

# Prologue to the Liberation of the Negro People

By JAMES S. ALLEN

## II \*

THE period of reconstruction (1865-1877) was the historical antecedent to the national-revolutionary struggle of the Negro people in the present period. It is therefore not surprising that those who deny the national-revolutionary character of the Negro question should remain oblivious to the real revolutionary content of reconstruction. It is impossible to appreciate the full and real meaning of that period unless one grasps the whole range of historical development set in motion by it.

When Mr. Herberg<sup>1</sup> overlooks entirely the revolutionary traditions stemming from the struggles of the Negro people in the Civil War period he does so from the "vantage point" not of Marxism-Leninism but of the Lovestoneite position on the Negro question, which, like that position in general, constitutes a basic revision of Marxism-Leninism. The Lovestoneites have never been able to overcome the social-democratic position on the national question and, in particular, the Socialist Party stand on the Negro question. The "pure class" theory of the Socialists and the "race theories" of the bourgeoisie are combined to produce the Lovestoneite theory of "caste" which serves but as a convenient weapon with which to deny the Leninist conception of the Negro question as a national question. Mr. Herberg's peregrinations into American history are made from the "vantage point" of the coat-tails of the bourgeoisie.

It has been a commonplace among both the bourgeois and Bourbon historians and those who echo them that the Negroes were handed their freedom on a silver platter by the North, without they themselves exerting any effort to obtain or broaden it. To a man they assert that the Negroes blindly followed in the tow of the Northern bourgeoisie, helplessly submitting to the dictates of the "carpet-baggers" and functioning as an inert mass which by its

\* The first part of this study was printed in the December, 1932, issue of *The Communist*, under the title. "Distorters of the Revolutionary Heritage of the American Proletariat."

<sup>1</sup> In his article "The Civil War in New Perspective," *Modern Quarterly* No. 2, 1932. See first article in the December, 1932, issue of *The Communist*.

mere weight acted as ballast for Republican Party power. In the same breath these historians deliver themselves of heated invectives against that very "Negro domination and aggression" which they a moment ago claimed did not exist, and with ill-concealed distaste record innumerable facts to controvert their own theses. This theory of the "inert mass" finds its expression today in the efforts of the white and Negro bourgeoisie to chain the Negro masses to the chariot of their executioners—Yankee imperialism. The whole coterie of present-day Negro reformists with their disdainful references to their own people as the "ignorant mass" tries to carry over an alliance with the bourgeoisie from a previous historical period to the present day when that bourgeoisie has long since become irrevocably reactionary. Today such an "alliance" can mean only the alliance of the Negro bourgeoisie with the white imperialists at the expense of the Negro masses. To overlook entirely, as Mr. Herberg does, the nature of that alliance during the Civil War period, and the revolutionary role played by the Negro people, not as a mute following, but as an active ally, is to lend support to a whole historical line of betrayal.

The events that transpired in the subjection of the South were so distorted and misrepresented by the ideologists of the bourgeoisie which had one foot on the path to counter-revolution before it had hardly entered upon the path to revolution, that even Negro historians and "Marxists", among whom is to be found Mr. Herberg, are unable to disentangle themselves from the mess. So laborious is the task of excavating the main contents of this period, despite the innumerable books that have been written by bourgeois historians about it, that we will be satisfied if, in the space of this article, we can give at least an indication of the revolutionary role played by the Negro people. Much original research by Marxist-Leninists will have to be done before this revolutionary decade will emerge in complete and distinct outline.

Even as they were emerging from chattel slavery the Negro people entered upon the struggle for bourgeois democracy. Both phases of the struggle were inseparable due to the fact that the bourgeois-democratic revolution occurred when American capitalism had already reached a relatively high stage of development in the North. The sweep of the revolution converted the ex-slave immediately into a fighter for bourgeois democracy. This process was accelerated by the fact that emancipation did not come as a result of a proclamation issued from above, but as the result of a bitterly fought war in which the Negroes themselves were involved. When Lincoln was convinced by the impact of events that, in the words of Frederick Douglass, "the nation would have to unchain against her foes her powerful black hand," and reluctantly per-

mitted the recruiting of Negroes into the Northern armies, free Negroes of the North, ex-slaves in the territory occupied by the Northern army, and slaves fleeing from the plantations in the interior, rushed to arms. Almost 200,000 Negroes enlisted, of whom 80,000 perished—they bore the brunt of the attack. “Curiously enough,” says a bewildered Southern historian, “Mississippi furnished more troops to the Union Army than it did to the Confederate Army, the number being 545 whites and 79,000 blacks.”<sup>2</sup> “Curious” only when one tries to reconcile such facts with the usual bourgeois slander.

The numerous slave revolts had been defeated in their isolation. This time thousands of Denmark Vesey, Nat Turners, Shields, Greens and Copelands are on the march in company with a powerful ally and on the path of a sweeping revolution. The Negroes—the ex-slaves, the “ignorant, illiterate mass”—give the army its revolutionary fervor. To the rear of the enemy lines slaves learn what is happening and act as scouts for Northern troops. Two slave insurrections are drowned in blood in South Carolina before the troops arrive—“a terrible ‘army with banners’, encouraging the Negroes to engage in pillage, fraternizing with them, and telling them that they were free.” Charleston, the scene of Vesey’s defeat, becomes the scene of his victory. The first troops entering the city are led by a Negro soldier bearing a banner inscribed with the word “Liberty.” The Negro regiments, led by the famous Fifty-Fourth of Massachusetts, follow singing “John Brown’s Body.” The streets ring with the cheers of the ex-slaves. Negro troops search every house in the city “for the purpose of proclaiming freedom and seizing firearms and abandoned property.” The slave pens and the auction blocks are destroyed and burned.<sup>3</sup>

The newly won liberty knows no bounds. The rough, calloused hand of the ex-slave brushes aside the polished lumber of the aristocracy. “Their whole manner has changed,” wails a maternal plantation owner. “They took to calling their former owners by their last name without any title before it . . . dropped the pleasant term of ‘mistress’ . . . walked about with guns upon their shoulders.”<sup>4</sup> Peasants with guns upon their shoulders—foreboding, menacing. In Russia a half century goes by before the peasants in mass enter upon a revolutionary struggle. Here the struggle reaches a high plane at the start. The sun rises upon emancipation and sets upon the struggle for land and freedom.

