find its own leadership, Social Democratic, centrist or Stalinist, blocking its path. The Founding Conference of the Fourth International summed it all up in a few words: the crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.

How does the Draft Resolution on the Third Chinese Revolution deal with the problem of leadership—the role of the conscious factor—in the Third Chinese Revolution? Did anyone lead the revolution which destroyed the capitalist state and created the “deformed” workers state? Are objective conditions alone enough to explain a social transformation — revolution — that led to the creation of a workers state? Without fear of contradiction, the Draft Resolution says that objective conditions alone were enough to bring about the destruction of the bourgeois state in China, and erect on its ruins a state of a new type.

Is this objectivist conception new? The Third World Congress document advanced the idea that “in the long run objective conditions determine the character and dynamics of the movement of the masses which raised to a certain level can overcome all subjective obstacles on the road to revolution...” We can see that this theory is not new, only “recent.”

This objectivist conception of proletarian revolution is, of course, in contradiction to the concept advanced by the Founding Conference of the Fourth International. Furthermore, Marxist theory, based on the international experience of the working class for over a hundred years, has affirmed that the workers cannot destroy the bourgeois state and create a state of a new type without leadership.

Perhaps, by way of a little digression, we can better come to grips with this objectivist theory. Many comrades when confronted with the prob-

lem of how Chiang's regime was destroyed, give the following recitation: “The Chiang government was rotten. It was incapable of governing any longer. It had no support even from the ruling class itself. A vacuum was created and the Stalinists came into power. Moreover Chiang would not even enter into a coalition with the Stalinists, which shows how inept he was.”

Now I believe any serious student of Marxism could easily refute this whole schema. One of the fundamental features of revolution is precisely the condition that the old ruling class looks rotten to the producers of society. Everything that the dying class does is, in a word, “wrong.” Even the supporters of the regime, when they see the ship of state going under the waves, jump on any old thing big enough to support them, viz. are neutralized, and attempt to nestle up to the new power. Of course the capitalist class as a whole is in opposition to the ruling bureaucracy because they see their rule coming to an end; and why should any propertied class be happy when they can no longer exploit the nation for themselves?

The past 40 years give us any number of examples of a capitalist class finding itself in the same situation as the Chinese capitalist class: Germany in 1919 and 1923, Spain, etc. The objective situation did not bring about the destruction of the ruling class.

The objectivist theory leads to but one conclusion. That a party is not necessary. This is obvious.

If we accept the resolution and its objectivism, we arrive at this interesting proposition: Like the bourgeoisie (a property-owning class), the proletariat (a social class which is property-less), can take power automatically, so to speak, just like the bourgeoisie.

Of course the objectivists do not generalize the experience of the Chinese Revolution. They make an exception of it. They say because China is a backward country, because of the historical fact that since 1911 China has had nothing but wars and revolution, the subjective factor is not necessary. At any rate, with this neat little package we can and do arrive at the

inescapable. Why worry about building parties in the backward countries? It will happen anyway, won't it? Doesn't the theory of the permanent revolution smack on the head any such idea that backward countries can be made into exceptions, that a leadership is indispensable for the overturn of the bourgeoisie? Once you start making "exceptions," anything goes; science is booted out the door and the subjectivist enters.

The resolution has posed another interesting proposition. Can a Stalinist party "lead" a revolution? Let's put it "differently." Can a Stalinist party "involved" in a revolution, prevent its success? First, what do we mean by success of a revolution? A successful revolution is one in which the bourgeois state power is destroyed and a workers power established. Understanding that this is only the beginning of the march toward socialism — which can only be done on an international scale.

What has our party said about this question of Stalinism and revolution? Indeed how has our party defined the character of a Stalinist party? We have always said that a Stalinist party is a party which subordinates the interest of the working class and oppressed classes of its own country to the interest of the Soviet bureaucracy. The Soviet bureaucracy being opposed to the interests of the world revolution and the victory of a workers revolution in any country.

Some comrades in Los Angeles say that the transitional program — under the section subtitled "Workers and Farmers Government" — does not exclude the possibility of the Stalinists taking power. I believe if we add up everything that we have ever said or written in hundreds of speeches and articles, the contention that our program says that the Stalinists can lead revolutions to "success" is false.

