

Revolutionary Negro Tradition

By Gilbert Lewis.

THE Congress in the thesis of the Sixth World Congress on the Negro question in the U. S. A. declared that a major task of the American Party is to utilize the revolutionary traditions of the Negro, to awaken his dormant revolutionary spirit, and win him for the class struggle.

That the Negro's past is indeed rich in revolutionary tradition is a fact that a glance at any history of the Negro in America will amply demonstrate. Aside from the purely Marxian analysis that the most exploited worker is potentially the best revolutionary material, the Negro's history is replete with many actual instances of uprisings against his exploiters and oppressors.

Always exploited, both as slave and as free man, doubly oppressed, as Negro and as worker, subjected to every infamy which the ruling class has seen fit to visit upon him, segregated, discriminated against, and made to feel inferior at every stage of the game, denied even the most elementary rights as accorded the rest of the working class, the Negro has reacted to this oppression by sporadic outbursts at various times throughout the entire country.

First Negro Uprisings.

That these uprisings have embraced the whole history of the Negro in America is evidenced in the fact that the first of these revolts occurred in 1687, only a few years after the first cargo of Negroes were brought to America, and the latest to occur was in 1923.

It was in 1687, in Northern Neck of Virginia, that a group of Negroes rose up with the avowed purpose of killing all of the white ruling class oppressors. They declared their intention of taking over the land and government for themselves. We had a repetition of this a few years later, in 1810, in Surrey County, Va. Both these attempts met with failure,

due to the great handicaps under which these Negroes were forced to launch their attack and the tremendous numerical strength of the enemy, who outnumbered them ten to one.

Complete though these failures were, they had not the power of dampening the revolutionary ardor of these oppressed slaves, for in 1722 we find more than two hundred Negroes assembled in a church near the mouth of the Rappahannock River in Virginia with the determination of destroying the entire white ruling class of that state. And in a few years later, in 1800, when news was carried to Williamsburg, to the effect that all the Christian Negroes in the town were to be freed, the non-Christian Negroes, instantly realizing that this move would only tend to harden the lot of the enslaved, rose up in revolt.

While all of the above uprisings occurred in Va., there were uprisings in other states as well, particularly in South Carolina. This state witnessed its first uprising in 1711 which had the nature of an isolated attempt on the part of only a few of the more advanced slaves. Later, however, in 1730, we see an elaborate plan drawn up by the Negroes for organized warfare against the whites; the attack was to begin with each slave destroying his master.

White Workers Join With Negroes.

Other states were also affected. Almost everywhere that the Negroes were oppressed can be cited one or two instances of these Negroes rising up against their oppressors and attempting to throw off the yoke of bondage. In 1712, the City of New York was rocked to its very foundation when reliable reports came to light that the Negroes were planning (and did attempt) to overthrow the ruling class by fire and sword. So alarming was this attempt that the Elias Neam school, for the training of Negroes, had to be closed down for many months. The Negroes were defeated and many