<sup>2</sup> James W. Garner, *Reconstruction in Mississippi*, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Francis B. Simkins and Robert H. Woody, *South Carolina During Reconstruction*, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Frances B. Leigh, *Ten Years on a Georgia Plantation*, p. 132.

There is perhaps no parallel in history—with the exception of the formerly oppressed peoples of the Soviet Union—to the rapidity with which the American Negroes have passed through the various phases of their development as a people. This is due, not to any inborn quality of the Negroes, but to the peculiar condition brought about by the existence of slavery side by side with capitalism and the stormy impact of the two. Barely 60 years before the end of the Civil War, the slave trade with Africa had been barred by the American government. At that time there were 1,000,000 slaves in the country, who had come from different tribes in varying stages of primitive society. Under the blows of a concentrated slave plantation system, which began to attain its most rapid rate of development only at the beginning of the 19th century, the Negroes were welded together as an agrarian people on a common territory. And yet, barely 60 years after the abolition of the slave trade, this people can impart a tremendous revolutionary impetus to the development of American capitalism and itself take up the cudgels for bourgeois democracy.

For the ex-slaves, bourgeois democracy means first of all the possession of the land. The Northern bourgeoisie orders the expropriation of the cotton of the slave-owners—only to return it later. It stops to draw its breath before the first faltering expropriation of the land, the houses, the belongings of the Bourbons—and then faces right about. But under the first impulses of the revolution the ex-slaves advance in a direct line toward the fulfilment of its tasks. The first impulse is destruction of the outward implements of slave exploitation. “Upon the flight of the planters, the slaves’ hatred of the cotton industry showed itself in a savage destruction of cotton gins.”<sup>5</sup> But this soon gives way to “unauthorized”, “illegal” expropriations. In Virginia, former slave-breeding center, “some freed men settled on abandoned plantations . . . where they constructed rude huts in which they dwelt until forcibly ejected from the property.”<sup>6</sup> When Port Royal, S. C., is captured by the Union Army in November, 1861, “the freedmen occupied houses and smashed or appropriated their contents. They tore down churches and used the lumber to build cabins for themselves, and they broke open church organs and blew the pipes in the streets.”<sup>7</sup> Churches for cabins and church organ pipes for blowing in freedom—the revolution in its first stages of ecstasy.

Negro soldiers play a leading role in the first open revolutionary

<sup>5</sup> Edward L. Pierce, *Atlantic Monthly*, September, 1863.

<sup>6</sup> A. A. Taylor, *Reconstruction in Virginia*, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> Simkins, p. 7.

seizures. The daughter of a plantation owner outside of Charleston, S. C., complains that "they broke open the storehouse, smokehouse and barns, and threw out to the Negroes all the provisions they could find."<sup>8</sup> These are not merely seizures of a conquering army in a vanquished territory, but revolutionary actions carried out together with the Negro toilers. Mississippi is but just conquered for the North, and already the New Orleans newspapers have alarming editorials about the movement for land. "Senator Lamar stated that in December, 1865, whites came into Vicksburg in great fear, saying that the Negroes were arming and demanding lands by Christmas, or they would take them by force."<sup>9</sup>

These first spontaneous actions of the Negroes raise sharply the issues at stake and pronounce a revolutionary course for their solution. Land and political liberty for the Negroes are the historical aims expressing themselves in these first spontaneous seizures. The slavocracy had realized full well the consistent course of revolution. The Confederate Congress, in its last address of March 1865, warned that the penalty for the defeat of the South in the war would be "the confiscation of the estates, which would be given to their former bondsmen."<sup>10</sup>

But the Confederates reckoned without the bourgeoisie. Much depends upon its action. For the Negroes do not have a class among them capable of leading the revolution through to its completion. A free Negro working class is almost nil, scattered in the cities of the North and South, still in its swaddling clothes. No less incipient is the Negro bourgeoisie. During slavery a small urban Negro petty bourgeoisie, chiefly in the North, had begun to breathe. It supplies ministers, teachers, journalists, lawyers who are to play an important part in the political leadership of the Negro masses during reconstruction. The white working class has not yet matured into an independent revolutionary existence. The small white farmers and "poor whites" must also look to a more decisive revolutionary class for leadership. The only class able to supply decisive revolutionary leadership in this period is the industrial bourgeoisie. Its revolutionary abilities and wants are bound by the conditions of capitalist development and its own class needs. It is revolutionary only insofar as it is necessary to destroy the pre-capitalist slave power and insure its own hegemony. It stops short at this minimum task for the process of its accomplishment has set it on an accelerated course of capitalist development, thereby sharpening all the class contradictions of the bourgeois democracy.

<sup>8</sup> Simkins, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Jesse T. Wallace, *History of the Negroes in Mississippi*, p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> Walter L. Fleming, *North American Review*, May, 1906, p. 723.

Even in the early large-scale confiscation of the plantations during the war it was by no means assured that this land would be given to the ex-slaves, as was being promised by the leading bourgeois democrats of the North. Instead the Freedmen's Bureau and army officers were taking advantage of this confiscation to turn a good profit. Large tracts of abandoned or confiscated land were sold to speculators or leased to white contractors, many of whom were in the Northern army of occupation, and who contracted for Negro labor at \$7 a month. Governor Andrews of Massachusetts, the storm center of abolition, invested \$30,000 in a Mississippi plantation hoping to turn a tremendous profit in the process of freeing the slaves. Plantations were being worked with "contrabands" for the federal government, with wages at \$10 a month. The bourgeoisie was giving the former slaves their first taste of "free wage labor" on the very land it had promised them. But having faith in the promises of the Northern bourgeoisie, the ex-slaves helped the Freedmen's Bureau in the confiscation of abandoned lands, with the expectation that it would be theirs. When the slogans of the revolution were still being taken seriously by a number of Northern generals, the right of the Negroes to lands they had taken possession of was granted in some districts. By 1865 more than 40,000 Negroes had taken possession of the plantations on the Sea Islands, S. C., under leases or temporary grants, pending legislation by Congress which, the Negroes thought, would certainly grant them the land permanently.

During the two years immediately following the war the revolution in the South holds its breath and even retreats pending the outcome of the struggle of the industrial bourgeoisie for complete hegemony. The petty-bourgeoisie, represented politically by President Johnson and the Copperheads, seeks to prolong its political life by alliance with the Bourbons. In spite of his earlier invectives against the slave aristocracy, Johnson, following in the footsteps of Lincoln, attempts to strengthen his own position by a rapid restoration of the Southern states to the Union. He demands only that the ex-slaveowners recognize emancipation, already established by force of arms. Suffrage, social and political rights, land for the freedmen, he brushes aside. He is quick to patch up new state governments in the South composed of leading Confederates.