There was a revolution in Yugoslavia, and our party had something to say about that revolution. We subscribed to the idea that the YCP which "led" that revolution to success, was something quite different from a Stalinist party. In a speech to the 14th National Convention of the SWP, comrade Murry Weiss in answering the Johnsonites, said: "The Johnson-Forrest tendency is absolutely incapable of grasping the Yugoslav reality. They say Titoism is pure, conscious and consistent Stalinism. To them the party that heads a revolution is identical with a party that beheads revolutions."

Some comrades in Los Angeles now say that Tito was always a Stalinist, that the YCP was always a purely Stalinist party. That is their right, without doubt. However, that does not dispute the fact that there is a qualitative difference between a party that heads a revolution and one that beheads one; any Marxist should understand that. What is not understandable is that the resolution refuses to acknowledge this fact when it comes to the CCP and the Third Chinese Revolution.

If we are to concur with the resolution and say that the CCP is a Stalinist party pure and simple, what follows from this? Let me formulate it for you. The Soviet bureaucracy wanted a successful revolution in China. The Soviet bureaucracy had a change of heart and permitted one of its agencies to take over the concern (China). There is, of course, one more amplification, or rather clarification, to this. The Soviet bureaucracy is not afraid of revolutions in backward countries, only in advanced countries.

The 25th National Plenum issued a resolution called "Against Pabloist Revisionism," Nov. 1953 some 23 months before the resolution on China. Under the subtitle, "The Kremlin and Communist Parties," what do we find? An identity is made between the YCP and CCP and the role each party played in its revolution. Let me quote what it says. (Page 18, Paragraph 5) "The specific conditions which forced the Yugoslav and Chinese CP's onto the revolutionary road must be analyzed and understood. Both parties had been in conflict with the existing regimes and operated illegally for long years. Both fought prolonged civil wars during which the leadership and cadres were selected, tested and hardened and their forces organized. The Chinese CP had armed forces of its own for years before launching the struggle for power. The domestic capitalist regimes were exceptionally weak and imperialism was unable to intervene with any effectiveness."

The question is quite obvious. What additional information have the comrades accumulated in 23 months which leads them to say just the opposite of what they did say? Of course, it is obvious that the resolution on Pabloism did not pretend to cope with all the problems of the Chinese revolution. The comrades, of course, have a right to change their minds also. Nevertheless, there is an unmistakable difference of opinion from 23 months ago.

One last problem. When was the workers state established in China? In our discussion in Los Angeles I asked this question and was informed to read Page 9, Paragraph 2:

“When the CCP established itself in power in the fall of 1949, it continued to cling to its program of a ‘bloc of four classes’ and its theory of a ‘revolution in stages’, i.e., the passage of China through an allegedly ‘new stage of capitalist development.’ The ties connecting China with capitalism were cut when the American military forces drove toward the Yalu and the imperialists clamped an economic blockade on China. The CCP was then left no choice except to seize the imperialist assets in the country and open at the same time a campaign against the native capitalists (the Three Anti and Five Anti movements).”

If the CCP established itself in power in 1949, as the resolution says, why cannot we say the workers state was established in 1949? Or do the defenders of the resolution mean that the CCP shared the power with the bourgeoisie in 1949? In that case what is the class character of such a state? Moreover, just what changes took place in the class structure of the Chinese state from 1949 to the march to the Yalu?

Is this question worth time and effort if we all agree that China is a workers state? (And I agree with this analysis.) I believe the question posed is important because it brings into focus once again the weakness of the resolution, its objectivism. The resolution does not even tell us the class character of the state power which issued from the Revolution (Oct. 1949). The transformation of China into a workers state according to the resolution page 9, paragraph 2 leaves in the shade the millions of armed and organized Chinese masses caught in the throes of a great revolution.

In conclusion. The resolution on the Third Chinese Revolution represents the sharpest possible break from what we have always said on the question of Stalinism. Agents of the Kremlin (Stalinist parties) could never take the power from the capitalists by means of revolution according to our theory. Objective conditions alone can never bring about the destruction of the bourgeois state and creation of a workers state, deformed or otherwise, for this task a leadership is necessary.

Al Johnson

Los Angeles, February 3, 1956

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