Marx follows events very closely and hardly is Johnson installed as president, when he writes Engels (June 24, 1865):

"Johnson's policy annoys me. Laughable affection of force against certain individuals; until now highly vacillating and weak in practice. The reaction has already begun in America and will soon become much stronger if the slovenliness existing up to now is not stopped."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe, Dritte Abteilung, Der Briefwechsel zwischen Marx und Engels*, Marx Engels Verlag, Berlin, Band 4, p. 275.

The reaction, however, does not continue on a straight line. Another period of revolution is to intervene. In his reply to Marx's letter Engels points out that "without colored suffrage nothing can be done, and the decision of the question Johnson leaves to the defeated ex-slaveholders." But he sees that the revolution must yet complete its first lap. "However," he adds, "it must be counted upon that things will develop differently than the Mr. Barons imagine . . . The oligarchy is going to its doom finally, but the process could be now quickly finished at one stroke, while it is being prolonged."<sup>12</sup>

During the earlier period of the war, when Engels, "seeing only the military aspects of things," was highly disgusted with the progress of the revolution, Marx had written him that the situation at that time was "at most a kind of reaction that arises in every revolutionary movement."<sup>13</sup> Now, too, Johnson's reactionary holiday (Presidential Reconstruction), is to give way before a period of revolution (Congressional Reconstruction), which in turn, is followed by counter-revolution.

But during this intervening period of reaction, in which the "doom of the oligarchy is being prolonged," the ex-slaveholders are returning to power in the South. The first Constitutional Conventions held in the Southern states under Johnson's reconstruction plan, are elected without the participation of the Negroes and consist for the most part of old Confederate leaders. These Conventions accept as a political expediency the emancipation of the Negroes, but for practical purposes pass the "Black Codes" which are intended to re-enslave the Negroes on the plantations as forced laborers minus the outward trappings of chattel slavery. The enlightened paternalism of the ex-slaveholders is expressed admirably by the president of the first Georgia Convention. His words have a contemporary ring: "Our conduct should be kind, magnanimous, just . . . we may indulge a hope that we may organize them [the Negroes] into a class of trustworthy laborers."<sup>14</sup> The non-slaveholding whites form the "left" in these Conventions, hailing the emancipation of the Negroes as "nothing more nor less than that of the whites," for the poor-whites had been also disfranchised and excluded from any political liberty under the slavocracy.

But the president of the Georgia Convention reckons without the Negro masses who are not so willing to be organized into "a

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Band 3, p. 111.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Levinson, *Race, Class and Party*, p. 34.

class of trustworthy laborers." The landless ex-slaves want land and, together with the Negro petty-bourgeois leaders many of whom have received training at the hands of the Abolitionists in the North, push the struggle for land and political freedom. Ex-slaveowners, who are being pardoned right and left by Johnson, are also being returned their right to the plantations which had been confiscated and many of which are in the hands of the Negroes. On the Sea Islands the Negroes arm themselves with every available weapon to drive off the returning landowners. The leader of a group of Negro squatters tells them: "You had better go back to Charleston, and go to work there, and if you can do nothing else, you can pick oysters and earn your living as the loyal people have done—by the sweat of their brows."<sup>15</sup> Johnson intervenes and sends General Howard, head of the Freedmen's Bureau, to settle the situation in favor of the planters.

The Negro settlers were "angry and overwhelmed at the news he brought. They felt that the government had deceived them and a stormy outbreak was with difficulty avoided." The Negroes refused to abide by the compromise agreement which would turn them into share-croppers, and held to the land until ousted by the Johnson militia. Fleming, a leading bourgeois historian of reconstruction, tells with what revolutionary determination the Negroes fought for the land:

"They began to fear that they were being tricked. They had secured arms, and now some of the leaders threatened that, if the division did not occur, they would forcibly seize the land . . . In Virginia, when the blacks heard that their hopes were in vain, they destroyed the fencing and other improvements."<sup>16</sup>

Negro and white soldiers among the Federal troops and local Negro militias lead and participate in the struggle to retain the land already occupied and in the agitation for the seizure of new land. A reporter of the abolitionist *Nation* is shocked at the direct manner in which the freedmen choose to put the slogans of the revolution into effect. "In the best of our regiments," he complains, "there are a few mischief makers who persuade the field hands that they should refuse to work, that they are the rightful owners of the land." So active a role do the troops in Mississippi play in the land agitation that in 1865 Governor Humphrey complains to President Johnson that the Negro troops "did infinite mischief by misrepresenting the purpose and intentions of the state government, and by circulating reports among the freedmen that the lands would be divided among them, and by advising them

<sup>15</sup> Simkins, p. 229.

<sup>16</sup> Fleming, *op. cit.*, pp. 727-732.



not to work for their late masters." The agitation increases: the commander of a Negro regiment at Jackson tells the landless Negro peasantry that they must defend their rights "to the click of the pistol, and at the point of the bayonet." Finally the Governor sends a commission to Washington "to lay before the president the condition of affairs as regards Negro troops and the danger of insurrection among them, and to procure arms for the state militia."<sup>17</sup> In Virginia the Bourbon press protests vigorously against the "nightly drilling and parading of armed Negroes in the principal cities of the state on almost every local or national holiday."<sup>18</sup>

Efforts to force the freedmen into share-cropping meet with sharp resistance. "I am offering them even better terms than I did last year," complains a large plantation owner. "But nothing satisfies them. Grant them one thing and they demand something more, and there is no telling where they will stop."<sup>19</sup> The Negro peasantry presses the point. Share-cropping or forced labor contracts smell acutely of the old days. If freedom means anything it means land and the vote. The revolution will revolve around these points for a decade and finally give way to the counter-revolution. Every year there will be reports of "Negro insurrections and conspiracies" for the seizure of the land. The Governor of Mississippi again warns the Negroes in 1867 that "the first outbreak against the peace and quiet of the state would signalize the destruction of their cherished hopes and the ruin of their race."<sup>20</sup> But two years of petty-bourgeois vacillation in the North and alliance with the Bourbons have permitted the former slave-owners to regain their plantations. The revolution will never again reach the point of wholesale confiscation. By the time the Radical Republican forces gain control in Washington, the bourgeoisie is already engaged in another form of expropriation—the expropriation of the pioneer farmers of the West for the benefit of the railroad and mining companies.

Under the leadership of former Negro abolition leaders, an organized movement against Johnson reconstruction and the Black Code governments gets under way with the holding of Negro conventions in the Southern states. These represent the first concerted political action by the Negroes. The Colored Peoples Convention of South Carolina, held in Charleston in November, 1865, sends a resolution to the State Legislature and a memorial to Congress. The resolution demands the repeal of the Black Codes

<sup>17</sup> Garner, p. 107.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor, *Virginia*, p. 62.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas J. Woofter, *Negro Migration*, p. 38.

<sup>20</sup> Garner, p. 176.

and the right to vote and testify in court. The memorial to Congress raises sharply the main demands of the Negro people in the revolution. Above all it demands that "a fair and impartial construction be given to the pledges of the government to us concerning the land question." No less does it stress the demand for equal suffrage. All the democratic rights are demanded for the Negro people. "We ask that the three great agents of civilized society—the school, the pulpit, the press—be as secure in South Carolina as in Massachusetts or Vermont . . . We ask that colored men shall not in every instance be tried by white men, and that neither by custom or enactment shall we be excluded from the jury box." The document demands "the right to assemble in peaceful convention, to discuss the political questions of the day; the right to enter upon all the avenues of agriculture, commerce, trade; to amass wealth by thrift and industry . . ." The Convention also adopts a vigorous resolution demanding free public education for white and Negro alike. The demands cover the whole gamut of bourgeois rights, from suffrage to private property. They bear the stamp of the bourgeois-democratic revolution more legibly than any other document produced by it.

But there is no illusion about peaceful evolution towards bourgeois democracy. The Convention protests to Congress against the effort of the State Legislature to disarm the Negroes and demands that the Negroes be permitted to retain their arms.<sup>21</sup> Only the armed people can prevent restoration and push the revolution along the road of fulfilment.

The political victory of the industrial bourgeoisie in the North halts for a moment the Bourbon reaction in the South and at the same time institutes bourgeois reaction in the North against the workers and farmers. The passage of the Reconstruction Acts by Congress in 1867 marks the decisive defeat of the petty-bourgeoisie. The course of bourgeois victory had been marked during the past few years by new legislation forced through Congress. The moderate income tax of the war days was replaced by the highest tariffs yet reached; a national banking system had been established and financial legislation passed which accelerated the massing of capital in the hands of bankers; railroad corporations were obtaining tremendous grants of land through Congress. The Immigration Act of 1864 had permitted the importation of workers under contract (similar to the indentured servants of colonial days) to be used by the capitalists to keep wages down and replace the labor shortage caused by the migration of workers to the new lands

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<sup>21</sup> *Proceedings of the Colored Peoples's Convention of the State of South Carolina*, held in Zion Church, Charleston, November, 1865.

opened up by the Homestead Law. By the time the Reconstruction Acts are passed a cynical newspaper correspondent can suggest that Congress permanently adjourn and inscribe on its doors: "The business of this establishment will be done hereafter in the office of the Pennsylvania Railroad."

We have already shown in our previous article how the rapid development of capitalism brought about by the war itself sharpened the class antagonisms and that the workers were rapidly organizing unions and entering upon major class conflicts. Now the alliance of the farmers of the West with the bourgeoisie against the slavocracy is also disrupted by the tremendous land grabs in the West and the expropriation of the pioneer farmers and homesteaders, which begin at this time. Two years later, when it has reached its height, Marx, in a letter to Engels, writes that:

"The railroad to California is being built with the bourgeoisie giving itself through Congress an enormous amount of 'people's land,' expropriating it from the workers, while it imports Chinese laborers to push down wages and, finally, institutes a new layer of the 'finance aristocracy.'" <sup>22</sup>

It is with the growing and stormy protests of the farmers and workers against the "financial oligarchy" already ringing in its ears, that the bourgeoisie sets out to still the Bourbon power in the rear and assure itself complete hegemony over the nationally united home market which it had surrounded with a high tariff wall. The Reconstruction Acts set forth the course of action to assure the attainment of these ends. They call for armed dictatorship in the South, under which the Bourbons are to be completely disfranchised, the Negroes guaranteed the right to vote, and new Constitutional Conventions held. Only when these Conventions should pass new state constitutions approved by the majority of the voters and the new state legislatures have approved the Fourteenth Amendment (guaranteeing "equal protection of the law" to all born or naturalized in the United States, cutting down Congressional representation where the right of suffrage is abridged, and disqualifying for federal and state office all participants in the Confederacy) are the states to be re-admitted into the Union. By the utilization of the time-honored method of dictatorship, which is to rely almost entirely upon the armed Negro people, does the bourgeoisie plan to consolidate its rule over the South. Drawing the Negro people into the realm of bourgeois democracy is to assure to the North a powerful ally and a popular mass support for the dictatorship. Not a word is said about the land question in these Acts, for the bourgeoisie engaged in land expropriations for itself

<sup>22</sup> *Der Briefwechsel*, Band, 4, pp. 219-220.

although Stevens, whom Herberg calls "the indomitable warrior," is chairman of the Committee on Reconstruction.

The Union Leagues, organized by the Radical Republicans, now become the center of organization for the Negro masses in the Black Belt and the "poor whites" in the hills. The national center in New York is dominated by the big industrialists and bankers among whom is Jay Cooke. In the South the Union Leagues play a role similar to that of the Jacobin Clubs during the Great French Revolution. Here they become the organizing center of the popular revolution, playing a decisive role in the preparations for the Constitutional Conventions and first revolutionary State Legislatures. In the up-country the Leagues had first become active in the organization of the small white landowners and landless whites at the close of the war and had organized the earlier anti-Bourbon state governments in Kentucky, West Virginia and Tennessee. Fleming estimates that by 1866, 30% of the white population in the traditionally anti-Bourbon upland country of all Southern states had been organized in the Leagues. But when the revolution enters the path of armed dictatorship its center is naturally in the Black Belt, the center alike of the Negro people and of the Bourbon power. It is here that the issues of Reconstruction are decided in action and the Negroes play the decisive role in their solution. The landless whites and non-slaveholding farmers are for a time to be the allies of the Negroes. For it is largely as a result of the awakening to revolutionary activity of the Negro masses, that democratic gains are made for the "poor whites" as well as Negroes. From the beginning the main strategy of the Bourbons is to split off this ally from the Negro people, taking advantage of the race hatred left as a heritage from the slave system, and only when this is accomplished will it realize the armed bands of the counter-revolution against the Negroes. It will be at the price of permitting the mountain folk and poor whites to retain the democratic rights deprived the Negroes by force, that the counter-revolution will be able to consolidate its victory.

The leaders of the Union Leagues are almost all Negroes. In many places its local councils are synonymous with the Negro militia and rifle clubs. In South Carolina the local League organizations have all been turned into people's militias and it is against them that the K.K.K., the first contingent of the counter-revolution, fears the creation of a new "intelligent and industrious yeomanry, equally removed from luxury and poverty," which Thaddeus Stevens saw as the main support of every bourgeois democracy. The prime question of the land, which has dominated the revolution in the South for the past two years, is thus passed over in silence, directs its energy. For the Leagues are in reality the heart of

the popular revolution directing the masses in the Radical Republican Party and pushing the revolution forward.

The following account, despite its obvious counter-revolutionary bias, gives some idea of how the "storm center" of the revolution functioned:

"The meetings of the Councils [of the Union League] were held once a week in Negro churches and schoolhouses, around which armed guards were stationed; inflammatory speeches were made by carpet-baggers [white Radical Republicans from the North] and Negro leaders; confiscation and division of property and social rights were promised . . . The members went armed to the meetings and were there trained in military drill, often after dark, much to the alarm of the whites [landowners, naturally] in the community. In South Carolina the Loyal Leagues were simply the Negro militia. Military parades were frequently held. If a white person became obnoxious to the League, his buildings were likely to be burned."<sup>23</sup>

While the Northern bourgeoisie would not commit itself in writing on the land question, the platforms of the Union Republican Party and the Leagues call outright for "the abolition of the large estates." In addition they demand all the democratic rights for the Negroes and "poor whites". At the state convention of the Radical Republican Party in South Carolina in 1867, the proposal is made that a Negro be Republican vice-presidential candidate in the next election.<sup>24</sup>

In South Carolina, Mississippi and Louisiana the course of revolution is the bloodiest, each battle the hardest fought, the counter-revolution meets with prolonged and stubborn resistance. These states were the center of the slavocracy; now they become the central battlefield of the revolution. For here the Negro population is the largest and the most concentrated and revolutionary energy the most intensive. In these states the parliamentary bodies created by the revolution are more completely people's assemblies, and especially of the Negroes. In South Carolina and Louisiana especially the Negroes dominate the Constitutional Conventions and the State Legislatures which follow. It is here that the "notorious Black Parliaments" invoke the greatest invectives from the Bourbons and later from the bourgeois historians. For these bodies represent the highest political expression of the democratic revolution.

The Constitutional Conventions take place only as the culmination of a stubborn struggle in which the Negro militias and Northern troops must give reality to the suffrage granted by the Reconstruction Acts. The former confederates attempt to prevent them by sabotaging the elections and by force. At an earlier

<sup>23</sup> Walter L. Fleming, *Documents Relating to Reconstruction*, No. 3, p. 5.

Convention in New Orleans, where the Negroes have left their arms at home on the pleas of some of their own petty-bourgeois leaders, the mass parade to the Convention Hall is attacked, but this does not deter the march. The procession is joined in its march by many who fall into line with their working clothes on. At the hall the white and Negro delegates are attacked with rifle fire by a Bourbon mob led by white policemen, and 38 are killed and hundreds wounded before the attackers are driven off with brickbats.<sup>25</sup>

“Never more astonishing conventions, in personnel, in a civilized country,” exclaims Claude G. Bowers, the present-day Bourbon and leading Democratic Party politician.<sup>26</sup> Astonishing indeed to Bowers, who foams at the mouth out of fear that history will next time speak in a gruffer and more decisive voice. For the social composition of the Conventions is overwhelmingly peasant and small-landowning with a sprinkling of urban bourgeois representatives. In South Carolina, out of 124 delegates, 76 are Negroes, nearly all of whom have two years before been slaves. The up-country is represented by some substantial farmers and many “low-down white” (scalawags). This convention of illiterate, newly awakened peasants without land proceeds to write a constitution which if put into effect today would revolutionize South Carolina. It sweeps aside all the cobwebs of history in the remotest corner of the oligarchy. It proclaims all the democratic rights—universal suffrage, no property qualifications for office-holding, representation by population and not by property, no imprisonment for debt, no discrimination against Negroes, universal education and a public school system, the rights of women, the reorganization of the county governments along democratic lines.

“These documents,” rages Bowers, “framed by ignorance, malevolence, and partisanship, sounded the death knell of civilization in the South.” They did indeed sound the death knell of the slavocracy.

The proceedings of the Conventions show their unmistakable roots in the soil. The land question is the most frequently and heatedly discussed in the South Carolina Convention. Through the eyes of a Southern historian we learn that “some of the reforms proposed by the colored delegates” are “born of ignorant self-assertiveness; for example, the suggestion that landlords be required to pay wages from January 1, 1863 [the day of Emancipation] and that wages be required to give their tenants one half of

<sup>24</sup> Simkins, pp. 82-83.

<sup>25</sup> John R. Ficklen, *History of Reconstruction in Louisiana*, p. 172.

<sup>26</sup> *The Tragic Era*, p. 216.

the crop.”<sup>27</sup> Although radical land legislation is not proposed by this Convention as a body, the cry for land is raised again and again. One proposal calls for an appropriation by Congress of \$1,000,000 with which to buy land for distribution among the landless Negroes. But this proposal is dropped on the insistence of Charles Sumner’s colleague, Senator Wilson of Massachusetts, who participates in the Convention as an arbiter for the Northern bourgeoisie. “Wait for Congressional action” has become the magical watchword by which the bourgeoisie hopes to prevent the breaking up of the estates and substitute faith for land.

This device has become a regular weapon in the arsenal of the bourgeoisie. The Russian bourgeoisie hoped to accomplish the same end during the Russian revolution by telling the peasants to wait for the Constituent Assembly, which, they knew very well, they would never call. Sumner talked of “abolishing the estates” and Thaddeus Stevens even calculated the number of acres to be divided and likewise promised Congressional action which would never take place.

The Convention, however, legislates in favor of the small farmers of the hill country by placing an exemption for forced sales on lands and buildings valued below \$1,000. At the same time Negro delegates fight against a stay law to prevent the forced sale of large plantations for debt. “It was class legislation,” declared R. H. Cain, Negro leader, “which would help the rich only. He was in favor of relieving the poor of both races.”<sup>28</sup> F. L. Cardoza, Negro reconstruction leader, opposes the stay law on the grounds that nine-tenths of the debts on the plantations were contracted for the sale of slaves, and by taking this opportunity to throw these plantations upon the market they would be striking at the very plantation system by breaking up the estates and selling them in small lots to the Negroes. “One of the greatest bulwarks of slavery was the plantation system,” he declares. “This is the only way by which we will break up that system, and I maintain that our freedom will be of no effect if we allow it to continue . . . Give them an opportunity, breathing time, and they will reorganize the same old system that they had before the war. I say, then . . . now is the time to strike . . . ”<sup>29</sup> Yes, the time, but not the method. The revolutionary method had already been used by the Negro peasants—the outright seizure of the land—and had called forth the united opposition of the bourgeoisie and the Bourbons.

<sup>27</sup> Simkins, p. 93.

<sup>28</sup> A. A. Taylor, *The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction*, p. 134.

<sup>29</sup> *Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of South Carolina*, Volume 1, pp. 115-118.

The bourgeoisie drags at the revolution until it can no longer restrain it, and finally steps on it. In the meantime, the Conventions and Legislatures will serve against the Bourbons and as safety valves.

But those very slogans and promises which the bourgeoisie had used to win the support of the Negro masses, are taken seriously by the Negroes and acted upon. The struggle for their realization by the Negro masses against the counter-revolution and the bourgeois compromisers, prolongs the battle and gives reconstruction its popular revolutionary character. Thus far the new State Constitutions are only on paper and each of the democratic rights proclaimed in Convention must be won in action. In New Orleans the soldiers and Negroes fight against the Jim-Crow "star cars" by forcing their way into the cars set aside for the whites "in spite of the fact that riots are almost started, and two weeks later, the star cars are abandoned."<sup>30</sup> In reply to the efforts of the Democrats to starve the revolution out by declaring lockouts in the workshops and by driving the Negroes off the plantations, Lewis Lindsay, a Negro worker of Virginia, declared that "before any of his children should suffer for food, the streets of Richmond should run knee-deep in blood; and he thanked God that the Negroes had learned to use guns, pistols and ramrods."<sup>31</sup> Terrible words these, for they come from a Negro worker, and burst into a storm of direct mass actions.

In the State Legislatures which follow the Conventions, the Negroes play an important and more assertive part. In both Louisiana and South Carolina the majority of the legislators are Negroes and they play a decisive role also in the reconstruction legislatures of the other states in the deep South. So insistent are the Negro and "poor white" representatives in the Louisiana Legislature on completing the dethronement of the Bourbons that soldiers are massed outside to protect the assembly from counter-revolutionary mobs in New Orleans. The Negroes especially are adamant in their demand that all white Democrats take the "iron clad oath" (swear that they had never borne arms against the United States or aided the Confederacy—tantamount to complete disfranchisement for the former slaveholders and their allies.)

"It showed a disposition," admits the bourgeois historian Ficklen, "on the part of the Negroes and their white allies to adopt a more radical program in their treatment of the whites [read counter-revolutionary whites] than General Grant himself would authorize, and forecasted a determination to legislate wholly with reference to their own interests."<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Ficklen, p. 188.

<sup>31</sup> Taylor, *Virginia*.

<sup>32</sup> Ficklen, p. 204.



The social composition of the South Carolina Legislature, where 84 out of its 156 members are Negroes, is revealed clearly by the record of the taxes paid by its members. The total taxes for all the legislators amounts to \$700.63, out of which six members pay \$391.62. There are not many property owners here. But property, in the form of a plantation owner from the Black Belt, looks on from the balcony and declares in amazement: "My God, look at this!" His worst fears have come true. Negroes who but three years before had been slaves are proposing confiscation of the estates. The Black Codes are declared abolished and equal rights for all proclaimed.

Through the eyes of James S. Pike, a leading Northern Republican who after his first visit to South Carolina returned to the North to engage in a campaign of slander and vituperation against the "Black Parliaments", we can at least catch a glimpse of the South Carolina Legislature of 1873. Only revolutions in which the masses to their deepest layers are in motion can produce such a parliamentary body in which the voice of the embattled Negro masses continually makes itself heard over the demogogy of its bourgeois ally. Despite Pike's condescending jibes, even from his description it is apparent that this is primarily an assembly of landless peasants and small landowners:

"Every Negro type and physiognomy was here to be seen, from the genteel serving man to the rough hew customer from rice or cotton field. Their dress was as varied as their countenances. There was the second hand frock coat of infirm sentility, glossy and threadbare . . . There was also to be seen a total disregard of the proprieties of costume in the coarse and dirty garments of the field; the stub jackets and slouch hats of soiling labor. In some instances, rough woolen comforters embraced the neck and hid the absence of linen. Heavy brogans and short, torn trousers it was impossible to hide . . . These were the legislators of South Carolina."<sup>33</sup>

While Negro intellectuals and bourgeois whites play a leading role in the Legislature, former slaves also assume political leadership and are uppermost in the demand for land. Beverly Nash, who is feared most by the Bourbon representatives, has been a slave and was afterwards a bootblack in one of the hotels. "Go into the Senate," says Pike. "It is not too much to say that the leading man of the Republican Party in that body is Beverly Nash, a man of wholly black. He is apparently consulted more and appealed to more, in the business of the body, than any man in it. It is admitted by his white opposition colleagues that he has more native ability than half the white men in the Senate."<sup>34</sup> No more than five or six of the Negro members are freeborn. Nearly all

<sup>33</sup> James S. Pike, *The Prostrate State*, p. 26.

<sup>34</sup> Pike, pp. 33-34.

the officials of the state and Legislature, with the exception of the Governor, are Negroes. And they by no means play a submissive role. Again Pike testifies that "two of the best speakers in the House are quite black . . . They are both leaders rather than lead." And the Senator from Georgetown who "boasts of being a Negro . . . appears to be one of the leading 'strikers', and is not lead, except through his interests."<sup>34</sup> We are especially emphatic in pointing out the important role played by Negroes in the political leadership of the reconstruction governments in order to make it plain that the Negroes were not simply being led by the nose, but played the role of an ally having their own demands for which they fought. The "Marxist" Mr. Herberg, following the usual bourgeois distortion, also speaks of the "newly emancipated slaves led by Northern men ('carpet-baggers') and some Southern white Radicals ('scalawags')"—no wonder he falls into a slavish idealization of Stevens and Sumner, and "overlooks" the heart of the revolutionary heritage left by reconstruction. That some of the Negro leaders betrayed the struggle and joined hands with the bourgeoisie and the Bourbons against the Negro masses is another matter.

"One of the things that first strikes a casual observer," continues Mr. Herberg's ancestral ally, "is the fluency of the debate . . . The leading topics of discussion are all well understood by the members, as they are of practical character, and appeal directly to the personal interests of every legislator, as well as of those of his constituents. When an appropriation bill is up to raise money to catch and punish the K.K.K., they know exactly what it means . . . So, too, with educational measures. The free school comes right home to them; then the business of arming and drilling the black militia. They are eager on this point . . . They have an earnest purpose born of a conviction that their position and condition are not fully assured, which lends a sort of dignity to their proceedings."<sup>35</sup>

"A conviction that their position and condition are not fully assured"—the Negro people are not blind to the manipulations of Mr. Pike's Northern friends. On the plantations they have been gradually enserfed. By 1876, the year of the counter-revolutionary *coup d'etat*, only five percent of the Negroes own land. Land is the only assurance—together with the people's militia—that the Negroes will be able to retain any democratic rights. They are so "eager" about the militia, for outside the legislative chambers the Negro masses are continually embattled. By force of arms they must maintain their rights and defeat the armed bands of the counter-revolution. A continual struggle goes on for the right to vote, to ride on trains and street cars without segregation, for the

<sup>35</sup> Pike, p. 21.

maintenance of the public schools. Only the militia stands between them and a bloody reign of terror. For the North has already made steps towards an outright alliance with the Bourbons and the Negroes are already entering upon the defensive. As long as they have arms it will be a struggle; as soon as they are disarmed it will be a massacre.

The Negro masses have not gone through the revolution without learning. In a few years of revolutionary action they have learned more than in a century of "peaceful" development. The realization had long since struck home that the promises of the bourgeoisie of "forty acres and a mule" are worthless. They have engaged in battle with Northern as well as Southern troops for land and have inevitably been defeated. They have seen Negro politicians siding with reaction. But as a landless and enserfed peasantry they need the revolutionary leadership of the city to assure the carrying through of the revolution. And the bourgeois city no longer is able nor does it want to mature the revolution. Only the forces of further development within the orbit of capitalism will produce a new revolutionary class, capable of determined and consistent revolutionary action.

With the growing awareness of the treachery of the bourgeoisie, the Negro people turn to more independent activity. "The black man of the Legislature," says Pike, "feels his oats and considers that the time has already arrived when he can take care of himself . . ." Increasing assertiveness in the assembly is a reflection of the deep stirring and motion of the masses. The sentiment grows that "they [the carpetbaggers] will only stand by us so long as they can use us, and when they have no more axes to grind they will cast us aside."<sup>36</sup> The increased self-assertiveness of the Negro masses hastens the counter-revolution for which the Northern bourgeoisie is quick to remove all obstacles.

Although the Negro working class is almost entirely incapable of exerting an independent force due to its infancy, yet the reconstruction period saw the beginnings of the labor movement among the Negro workers as well as of solidarity between white and black toilers. Without minimizing the importance of working class organization in this period—the participation of Negro labor leaders in the 1869 session of the National Labor Union, the holding of a national Negro labor convention in Washington in the same year, the beginnings of trade union organization among the Negro workers and the first strikes—we will not enter into a discussion of this phase of the struggle here. We will only point out that the spectacle of Negro and white workers in action together

<sup>36</sup> Simkins, p. 124.

only a few years after the abolition of slavery—side by side with the rising labor movement in the North, the revolt of the farmers and the assertive action of the Negro people—arose to plague the bourgeoisie and drive it along the course of counter-revolution. It also drove some of the Negro petty-bourgeois leaders into the arms of the reaction and led Frederick Douglass to write an editorial in his paper, *The New National Era*, entitled “The Folly, Tyranny and Wickedness of Labor Unions.”<sup>37</sup>

The Northern bourgeoisie prepared the path for the counter-revolution. It repealed the “iron-clad oath” in 1871, permitting the Bourbons to re-enter political life openly and gave them complete leeway by the general Amnesty Act of 1872. Former abolitionists and Republican leaders began to speak against the “degradation” of the Southern states, of “political liberty” for everybody, including the Bourbons. Reconciliation with the former enemy became the announced policy of the Republican Party in the North. Sumner, Mr. Herberg’s “incorruptible”, pleads for first honors in placing the garland of betrayal around the neck of the bourgeoisie: “It was our state [Massachusetts] which led in requiring all the safeguards of liberty and equality; I covet for her the other honor of leading in reconciliation.”<sup>38</sup> For the bourgeoisie now has a stake in the “new South” and wants tranquility to the rear at all costs. The new big landowning class—composed of former slaveholders and the “new rich” who have bought themselves in—has been placed on its feet by financial aid and credit from the Northern bankers. The rapidly growing textile industry of “abolitionist” New England needs cotton—plenty of it and cheap—no matter if it means a new slavery in the South to obtain it. Much capital has been supplied by the North in rebuilding and enlarging the Southern railroad system and this system needs to transport cotton if it is to “assure returns.” The maintenance of the *status quo* is the necessity alike of the Northern bourgeoisie and the big landowners. The aspirations of the Negro people for land and freedom must be crushed if they are to remain bound to the planter’s soil and provide the peon labor for the large-scale production of cotton.

The Radical Republican Party in the South retains its revolutionary character at this time only because it is the party primarily of the Negroes. The strategy of the Democratic Party, the party of the Bourbons, is to split the “poor white” and small landowning whites off from the Republicans and sever completely the alliance of these elements with the Negro people. How this is done we

<sup>37</sup> May 17, 1874.

<sup>38</sup> Edward L. Pierce, *Memoirs and Letters of Charles Sumner*, IV, p. 552.

have already mentioned and the process is completed by 1876. The carpet-bagger elements help by splitting off compromise Conservative Republican Parties. The Radical Republican Party, in the short breathing spell left it in the South, becomes in reality a Negro nationalist party, attempting in vain to hold political power in the three decisive states, South Carolina, Louisiana and Mississippi.

The counter-revolution prepares for the final *coup d'état* by the widespread organization of "White Leagues" and rifle clubs. The "Red Shirts" ride armed through the South Carolina countryside. Fear of concerted armed action by the Negro peasantry dominates both Republicans and Democrats. In Mississippi the Governor signs a "peace treaty" to "prevent a violent overthrow of the state government," which provides, not for the disarming of the counter-revolutionary armies, but for the disbanding and disarming of the Negro militias. Once these are disarmed the counter-revolution has free reign. The Democrats prepare for the Presidential election of 1876 as they would for a war. In Mississippi the Democratic campaign manager is known as "the commander for the battle of the polls"—for "it was not a campaign he was to manage—it was a revolution."<sup>39</sup>

But the Negro masses do not submit to being disarmed. In South Carolina they purchase "guns and ammunition to the extent that their means would allow" and prepare "to shoot and apply the torch in their effort to resist aggression." They begin, "moreover, to maltreat those Negroes who had gone over to the Democratic Party."<sup>40</sup> Armed clashes between the "White Leaguers" and armed Negroes are frequent. The battle is fought for the most part in the country, especially in the Black Belt counties where the Negroes hold complete political power. There they are gradually disarmed and defeated and the counter-revolution seizes power by armed force. Leading Negro reconstruction leaders are hanged and shot. Federal troops are sent by the conservative Republican state officials to disarm and disperse the Negroes wherever they have armed in a body. The state elections are a farce. With the aid of its armies the counter-revolution sets up its own state governments, and dual governments, one Radical and the other Bourbon, exist for a while in South Carolina and Louisiana. But these last holds of the revolution are blown up by the final act of bourgeois betrayal.

The presidential elections of 1876 are close, with the returns in South Carolina, Mississippi and Florida deciding the outcome. The bourgeoisie to assure its political hegemony buys victory for

<sup>39</sup> Bowers, p. 453.

<sup>40</sup> Taylor, *South Carolina*, p. 248.

the Republican Party at the price of complete and final desertion of the Negro masses to the tender mercies of the counter-revolution. History is favored with a written record of the unsurpassable infamy of the bourgeoisie. The document signed by its representatives and those of the counter-revolution is as clear as day:

"Referring to the conversation had with you yesterday in which Governor Hayes' policy as to the status of certain Southern states was discussed, we desire to say that we can assure you in the strongest possible manner of our great desire to have him adopt such a policy as will give the people of the states of South Carolina and Louisiana the right to control their own affairs in their own way, subject only to the constitution of the United States and the laws made in pursuance thereof, and to say further that from an acquaintance with and knowledge of Governor Hayes and his views, we have the most complete confidence that such will be the policy of his administration."<sup>41</sup>

Hayes received the required votes, and in return he left the counter-revolution in complete possession of the Southern state governments, removing the last Federal troops in 1877. And the Northern bourgeoisie has kept its confidence, as pledged in the agreement, to the present day.

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The armed struggle of the Negro share-croppers in Tallapoosa County, Alabama, has shown this old battlefield of the bourgeois-democratic revolution to be more than merely an historical landmark. The fight for land and freedom by the Negro people rages again, but this time on a higher plane of social development, with new leaders and new allies. Tallapoosa has shown that every struggle by the Negro peasantry even for the most elementary economic and social demands strikes sparks just as certainly as when flint hits steel. The intensification of the national oppression of the Negro people, the creation of a Negro working class in the course of capitalist development side by side with a semi-feudal agrarian system, has made the Black Belt one of the most sensitive spots today on the home front of Yankee imperialism.

In the antecedent revolutionary period it was possible for the bourgeoisie in the North, because of both the sectional nature of the struggle and the weakness of its class enemies, to isolate the embattled Negroes, the Northern working class and the rebellious farmers and by alliance with the counter-revolution crush them all. But today, thanks to capitalist development, the working class has grown in power both in the North and South, among both white and Negro workers. That very national oppression which has

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<sup>41</sup> Charles R. Williams, *Life of Rutherford B. Hayes*, I, p. 533.

subjected the Negro people has at the same time created in the oppressed Negro people a tremendous revolutionary force capable of bringing to the proletarian revolution even greater energy and strength than they had contributed to the bourgeois-democratic revolution. The present catastrophic crisis has accentuated all the contradictions of capitalism and is now bringing the "kettle to a boil", as Marx expressed himself 50 years ago on the great upsurge of the labor movement in the 70's. It is well to recall his penetrating analysis in a letter to Engels at that time:

"This first outbreak against the associated capital oligarchy which has arisen since the Civil War, will naturally be defeated; it can, however, very well be the starting point for the building of a serious workers' party. There are two circumstances in its favor. The policy of the new president *will make the Negro*, and the large land expropriations (persily of the fertile land) in favor of the railway, mining, etc., companies, *will make the farmers of the west*, who are already rebellious, *into allies of the workers*. So the kettle is beginning to boil . . ." <sup>42</sup>

The struggle today of the Negro people for land and freedom plays no small part in heating the kettle. The development of capitalism has not only supplied the working class with powerful allies in the impoverished farmers and the Negro people, but has made that alliance inevitable, as events are proving today. Those tasks left unfulfilled by the bourgeois-democratic revolution of the last century pass into the domain of the proletarian revolution. The struggle of the Negro peasantry for land, of the Negro people against national oppression and for self-determination in the Black Belt have become an inseparable part of the proletarian revolution which will sweep away all the rubbish left by the past. "The social revolution cannot come about," said Lenin, "except as an epoch of proletarian civil war against the bourgeoisie in the advanced countries, combined with a *whole series* of democratic and revolutionary movements, including movements for national liberation, in the undeveloped, backward and oppressed nations."

We would not be worthy of the name of Communists, if we did not recognize the movement for national liberation of the Negro people and the blow that movement holds in store for American imperialism. Nor could we call ourselves Communists unless we lend direct aid to that movement and mobilize the working class as a whole for its support. The Civil War decade, the historical prologue to the struggle for Negro liberation in the present period, even then showed clearly the confiscation of the land in benefit of the Negro toilers and the right of self-determination to be the necessary conditions for the complete realization of freedom for

<sup>42</sup> *Briefwechsel*, IV, p. 469.

the Negro people. The lessons of that period and the revolutionary heritage left by it are the property of the revolutionists of today, and if they are to be effective in the struggle, they must be assimilated by the revolutionary movement and their content preserved against falsification and distortion.

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